

Relationship between Iranian EFL Learners' Reading Strategy Use and Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' reading strategy use and Emotional Intelligence (EI) as well as exploring the most frequently-used reading strategies which can facilitate the process of reading comprehension. To this end, a group of 60 was selected out of 274 university learners majoring in TEFL and English Translation. Based on English Proficiency Test and Bar-On's (1997) EI Test, they were divided into two groups (high and low EI). Then, the needed data were gathered by employing a Reading Strategy Questionnaire. The collected data were analyzed via SPSS software, version 22. The results of the study revealed that EI level was positively associated with Reading Strategy Use ($r=0.623$, $p<0.01$). Also, the results of independent samples t-test were indicative of the fact that the degree of usage of meta-cognitive and cognitive strategies by the high EI group was greater than that of the low EI group, while with respect to the test-taking strategies, this degree of usage was weaker in the former than in the latter. In addition, cognitive strategy, as the most frequent one, was observed to be a facilitative strategy for reading comprehension. It was, therefore, concluded that the importance of reading strategies should be taken into account in improving the reading skill and other areas of language learning and teaching. The findings of the can be helpful for material development, testing and teaching methodologies.

Key words: Emotion, intelligence, emotional intelligence, reading strategy use, meta-cognitive, cognitive

Introduction

The concept of Emotional Quotient (EQ) has become one of the most familiar phenomena throughout the world since 1995. Emotional intelligence (EI) is defined as "a skill or ability in the case of the trait EI model, a self-perceived ability to identify, assess, and control the emotions of oneself, of others, and of groups" (Goleman 1998, p. 125). The term emotional intelligence has been expanding increasingly, especially in its application in education, personal life, work and business, where a few research studies have been conducted (Pellitteri, 2002). It has been claimed that emotional intelligence is one of the most important elements that determine success in life and psychological well-being (Bar-On, 2001). Emotional intelligence is the ability to use accurate reasoning about one's own and others' emotions as well as the ability to facilitate this reasoning to enrich thinking and deciding (Martinez, 1997). The one who has emotional intelligence gives order and stability to his/her life in such a way that with high emotional intelligence the person is able to experience less negative incidents in his/her life (Esmaeili, 2004). Furthermore, Salovey and Mayer, (1990) pointed out that emotional intelligence is a type of social intelligence that involves both the ability to analyze one's own and others' emotions and the ability to exploit the analyses to direct and guide one's own and others' actions Salovey and Mayer(1990)expanded four branches of Emotional Intelligence that included four elements: the use of emotions, perceiving emotions, emotional management and social fitness (Salovey and Mayer, 1990): To this end, furthermore, Goleman (1995) expanded the Four Branch Model including five

emotional factors: managing one's own emotional conditions; understanding and influencing other people's emotions; identifying and distinguishing among one's own emotional conditions; forming and sustaining successful social relationships; and using one's current emotional state purposefully to achieve specific goals and aims.

A great number of research studies (Samouei, 2002; Aghasafari, 2006) have focused on the effectiveness of social factors and psychological dimensions of differences among learners. However, a few of these research studies have limited their attention to the emotional aspects of language (Cohen & Macaro, 2007). In order to learn a foreign language, one must accept the human agency and psychological aspects in learning. One of the main factors that influence learning process is intelligence (Cohen & Macaro 2007). However, Oxford (1990) states that conventional measures of intelligence (IQ) account for 20% of one's success in life.

Researchers have also found that the use of learning strategies in language classroom is an important factor in the success of EFL learners (Oxford, 1990). To this end, the main problem regarding the phenomenon of EI is the fact that there are a lot of questions unanswered with respect to the effect of this phenomenon on different areas of language learning and teaching. On the other hand, lack of research projects can be seriously seen in the realm of foreign language learning and teaching, which is the case with the present situation on the part of the Iranian EFL learners. By investigating this area of language, the quality of language learning and teaching can be improved. Due to the scarcity of research, especially between English and Persian, the present study aims to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and the reading strategies employed by Iranian EFL learners and to find the most and the least frequently-used reading strategies employed by Iranian EFL learners with high and low EI in reading comprehension. This study provides useful information for both language teachers and learners. Also, the findings of this study can be used to improve and revise language teaching methodologies as well as language testing materials. Moreover, it can provide insights into material development and thus facilitate the process of language learning, particularly reading, for the learners. The research questions to be addressed are clearly as follows:

Research questions

1. Is there any significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the reading strategies employed by Iranian EFL learners?
2. What are the most and the least frequently-used reading strategies employed by Iranian EFL learners with high and low EI in reading comprehension?

