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The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence, Gender, Major and English Reading Comprehension Ability: A Case Study of Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract: *The topic of EI has witnessed unparalleled interest since the publication of the best-selling book Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman (1995). The emotional intelligence (EI) construct is a relatively new concept with little empirical research. This study was an attempt to find the relationship between EI, gender, major, and reading comprehension ability of Iranian EFL learners. For this purpose, 268 students completed the Bar-On EQ inventory (1997) which included 133 items and took a reading comprehension test. It was found that females outperformed males in the reading comprehension test. However, no significant relationship was found between gender and major on one hand and reading comprehensions ability on the other hand. The relationship between major and reading comprehension ability was also statistically significant. This study showed no significant relationship between EI scales (interpersonal, stress management, adaptability, and general mood) except for the intrapersonal intelligence. The intrapersonal intelligence of females in general, regardless of major, was found to be significantly higher than males. The implications of the study and suggestions for further research are discussed.*

Key Words: *Bar-on EQ-i, EFL, Emotional Intelligence, Gender, Reading Comprehension.*

Introduction

Since the publication of the best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman (1995), the topic of EI has witnessed unparalleled interest. Programs seeking to increase EI have been implemented in numerous settings, and courses on developing one's emotional intelligence have been introduced in universities and even in elementary schools throughout the world. But what exactly *is* EI? As is the case with all constructs (i.e. intelligence or personality), several schools of thought exist which aim to most accurately describe and measure the notion of EI. At the most general level, EI refers to the ability to recognize and regulate emotions in ourselves and others (Goleman, 2001). Peter Salovey and John Mayer initially defined it as:

A form of intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and

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emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Later, these authors revised their definition of EI, the current characterization now being the most widely accepted. EI is thus defined as: *The ability to perceive emotion, integrate emotion to facilitate thought, understand emotions, and to regulate emotions to promote personal growth (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).*

Another prominent researcher of the EI construct is Bar-On, the originator of the term "emotion quotient". Possessing a slightly different outlook, he defined EI as being concerned with understanding oneself and others, relating to people, and adapting to and coping with the immediate surroundings to be more successful in dealing with environmental demands (1997).

However, there are arguments that the concept of EI is not clearly defined, that different definitions and tests are being used - not always including the same aspects, and that many of the measures are neither reliable nor valid (Ciarrochi, Chan & Caputi, 2000). In essence there are two views on EI (Hedlund & Sternberg, 2000): some argue that EI includes everything that is not measured by IQ but instead is related to success (Bar-On, 1997; Goleman, 1995); others advocate an ability model of EI that measures the ability to perceive and understand emotional information (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000). According to Petrides and Furham (2001), it would be more beneficial to describe trait EI and ability EI as two separate constructs instead of one being measured in two different ways. Some researchers even questioned whether EI is anything more than a set of personality variables for which adequate measures already exist (Davies, Stankov & Roberts, 1998). Although the definitions of EI may differ among the many researchers, instead of being contradictory to one another, they appear to be complementary and they all share a common purpose which is to extend the traditional view of intelligence by underlining the importance of social, emotional and personal factors regarding intelligent behavior (Dawda & Hart, 2000).

This study attempted to answer the following questions:

Research question 1: Is there a significant relationship between gender, major and reading comprehension ability?

Research question 2: Is there a significant relationship between gender, major, and EI?

Research question 3: Is there a significant relationship between gender, major and five scales of EI?

Research question 4: Is there a significant relationship between gender, major, five EL scales on one hand and reading comprehension ability on the other hand?

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Review of Literature

EI Models

Early theorists such as Thorndike and Gardner paved the way for the current experts in the field of emotional intelligence. Each theoretical paradigm conceptualizes emotional intelligence from one of two perspectives: ability or mixed model. Ability models regard emotional intelligence as a pure form of mental ability and thus as a pure intelligence. In contrast, mixed models of emotional intelligence combine mental ability with personality characteristics such as optimism and well-being (Mayer, 1999). Currently, the only ability model of EI is that proposed by John Mayer and Peter Salovey. Two mixed models of EI have been proposed, each within a somewhat different conception. Reuven Bar-On has put forth a model based within the context of personality theory, emphasizing the co-dependence of the ability aspects of emotional intelligence with personality traits and their application to personal well-being. In contrast, Daniel Goleman proposed a mixed model in terms of performance, integrating an individual's abilities and personality and applying their corresponding effects on performance in the workplace (Goleman, 2001).

