



The Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Vocabulary Learning Strategies among Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

Although there are many studies in the field of Emotional Intelligence (EI), its implications to language learning have not been practiced noticeably in Iran. Previous studies have noted the relationship between EI and language learning strategies; however, the present study aimed to investigate the relationship between English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' EI and vocabulary learning strategies. To fulfill the purpose of the study, 50 Iranian EFL learners, (25 females and 25 males), aged 23-32, learning English in Language Institutes in Gorgan, Golestan Province, were selected. The native language of the participants was Farsi. The participants' level was identified by Nelson 350 A proficiency test as intermediate. They were recruited to fill out Bar-On EQ questionnaire (1997) along with Schmitt's (1997) vocabulary learning strategies questionnaire. Results were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 18. In an attempt to discover any possible significant relationship between male and female EI and to explore any differences among EI of learners and their vocabulary learning strategies, independent sample t-test and Pearson correlation were applied. The results demonstrated that there was a positive significant relationship between EI and vocabulary learning strategies, i.e. the learners with high EI, were better strategy users for learning vocabulary and in fact EI had a role on how one decided to use strategies for vocabulary learning. Moreover, there was no significant difference between EI and gender of EFL learners in vocabulary learning strategies. The results may pave the way for some implications in learning and teaching.

Key Words: Emotional Intelligence; Language Learning Strategies; Vocabulary Learning Strategies

INTRODUCTION

Individuals differ from each other in the rate of success in learning a second language. Some learners learn a second language with no difficulty while others with some difficulties. In spite of the fact that there are many factors involving to the success of learning a second language including attitude, motivation, and anxiety, one crucial factor for learning a second language is the degree of intelligence which individuals have (Pishghadam, 2009).

Traditionally, the intelligence quotient (IQ) was considered the main factor influencing human achievement. However, recent studies by researchers such as Turner and Stough (2020), and Mansurul (2023) stated that Emotional Intelligence is a more significant determinant of success in various areas, including academics, professional performance, and social relationships. The genesis of EI theory dated back to the 1970s and 80s, referred to Emotional Quotient (EQ), developed by psychologists Howard Gardner, Peter Salovey, and John Mayer (Lall, 2009). Later, EI was formally considered as the center of interest with the rise of research on the interaction between emotion and thoughts in the field of psychology in the 1990s (Grewal & Salovey, 2005).

Goleman (1995) postulated that EI refers to the abilities to identify and regulate emotions not only in ourselves but also in others. EI can be considered as a powerful indicator for predicting success in our life. "In distinguishing successful people within a job category or profession, EI emerges as a stronger predictor than IQ of who, for instance, will become a star, salesperson, team head, or a top-rank leader" (Goleman, 1995, p. 34). Mansurul (2023)



emphasized that while IQ contributes to only 20% of life achievements, EI is a critical factor in determining overall success. EI can be understood as a skill or capability, particularly within the trait EI framework, which involves an individual's self-assessed ability to identify, evaluate, and regulate their own emotions, as well as those of others and groups (Mansurul, 2023).

In the domain of learning and teaching a foreign or second language, there has been a desire to shift the focus from teacher-centered classroom to learner-centered classroom as a result of changing the focus from product-oriented to the process-oriented language learning. In this regard, learners accounted as active individuals that the effects of teaching will be partially pertain to what they have known, including their background knowledge, their way of thinking during learning, and their cognitive process (Dansereau, 1985). In the field of education, Mavroveli and Sánchez-Ruiz (2011) argued that EI significantly contributes to the development of English language skills among EFL learners. On the other hand, researchers have found that the use of learning strategies plays a crucial role in determining the success of EFL learners (Oxford, 2017). The idea of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) has been defined by various scholars, with Oxford's definition being the most widely recognized. Oxford (2017) described LLS as specific actions, behaviors, or techniques that learners consciously employ to improve their ability to understand, absorb, and use a second language effectively.