Methodology

Design of the study

The present study employed an 'ex-post facto' research design which is a category of research designs in which the investigation starts after the fact occurs without interference from the researcher. In fact, since in this study the researchers were not able to control the independent variable (that is, EQ) by manipulation, on the one hand, and since here the participants had to be selected through non-random purposeful method, they used this kind of design.

Participants

The participants of the study were learners of the Islamic Azad University majoring in TEFL. The total population (that is the available population) were 274 male and female learners aged between 20 and 24. They were chosen through non-random availability method. In order to reach a homogenized sample population with respect to the level of English

proficiency, a ‘Standard Test of English Proficiency’ (a TOEFL test including 40 multiple-choice questions to be completed in 40 minutes) was administered to the aforementioned learners. Due to the fact that the proficiency test results showed the dominance of intermediate level over other levels (with reference to their scores), and in order to have a more comprehensive population (that could increase the statistical validity of the data collection), they were selected for the purposes of the study (No.183).

As for the assessment of the participants’ level of emotional intelligence, ‘Bar-On’s (1997) EI Test (composed of 133 items measuring five broad areas of skills and 15 factorial components to be completed in nearly 40 minutes) was administered to the 183 learners. The Bar-On EI test is a self-report measure of emotionally and socially intelligent behavior that provides an estimate of emotional-social intelligence (Bar-On, 1997). Then, based on the results of the Bar-On EI test, the participants were divided into two levels of high and low emotional intelligence. In order to make the study more manageable and reach the minimum requirements of subject selection according to Farhadi (2007), from among the 59 high EI level and 86 low EI level learners only 30 learners were randomly selected for the high group and 30 learners were randomly selected for the low group. The participants of both groups included both male and female learners.

Instruments

The first instrument employed in this study was Standard English proficiency Test (TOEFL Test) in order to identify the learners’ English proficiency levels. The test includes 40 multiple-choice questions (including 10 grammar tests, 10 vocabulary tests, 5 cloze tests, and 15 reading comprehension tests) and takes about 40 minutes to be completed. The second instrument used to determine the participants’ emotional intelligence level was ‘Bar-On’s EI Test’. It includes 133 short statement items which measure five broad areas of skills (managing one’s own emotional conditions; understanding and influencing other people’s emotions; identifying and distinguishing among one’s own emotional conditions; forming and sustaining successful social relationships; and using one’s current emotional state purposefully to attain specific goals) and 15 factorial components. The questionnaire employed a five-point response scale with a textual response format ranging from ‘very seldom’ or ‘not true of me’ to ‘very often’ or ‘true of me’. In this study, to avoid cross-cultural differences and probable misunderstanding regarding the content of the questionnaire, the translated Persian version of this questionnaire was employed. The Cronbach’s Alpha reliability index was reported as 0.80 (Samouei, 2002). In another study, Dehshiri (2003) reported that the Persian version has generally good internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and construct validity. As he states, Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was found to be .76. The Bar-On questionnaire is based on the most comprehensive theory of EI to date and renders an overall EQ score as well as scores for the 15 major categories. These important areas of emotional intelligence are measured accurately with a sophisticated correction factor. Students’ scores range from minimum 270 to maximum 450. The third instrument was the Reading Strategy Questionnaire in order to test the learners’ reading strategy use--a 34-item questionnaire adopted from Mazlumzavaragh (2000) was employed. It comprised 24 cognitive, 3 meta-cognitive, and 7 test items.

Analysis of the data

The collected data were analyzed via SPSS software, version 22. Thus, in order to determine the probable relationship between Iranian EFL learners’ EI level and their reading strategy use, the correlation analysis was run to obtain the correlation coefficient index. Furthermore, in order to find out the most and the least frequently-used reading strategies employed by Iranian EFL learners with high and low EI in reading comprehension,

descriptive analysis (Means, Standard Deviations, Frequencies and percentage) were employed.