Salovey and Mayer: An Ability Model of EI

Peter Salovey and John Mayer first coined the term "emotional intelligence" in 1990 (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) and have since continued to conduct research on the significance of the construct. Their conception of emotional intelligence is based within a model of intelligence, that is, it strives to define EI within the confines of the standard criteria for a new intelligence (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003). It proposes that EI is comprised of two areas: experiential (ability to perceive, respond, and manipulate emotional information without necessarily understanding it) and strategic (ability to understand and manage emotions without necessarily perceiving feelings well or fully experiencing them). Each area is further divided into two branches that range from basic psychological processes to more complex processes integrating emotion and cognition. The first branch, emotional perception, is the ability to be self-aware of emotions and to express emotions and emotional needs accurately to others. Emotional perception also includes the ability to distinguish between honest and dishonest expressions of emotion. The second branch, emotional assimilation, is the ability to distinguish among the different emotions one is feeling and to identify those that are influencing their thought processes. The third branch, emotional understanding, is the ability to understand complex emotions (such as feeling two emotions at once) and the ability to recognize transitions from one to the other. Lastly, the fourth branch, emotion management, is the ability to connect or disconnect from an emotion depending on its usefulness in a given situation (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

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Gender Differences in Emotional Intelligence

Competing evidence exists surrounding whether or not males and females differ significantly in general levels of emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman (1998) asserted that no gender differences in EI exist, admitting that while men and women may have different profiles of strengths and weaknesses in different areas of EI, their overall levels of EI are equivalent. However, studies by Mayer and Geher (1996), Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey (1999), and more recently Mandell and Pherwani (2003) have found that women are more likely to score higher on measures of EI than men, both in professional and personal settings.

The discrepancy may be due to measurement choice. Brackett and Mayer (2003) found that females scored higher than males on EI when measured by a performance measure (the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test). However, when using self-report measures such as the Bar-On EQ-i and the Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SREIT), they found no evidence for gender differences. Perhaps gender differences exist in EI only when one defines E.I. in a purely cognitive manner rather than through a mixed perspective. It could also be the case that gender differences do exist but measurement artifacts such as over-estimation of ability on the part of males are more likely to occur with self-report measures. More research is required to determine whether or not gender differences do exist in EI.

In this article we used the Bar-on EQ-i (1997), one of the first scientific developed measures that attempts to assess EI. Bar-on worked extensively on developing a multi factorial and theoretically eclectic measure for EI, the Bar-on EQ-i, which measures the potential to succeed rather than the success itself (1997). According to Bar-On the core of EI is 'understanding oneself and others, being able to relate to people and possessing the ability to adapt and cope with one's surroundings' which in term will increase one's chances of success when dealing with environmental demands. Because EI renders the way in which someone applies his knowledge to certain situations, it can also help to predict future success (Bar-on, 1997).

According to a new study, there are several notable differences between men and women in EI. Men seen to have significantly stronger interpersonal skills than their men counterparts do, men appear to have a stronger sense of self and deal better with stress. According to Steven Stein (2004), women were more aware of their feelings and those of others, relate better interpersonally, and are significantly more socially responsible than men. On the other hand, men seem to have stronger self-regard and cope better with immediate problems of a stressful nature than women.

Petrides and Furnham (2000) have found the relationship between gender and EI among two hundred and sixty predominantly white participants completed a measure of trait EI and estimated their scores. Findings indicated that females scored higher than males on the "social skills" factor of measured trait EI. Nonetheless, studies have largely ignored the relationship

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between EI and reading comprehension ability of university students whose majors are anything rather than English. Besides, the moderating effect of major and gender was also taken into account in this study.

Methodology

This study focused on the relationship between EI, gender, major, and reading comprehension ability of Iranian EFL learners. This section addresses the method adopted for conducting the present study. The participants of the study, instruments used for data collection, and the data collection procedures are followed by.

Participants

A community sample of 385 people participated in this study, comprised of 138 males and 247 females within the ages of 18 and 28 (M= 20.3, SD=3.5). The participants were university students at Sama Technical and Vocational Training College, Tehran branch in Iran, majoring in accounting (114), architecture (113), and software engineering (158). They were all taking General English course at the time of the research. These students were asked if they would volunteer to complete a questionnaire on EQ in a study on "Emotional Intelligence and Second Language Learning". Out of 385 participants, 268 participants accepted to complete the Bar-On EQ-i which included 133 items.