The present study attempted to concentrate on how EI can be applied to vocabulary learning strategies, in order to help students improve their learning strategies. In spite of the fact that the vast number of studies have been conducted to explore the relationship between EI and skills in learning language, no study concentrated on investigating the relationship between EI and vocabulary learning strategies. Therefore, the present study focused to probe any possible relationship between EI and vocabulary learning strategies among Iranian intermediate EFL learners in institutes. The primary purpose of the present study is to examine EI in EFL context. The uniqueness of this study existed in the fact that it attempted to probe the relationship between EI and component learning strategies among English language learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK INTELLIGENCE DEFINED

Intelligence has undergone various changes, from intelligence as one dimensional concept (Binet, 1905) to intelligence as a multiple concept (Gardner, 1983), and eventually to intelligence as an emotional notion (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Gardner (1983) defined intelligence as “the ability to solve problems or to create products that are valued with one or more cultural settings” (p. 81). Gottfredson (1997) stated that intelligence is a general mental capability that involves the ability to solve problems, reason and plan to learn from experience. Geary (2005), indicated that IQ is highly related with many important social outcomes. Individuals who have low IQs are more likely to be divorced, and more likely to have a child out of marriage, more likely to need long term welfare support. Recent research has shifted from IQ scores as the unidimensional measure of intelligence.

In the first half of the 20th century, Thorndike (1920) hypothesized that intelligence comprises of academic, emotional, and social components. Furthermore, it has drawn attention to learning strategies which learners opt during the process of learning to assist second language learning (Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1991). That is, the way learners' process new information and the kinds of strategies they use to learn, understand, or remember has been the main concern of the second or foreign language researchers.

EMOTIONAL QUOTIENT

Bar-On was developed the term EQ to describe how to get along with others, understand yourself, successfully deal with tension situations, and solve problems which are related to psychological traits. Later, he developed the Bar-On Emotional Quotient inventory (EQ-i) which was regarded as the first scientific and valid measure of EI encompasses fifteen components of EI which mixes traits, skills, and abilities. It represents individual's ability to cope with daily environment challenges and predicts both personal and professional individuals' success in life (Abraham, 1999). Bar-On (2000) defined EQ as “an array of personal, emotional, and social abilities and skills that influence one's ability to success in coping with environmental demands and pressures” (p. 370).



EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The history of EI is derived from the concept of social intelligence. In the 1920s Thorndike examined EI as the social intelligence and pointed out that social intelligence is the capability to sympathize with others and act logically in relationships (Goleman, 1998). His point of view, however, was not paid attention until subsequent years. In 1948, emotional thought was considered to be in the domain of intelligence. According to Salovey and Mayer (1990) EI related the way in which an individual processes information about emotion and emotional responses. They defined EI as the “ability to monitor one’s own and other’s feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and action” (p. 189).

Eventually, the idea was presented into the world by publication of Daniel Goleman’s best-seller book entitled “Emotional Intelligence” in 1995. Bar-on (1997) identified EI as “an array of noncognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one’s ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures” (p. 14). His model of EI is composed of five broad areas of skills or competencies: intrapersonal EQ, interpersonal EQ, adaptability EQ, stress management EQ, and general mood EQ (Bar-On, 1997).

VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES

In the late 1980s, vocabulary was regarded as heated debate which had drawn scholar’s attention within the mainstream of second language acquisition (Nation, 1990). According to Takač (2008), “vocabulary learning strategies are particular strategies applied in the separated task of learning vocabulary in the target language.” (p. 52) Researchers postulated that many learners’ difficulties, not only receptive but also productive, is as a consequence of insufficient vocabulary, and language learners at advanced levels of both language competence and performance need to learn vocabulary.

According to Gu and Johnson (1996), a vast amount of research on vocabulary learning strategies has concentrated on multifarious methods of presenting vocabulary, and their impact on retention. Furthermore, Nation (2001) suggested that vocabulary learning strategies are a section on language learning strategies which are sub scales of general learning strategies respectively. Oxford (1990) postulated that language learners employed such distinct activities called language learning strategies to make learning more pleasurable, easier, and more self-directed to new situations. Nation (2001) proposed that vocabulary learning strategies assist learners to take on responsibility for their own learning. According to Nation’s (2001) point of view learners can achieve a large number of vocabularies can be obtained by adopting vocabulary learning strategies.

EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK

Razmjoo, Sahragard, and Sadri (2009) investigated the relationship among EI, vocabulary learning knowledge and vocabulary learning strategies among Iranian EFL learners. The 100 participants of the study were chosen among senior English Teaching students at Islamic Azad University, Branch of Shiraz in the academic year 2006-2007. Descriptive and inferential data demonstrated that there is a relationship between EI and vocabulary learning knowledge. Moreover, it was shown that there is a significant relationship among different aspects of intelligence, verbal-linguistic and naturalistic intelligences of vocabulary learning knowledge.

The relationship between EI and foreign language vocabulary learning of Iranian learners was investigated by Nesari, Karimi, and Filinezhad (2011). In the study, 120 learners were randomly chosen from Jihad and Alfab language institutes in Ilam. First, the participants were homogenized via Nelson English test. After that, Emotional Intelligence questionnaire (Bar-On’s EQ-i) was given to the participants. Finally, a vocabulary achievement test was administered. Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient and t-test were used to analyze the data, the results of the study revealed that there was no significant relationship between EI and vocabulary learning. Furthermore, there was no difference between EI of male and female participants.

Skourdi and Rahimi (2010) confirmed that learners with higher emotional intelligence tend to have better linguistic intelligence and greater vocabulary knowledge. The findings acquired in this study also showed that EI can be a strong predictor of linguistic intelligence, and vice versa. The participants in this study composed of 103 junior English students at Shiraz Azad University and Shiraz State University.

In another study conducted by Zarafshan and Ardeshtiri (2012), the relationship between EI, language learning strategies and English proficiency among Iranian EFL university students was explored. For this intention, 135 undergraduate students majoring English Teaching and Translation were chosen. The participants adopted from Islamic Azad University in Hormozgan, Iran and requested to fill Nelson Proficiency Test, Bar-On emotional intelligence questionnaires, and Strategy Inventory for language learning. The findings illustrated that there was a



negative relationship between EI and English proficiency. Furthermore, the data demonstrated that there was a positive relationship between English proficiency and language learning strategies.

Rostampoor and Niroomand (2013) studied the relationship between EI, motivation, and vocabulary learning knowledge. To this intent, 59 undergraduate EFL learners participated in this study, and divided into high, mid, and low groups. They employed to complete two sets of questionnaires and one test including vocabulary size test, motivated strategies for learning questionnaire and self-report emotional intelligence test developed. The data acquired indicated that there was a positive and significant relationship between motivation and EI in all three groups. In addition, it was found that the positive and significant relationship existed between all components of motivation and all competencies of EI in high, mid, and low groups. The relationship between EQ and language learning strategies was conducted by Aghasafari (2006) in a sample of 100 EFL sophomore participants at Islamic Azad University, branch of Ghazvin. The findings revealed that there was a positive relationship between the EI and language learning strategies.

Zafari and Biria (2014) aimed at investigating the influence of EI on language learning strategy use among Iranian EFL students. To this intent, 100 Iranian EFL students consisting of 30 males and 70 females were selected and requested to complete the Persian translation EQ-i (Bar-On, 1997) and Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Oxford, 1990) questionnaires. The analysis of the data indicated that participants relied most heavily on metacognitive strategies and least on affective strategies. Furthermore, EI is significantly related at the (<0.001) with language learning strategies. The students whose posse more EI use more strategies than the ones with less EI.

Alqarni (2023) demonstrated that higher emotional intelligence is linked to better academic and social performance in high school students. Specifically, the research found that EI positively influences their development in social learning settings. Tri (2024) reported that both general EI and LLS were at a medium level among the studied population. Moreover, there is a statistically significant correlation between EI levels and the extent to which students employed LLS.

According to Yang and Duan (2023) argued that improving EI in EFL students directly supports their academic literacy. By fostering emotional understanding, students can improve classroom interactions. Furthermore, existing research indicates that emotional intelligence positively impacts various educational outcomes, including academic performance and the cultivation of positive emotions. Chen and Zhang (2020) reported that participants' self-reported EI tended towards moderate to high levels, with strong well-being but lower sociability. Individual differences were noted across all measured factors. Modest correlations were found linking students' EI, well-being, and emotionality to their language performance, particularly in listening and speaking. Furthermore, the findings emphasized the complicated interaction of trait EI within the second language learning process.