Results and discussion

Relationship between emotional intelligence level and reading strategy use

In order to determine the relationship between learners' EI level and reading strategy use, the Pearson Correlation analysis was done. The results in Table 1 below show that among the intermediate learners (n=60), Emotional Intelligence level was positively associated with reading strategy use ($r=0.623$, $p<0.01$). Their percentages of variances being $r^2= 0.388$ was indicative that the amount of variance in Emotional Intelligence level can be explained by the reading strategy use. Therefore, the correlation coefficients of the Emotional Intelligence and reading strategy use accounts for 38%, of the variations. This shows that the learners' Emotional Intelligence level associate with their reading strategy use and vice versa. The difference among the groups was also statistically significant and positive in amount. Thus, the degree of usage of meta-cognitive and cognitive strategies by the high group was greater than that of the low group. However, the test-taking strategy was greater than the expected one at the .05 level, i.e. the difference between the groups was statistically significant and negative in amount and therefore, the degree of usage of test-taking strategies by the high group was weaker than that of the low group. These results indicated that there was a difference between high and low group with respect to their use of each reading strategy which was possibly (because of the weak positive relationship between EL level and reading strategy use) resulted from the EFL learners' EI level.

Table 1. Pearson correlation results for the relationship between EI and reading strategy use

Emotional Intelligence	N	Reading Strategy Use	Pearson Correlation (r)	R ²	Sig.
Intermediate	60	Intermediate	0.623**	0.388	0.000

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Many studies have been conducted to find out the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' strategy use and their EQ scores (Akbari and Talebinezhad, 2003); the relationships between emotional intelligence (EI) and foreign language anxiety (Rouhani, 2008); the relationship between EI and speaking ability of a group of Iranian EFL learners (Ghaffari, 2008); the relationship between EI, vocabulary learning knowledge and vocabulary learning strategies among Iranian EFL learners (Razmjoo, Sahragard, and Sadri, 2009); the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and foreign language learners' achievement in Iranian context (Hasanzadeh and Shahmohamadi, 2011); the impact of emotional intelligence (EI) components on listening proficiency together with gender differences (Jahandar, Khodabandehlou, Seyedi, and Dolatabadi (2012); and the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and writing skill among Iranian MA students (Ghasemi, Behjat and Kargar, 2013). The results of the present study are line with those of such researches, showing the consistence and authenticity of the results in different Iranian contexts. For instance, Akbari and Talebinezhad (2003) reported that Iranian mostly use meta-cognitive strategy while affective strategy was used the least. Furthermore, the results of the present study were indicative of the fact that in high EI group, the frequency of usage of cognitive strategies was very high, while the frequency related to meta-cognitive and test-taking strategies was conjointly high. On the other hand, with respect to the low EI group, the frequency of usage of test-taking and cognitive strategies was conjointly high, while that of

the meta-cognitive strategies was moderate. This shows that with respect to the frequent meta-cognitive strategy use, there are some differences between the results gained in this study and those obtained in Akbari and Talebinezhad (2003).

Learners' reading strategy use

Table 2 below presents a descriptive analysis (Frequencies/Percentages, Means and Standard Deviations) of the intermediate (high and low EI) learners' reading strategy use (meta-cognitive, cognitive and test-taking). It is worthy to mention that among these three types of reading strategy preferences, the one which indicated the highest mean value among learners with high and low level of EI was considered to be the learners' cognitive reading strategy use. Frequency was also run to get the percentages of the total number of the learners who preferred each type of reading strategy use.

Table 2. Groups' statistics for meta-cognitive, cognitive and test-taking reading strategies

	EI Group	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Meta-cognitive	High	30	4	12	9.07	2.545
	Low	30	3	10	5.30	1.803
Cognitive	High	30	53	94	77.77	12.859
	Low	30	33	89	53.67	14.428
Test-Taking	High	30	8	15	16.30	4.356
	Low	30	10	28	20.10	5.803

As Table 2 indicates, the mean score of using meta-cognitive strategies in high group (9.07) is higher than that of the low group (5.30). This shows that the high group of EI is more inclined to use meta-cognitive strategies than the low group is. With respect to the cognitive strategies, the mean score of the high group (77.77) is higher than that of the low group (53.67), while in connection with test-taking strategies, the mean score of the high group (16.30) is lower than that of the low group (20.10). In order to test the authenticity of the results displayed in Table 2, an independent samples t-test was run.