Measures and procedures

In June (2014), at the end of the academic year, participants completed the Bar-On EQ-i; (1997). The Bar-On EQ-i was originally designed in 1980 by Bar-On. It was a self-report scale, including 133 items, which measured five broad areas of skills or competencies and 15 factorial components. An example from the EQ questionnaire is "It does not bother me to take advantage of people, especially if they deserve it." Subjects respond on a 5-point Likert type scale continuum from "Very seldom or Not true of me" to "Very often or True of me". For the EQ-i (Bar-On, 1997) high and low scores were identified by their distance from the mean score of 100. Scores exceeding the mean or falling below the mean by 1 SD (15 points) were considered to be within the normal range. Since the test was timed, the participants were asked to complete it in 40 minutes.

In view of the cultural differences and to avoid any misunderstanding regarding the content of the questionnaire for lower-level students, the translated version of this questionnaire (Dehshiry, 2003) was employed. In this study, the reliability of the translated version estimated through Cronbach's alpha was found to be acceptable (r= 0.86). To determine the role of EI in reading comprehension ability of Iranian EFL learners, a reading comprehension test was also administered to the participants. This test was comprised of 28 questions and the time allotted was 40 minutes (r=0.81).

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Findings

In order to answer the research questions, Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, Multivariate Regression Analysis, Pearson Correlation Coefficient, Two Way Analysis of Variance (AVOVA), One-Way ANOVA, Levene's test, Independent samples t-test, and linear graphs were used. Table 1 shows the information regarding the gender and major of the participants of this research.

Table 1 ***Gender Frequency Distribution Table***

Major	Female	Male
	Frequency	Frequency
Computer	59	44
Accounting	61	18
Architecture	75	17
Total	195	79

Normality Test of Research Variables

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test (K–S test or KS test) was used to determine whether the research variables were normally distributed. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test results showed that the participants' scores in total EI and reading comprehension ability was normally distributed (p= 0.05). Since p-value was more than 0.05 for the research variables, mean and standard deviation were used for the descriptive analysis of the data (Table 2). Parametric tests were also used to test the research hypotheses.

Table 2 *The Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test*

Variables	Kolmogorov	P value
Reading comprehension	1.21	0.11
Emotional intelligence	1.09	0.19

Mean and standard deviation of the reading comprehension scores revealed that:

1. The mean of reading comprehension scores of females, in general and for computer and architecture students was higher than males.
2. The mean of reading comprehension scores of students majoring in accounting was almost the same for males and females.
3. The standard deviation of reading comprehension scores of females in general, and for students majoring in computer and accounting was higher than males. Likewise, the standard deviation of reading comprehension scores of females majoring in architecture was lower than males.

Research Question 1: Is there a significant relationship between gender, major and reading comprehension ability?

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In order to investigate the relationship between gender, major and reading comprehension ability, the two-way ANOVA was used. As Table 3 shows, there was no significant relationship between gender and major on one hand and reading comprehensions ability on the other hand ($p>0.05$). Besides, the relationship between gender and reading comprehension ability was statistically significant ($p<0.05$, $F=4.728$). That is, the reading comprehension ability of female students was higher than males. Furthermore, the relationship between major and reading comprehension ability was also statistically significant ($p<0.05$, $F=4.364$). In fact, the reading comprehension ability of the participants was statistically significant in different majors. Bonferroni post hoc test results for comparing means demonstrated that the mean score of the reading comprehension ability of architecture students was significantly higher that the accounting and computer students. The mean score of the reading comprehension ability of the accounting and computer students was not statistically significant (Table 4).

Table 3 *Two-way ANOVA: Gender, Major and Reading Comprehension Ability*

Source	Sum of the Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Effect Size
Gender	113.307	1	113.307	4.728	.031	.018
Major	209.193	2	104.596	4.364	.014	.032
Gender and Major Interaction	139.414	2	69.707	2.909	.056	.022

Table 4 *Bonferroni Post-Hoc Test Results*

Majors	Computer	Accounting	Architecture	
Computer	-	1.68	2.17*	∗Significant at p=0.05
Accounting	-	-	0.49	
Architecture	-	-	-	

Research Question 2: Is there a significant relationship between gender, major, and EI?