Roohani, Etesami, and Mirzaei (2020) investigated how Iranian EFL learners with varying levels of EQ utilize learning styles and oral communication strategies. The study aimed to determine if EQ correlated with the use of these strategies in both high and low EQ groups. Using three questionnaires, data was collected from 108 university students. The analysis revealed that high-EQ learners preferred visual and kinesthetic learning, and focused on accuracy and meaning in communication. Low-EQ learners favored kinesthetic and auditory learning, and relied on word-focused and scanning strategies. Notably, both groups rarely used strategies involving direct English thinking or message abandonment. While EQ showed no significant correlation with learning styles and oral communication strategies in the high-EQ group, it positively correlated with the use of strategies for addressing speaking difficulties among low-EQ learners.

The results of the study conducted by Taheri, Sadighi, Bagheri, and Bavali (2019) revealed several significant connections: foreign language achievement was linked to IQ, specific emotional intelligence areas (interpersonal relationships, optimism, and problem-solving), and particular learning strategies (cognitive, compensation, and social). Additionally, emotional intelligence showed a significant relationship with both language learning strategies and learning styles.

While numerous studies have explored how EI affects different aspects of second language learning, no study have investigated the link between EI and vocabulary learning strategies. This research seeks to address this gap and provide a comprehensive understanding of the EI and vocabulary learning strategies relationship.

METHODOLOGY PARTICIPANTS

The total sample of participants in the study was 50 intermediate English language learners with the age range of 23 to 32. The participants were selected from Giti Language Institute and Sama Language Institute in Gorgan, Golestan Province, Iran. These participants were selected from 80 individuals who sat for the Nelson 350 A test (Flower &



Coe, 1976). Fifty learners received the required score in Nelson 350 A proficiency test, therefore, they had been selected based on their performance in the test. The test was used for clarifying the homogeneity of participants. The native language of the participants was Persian. Given the fact that the present investigation concentrated on the gender differences, 25 males and 25 females were chosen. All of them took part in the study on a voluntary basis and gave consent form. These students were involved in the study based upon a convenience sampling procedure due to availability reasons.

INSTRUMENTS

Given the fact that this study was a correlational research study in essence among intermediate learners, one homogeneity test and two types of questionnaires were administered to collect data: Nelson 350 A test (Flower & Coe, 1976) was administered to homogenize the participants based on the level of proficiency, Emotional Intelligence Test also called EQ-i (Bar-On, 1997) which was developed by Bar-On (1997), and Schmitt's Vocabulary Learning Strategies (1997). The reliability of the questionnaires proved to be 0.79 and 0.82 respectively by Cronbach Alpha which were acceptable, moreover, the face and content validity of the questionnaires were approved by consulting with three English language university teachers. The total number of items in each scale along with the internal reliability Coefficient Alpha of this study was listed in Table 3.2.

DATA COLLECTION

The participants of the present study were chosen from Giti Language Institute and Sama Language Institute in Spring 2016. To fulfill the purpose of the study participants were asked to complete Nelson English proficiency test, Nelson 350-A test (Flower & Coe, 1976), to ensure that there were no significant difference among the participants in terms of their proficiency level. They also requested to complete the Bar-On EI questionnaire along with Schmitt's vocabulary learning strategy questionnaire. At the outset of the research, permission for data collection was granted by the principals of language institutes. The participants were informed about the objective of the study and were requested to answer the questionnaires truthfully. They were informed how to fill out the questionnaires and explained that their identities would remain anonymous and confidential, after that an English consent form was delivered to them.

The questionnaires were delivered only to those who were willing to take part in this study after that they signed the consent form. Afterwards, the questionnaires were administered to the total number of 50 language learners necessary instruction relating to how to fill provided to the participants. Participants were also requested to complete the demographic part of the questionnaire looking for information regarding to their age, gender, etc. Just over half the subjects completed the questionnaires which emailed to them and the rest filled the hard copy.

DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

The design of the study was correlational as it dealt with the relationship between EI and vocabulary learning strategies among Iranian intermediate EFL learners and comparative design for the gender differences. Mackey and Gass (2005) stated that descriptive statistics provide a simple overview of data, hence allowing the researchers to expand their overall understanding of the data set. Successive to collecting data, SPSS software version 18.0 was utilized to analyze the data of the questionnaires. In an attempt to figure out the difference between male and female learners' EI and to examine any potential significant differences among EI of learners in terms of their vocabulary learning strategies, a series of independent sample t-test and Pearson correlation were applied.