The degree of language learning strategy use

Table 3 below contains the descriptive analysis (Frequencies/Percentages, Means and Standard Deviations) of reading strategies and learners' use of individual strategies by category (meta-cognitive, cognitive, and Test-Taking). With respect to meta-cognitive strategies, the high group gained the high level (3.02) of usage while the low group proved to be at the medium level (1.76). Furthermore, regarding the cognitive strategies, the high group stood at the very high level (3.24) of usage while the low group gained the high level (2.23). As far as the test-taking strategy is concerned, even though both high and low groups stood at the high level of usage, the amount of usage in the low group (2.97) was greater than that of the high group (2.32), as opposed to the other two strategies. Finally, with respect to the overall usage of the reading strategies, the high group stood at very high level (3.14), while the low group stood at high level (2.20).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the degree of language learning strategy use

		EI Group	N	Mean	Degree of Usage	Std. deviation	F (%)
Reading Strategy	Meta-cognitive	High	30	3.02	High	0.23	75.50%
		Low	30	1.76	Medium	0.18	44.00%
	Cognitive	High	30	3.24	Very High	0.73	81.00%

	Low	30	2.23	High	0.84	55.75%
Test-Taking	High	30	2.32	High	0.31	58.00%
	Low	30	2.97	High	0.39	74.25%
Overall	High	30	3.14	Very High	0.82	78.50%
Strategy Use	Low	30	2.20	High	0.86	55.00%

It is to be mentioned that in the three types of reading strategy preferences, the one with the highest mean value among high and low EI level learners was considered to be the learners' cognitive reading strategy use. The frequency was also run to get the percentages of the total number of the learners who preferred each type of reading strategy use. With regard to this, Table 4 above displays that as far as the meta-cognitive strategy is related, 22 participants in the high group and 13 participants in low group used this reading strategy. Regarding cognitive strategy, the number of participants who preferred to use this strategy in high and low groups were 24 and 16, respectively. Furthermore, regarding test-taking strategy, 17 participants in the high group and 21 participants in the low group utilized this strategy. With regard to meta-cognitive and cognitive strategies the high group overrode the low group in terms of the frequency of usage of these two strategies. However, with respect to the third type of strategy, i.e., test-taking strategy, the participants in the low group overrode those in the high group. Finally, as far as the overall usage of the three types of strategies is concerned, the number of participants who preferred to use the three reading strategies in high and low groups were 23 and 15, respectively. This shows the fact that the participants in the high group of EI preferred to employ the above-mentioned reading strategies more than those in the low group.

Conclusions and implications

This study focused on the relationship between EI and reading strategy use as well as the most and the least frequently-used reading strategies employed by Iranian EFL learners with high and low EI in reading comprehension. To this end, the inferential statistics related to the correlation indicated that between the two groups (high and low) of EI (n=60), Emotional Intelligence level was 'positively' associated with Reading Strategy Use. Thus, it is concluded that among the three types of reading strategy preferences the learners of the high group use cognitive strategies more than meta-cognitive and test-taking strategies, respectively. More specifically, in low group the diminishing order of strategy preferences was test-taking, cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies, respectively. It can also be concluded that this finding might be due to the fact that cognitive strategies (which can be seen more in high EI level participants) need more cognitive processing and attention, while test-taking strategies are related to the learners' familiarity with the format of the examination (which can be more applicable to the low EI level participants and does not need a deep cognitive processing). Moreover, the most frequent reading strategy, i.e., cognitive strategy can be proposed as a strategy which can facilitate the process of EFL learners' reading comprehension.

Generally, Emotional Intelligence can have an effect on the EFL learners' reading comprehension ability. Readers who use reading strategies frequently and adequately are more successful than readers who do not use such reading strategies. It is also concluded that cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies (which were mostly used by the high group) made the greatest distinction between successful and less successful readers. Consequently, the significant role of reading strategies should be taken into account to improve reading skills. Also, the findings of this study can be utilized for improving and revising language teaching methodologies as well as language testing materials. They can also provide insights into material development and facilitate the process of language learning, particularly reading, for

the learners. The findings can also help teachers, instructors and mostly learners to see what reading strategies they should employ regarding their EI level use in order to improve the quality of their second/ foreign language teaching and learning, respectively.

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