RESULTS

INVESTIGATION THE FIRST RESEARCH QUESTION

RQ 1: Is there any significant relationship between EI and vocabulary learning strategies of intermediate Iranian EFL learners?

To test the first research question probing the relationship between the learners' EI and their vocabulary learning strategies through the parametric Pearson correlation, firstly, the assumption of normality of distribution of each set of scores was checked. The following table shows the result:



Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics of Emotional Intelligence and Vocabulary Learning Strategies Used for Normality

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance				
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Skewness	Error of Skewness	Kurtosis	Error of Kurtosis
Emotional intelligence	50	111	174	137.44	14.060	197.680	.547	.337	.482	.662
Vocabulary learning strategies	50	62	173	117.00	25.140	632.041	-.122	.337	.204	.662
Valid N (listwise)	50									

According to Table 1, for EI, the skewness value was .547 and the standard error of skewness came out to be .337. So, the skewness ratio became 1.623. And the kurtosis ratio appears to be .728. For vocabulary learning strategies, skewness and kurtosis ratio appear to be -.362 and .308 respectively. As this figure fell within the normality range of ± 1.96 , it was concluded that two sets of scores were normally distributed. The following graphs visually illustrate the distributions:

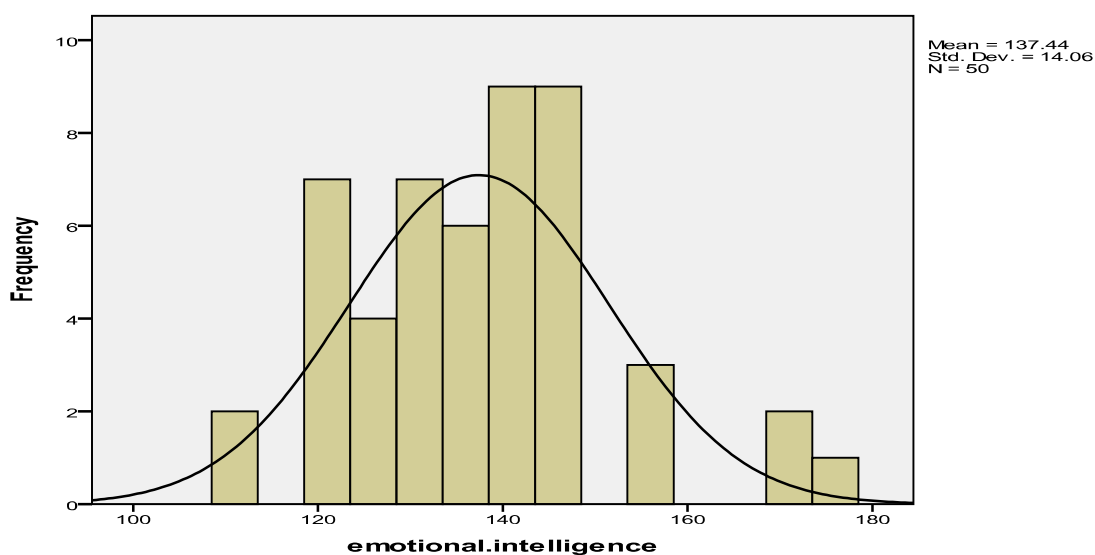


Figure 1. Histogram of the Distribution of Emotional Intelligence Scores

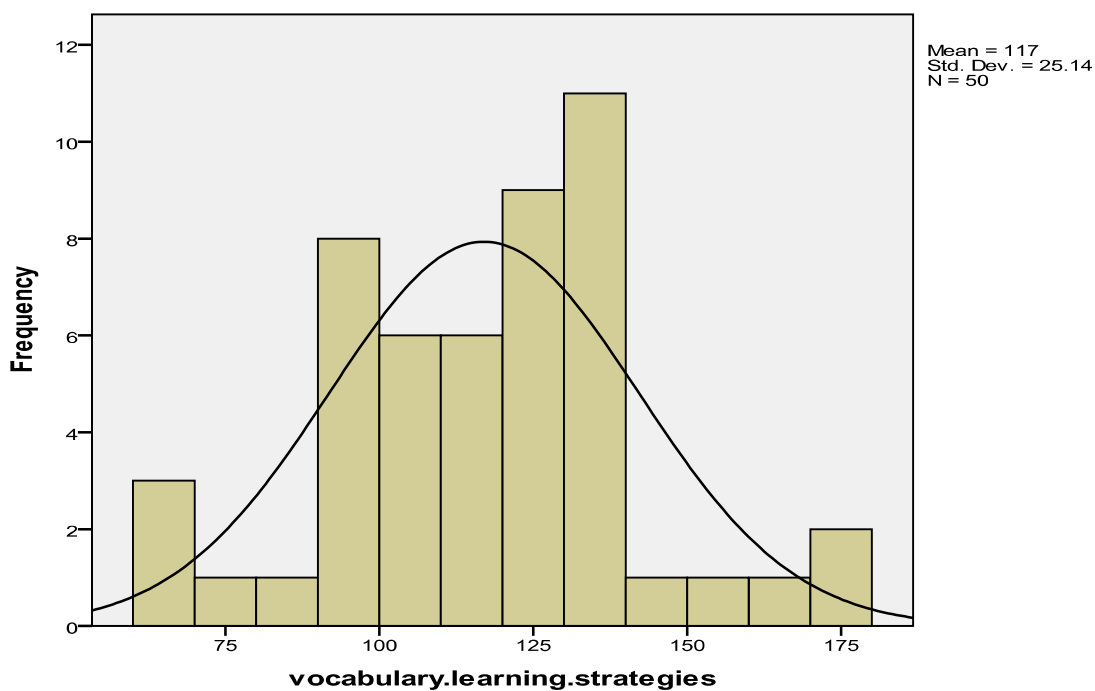


Figure 2. Histogram of the Distribution of Vocabulary Learning Strategies Scores

To check the relationship between EI and vocabulary learning strategies, the linearity of relationship and the homoscedasticity conditions were verified visually through the following scatter plot:

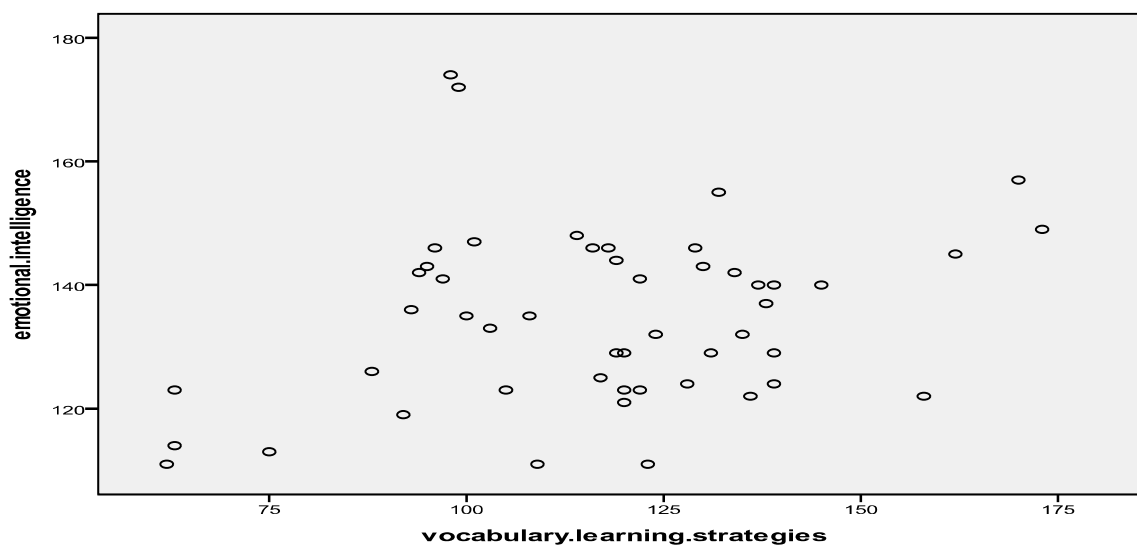


Figure 3. Scatter Plot of Emotional Intelligence and Vocabulary Learning Strategies Scores



As shown in the above figure, the points form a linear shape as they cluster around a straight line from the bottom left to the top right. The figure indicates that there is a linear and positive relationship, and scores are distributed along the line: homoscedasticity.

As the assumptions were met, the parametric Pearson correlation was used to calculate the correlation between the two variables. The following table shows the result of the calculations:

Table 2.

Pearson Correlation Results for the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Vocabulary Learning Strategies

		Emotional Intelligence	Vocabulary Learning Strategies
Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	1	.302 *
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.033
	N	50	50
Vocabulary Learning Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.302 *	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.033	
	N	50	50

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As indicated in the above table, the strength of correlation between EI and vocabulary learning strategies turned out to be .302 and positive. Since Sig. value was smaller than .05 ($p = .033$), there was a significant correlation between the learners' EI and their vocabulary learning strategies. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.091. Expressed in percentage, 9 percent of the variance in EI is shared by vocabulary learning strategies.

INVESTIGATION THE SECOND RESEARCH QUESTION

RQ 2: Is there any significant difference between the EI and gender of EFL learners in their intermediate vocabulary learning strategies?

The second research question stated that there is no significant difference between the EI of male and female learners in their vocabulary learning strategies.

In order to probe the second research question, an independent sample t-test was run. The descriptive statistics of each gender's EI are presented in Table 3.



DISCUSSION

The study examined the relationship between Iranian intermediate English language learners' EI and vocabulary learning strategies in a context where English was learned as a foreign language. The research questions posed whether there is any significant relationship between EI and vocabulary learning strategies among Iranian intermediate language learners and whether there is any significant difference between EI and vocabulary learning strategies of male and female language learners. Two types of questionnaires were conducted to collect data and after that Pearson correlation coefficient and an independent t-test were employed as particular statistical analysis methods in line with each research question.

After statistical analysis, the outcome of this study revealed a significant positive correlation between EI and vocabulary learning strategy among Iranian intermediate language learners. That is to say, an increase in EI among Iranian intermediate language learners leads to increase in vocabulary learning strategies. Therefore, learners who possess high EI try to improve their vocabulary learning strategies in English.

According to the study, there was a positive relationship between EI and vocabulary learning strategy. The findings of the study are inconsistent with a study conducted by Nesari et al. (2011). In their study, the relationship between EI and foreign language vocabulary learning of Iranian learners was probed. The data proved that there was no significant relationship between EI and vocabulary learning also there was no differences between the male and female participants. This different results may be due to different reasons such as using different questionnaires or may be due to the fact that the participants of the study were different students in different EFL contexts (one is in Gorgan, and the other is Ilam). Besides, the result of the study is not in accordance with the study of Zarafshan and Ardeshtiri (2012). They found the relationship between EI, language learning strategy, and English proficiency. They figured out that EI was negatively correlated with English proficiency. However, the result of the study is in harmony with Alqarni (2023). The results showed that learners who have higher EI have better performance in academic and social environment. Also, the results of the study in line with the study of Razmjoo et al. (2009). They found the relationship between EI, vocabulary learning knowledge and vocabulary learning strategies. They found that the relationship between EI and vocabulary learning knowledge was positive.

CONCLUSION

Given the fact that EFL learners exposed to English language merely in English classes and academic environment just for some sessions a week, therefore, English is considered as a foreign language in Iran. This study examined the relationship between EI and vocabulary learning strategies, hence, 50 Iranian intermediate EFL learners (both male and female) from Giti and Sama language institutes participated in this study. The required data were gathered by administering questionnaires. Statistical data analysis methods of correlation coefficient and t-test were utilized in line with two research questions.

The study found a significant positive correlation between EI and vocabulary learning strategies, as shown by Pearson's correlation. This means that learners with higher EI were more inclined to employ vocabulary learning strategies when learning English. The present study attempted to shed light on the status of EI and the vocabulary learning strategies attributed to the language among Iranian EFL learners. The findings revealed that vocabulary learning strategies can be affected by components of EI, moreover, the responses prepared by them in the questionnaires demonstrated that they had a high tendency to use strategies.

From what has been above, it was demonstrated that increasing the learners' EI leads them to engage actively employ strategies for learning vocabulary. It can be suggested that EFL instructors should try to encourage and increase EI of their language learners to promote their use of strategies.

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