In order to answer the research question 2, two-way ANOVA was run (Table 5). It was found that there was no significant relationship between gender and major on one hand and EI in general on the other hand ($p>0.05$). In fact, the general EI of males and females in different majors wan not statistically significant. Besides, There was no significant relationship between gender and general EI ($p>0.05$). Furthermore, there was no significant relationship between major and general EI ($p>0.05$). In other words, the general EI of students majoring in accounting, computer and architecture was not significantly different.

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Table 5 *Two-way ANOVA for the Interaction of Gender and Major on EI*

Source	Sum of the squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Gender	0.00082	1	0.00082	.004	.997
Major	.704	2	.352	1.717	.182
Gender and Major Interaction	.297	2	.148	.724	.486

Research Question 3: Is there a significant relationship between gender and major and Intrapersonal intelligence as a scale of EI?

In order to answer the research question 3, two-way ANOVA was run (Table 6). The results showed that there was a significant relationship between gender and major on one hand and Intrapersonal intelligence as a scale of EI on the other hand ($p<0.05$). In fact, the Intrapersonal intelligence of males and females in different majors was significantly different. In other words, the mean of intrapersonal intelligence of male students majoring in accounting was higher than female students of accounting. However, the mean of intrapersonal intelligence of female students majoring in computer and architecture was higher than male students of computer and architecture. Besides, the intrapersonal intelligence of females in general, regardless of major (3.60), was significantly higher than males (3.40). Furthermore, there was no significant relationship between major and intrapersonal intelligence, not taking into account the gender factor.

Table 6 *Two-way ANOVA for the Interaction of Gender and Major on Intrapersonal Intelligence*

Source	Sum of the Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Effect Size
Gender	1.071	1	1.071	4.570	.034	.031
Major	1.071	1	1.071	4.570	.034	.031
Gender and Major Interaction	1.698	2	.849	3.621	.029	.048

Research Question 4: Is there a significant relationship between gender and major and Interpersonal intelligence as a scale of EI?

In order to answer the research question 4, two-way ANOVA was run (Table 7). The results manifested that there was no significant relationship between gender and major on one hand and

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Interpersonal intelligence as a scale of EI on the other hand ($p>0.05$). In fact, the interpersonal intelligence of males and females in different majors was not significantly different. Besides, the interpersonal intelligence of females in general, regardless of major (3.78), was significantly higher than males (3.60). Furthermore, there was no significant relationship between major and interpersonal intelligence, not taking into account the gender factor.

Table 7 *Two-way ANOVA for the Interaction of Gender and Major on Interpersonal Intelligence*

Source	Sum of the Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Effect Size
Gender	1.298	1	1.298	4.801	.030	.026
Major	.014	2	.007	.027	.974	.000
Gender and Major Interaction	.026	2	.013	.049	.952	.001

Research Question 5: Is there a significant relationship between gender and major and Stress Management as a scale of EI?

The results of two-way ANOVA showed that there was no significant relationship between gender and major on one hand and stress management as a scale of EI on the other hand ($p>0.05$). In fact, stress management of males and females in different majors was not significantly different (Table 8). Besides, there was no significant relationship between gender on one hand and stress management as a scale of EI on the other hand. In other words, the stress management of male and female students was not significantly different. Furthermore, There was no significant relationship between major and stress management, not taking into account the gender factor.

Table 8 *Two-way ANOVA for the Interaction of Gender and Major on Stress Management*

Source	Sum of the Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Gender	.167	1	.167	.473	.493
Major	.870	2	.435	1.234	.293
Gender and major Interaction	1.291	2	.646	1.831	.163

Research Question 6: Is there a significant relationship between gender and major and Adaptability as a scale of EI?

The results of two-way ANOVA showed that there was no significant relationship between

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gender and major on one hand and adaptability as a scale of EI on the other hand ($p>0.05$). In fact, the adaptability of males and females in different majors was not significantly different (Table 9). Besides, there was no significant relationship between gender on one hand and adaptability as a scale of EI on the other hand. In other words, the adaptability of male and female students was not significantly different. Furthermore, there was no significant relationship between major and adaptability, not taking into account the gender factor.

Table 9 *Two-way ANOVA for the Interaction of Gender and Major on Adaptability*

Source	Sum of the Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Gender	.167	1	.167	.473	.493
Major	.870	2	.435	1.234	.293
Gender and Major Interaction	1.291	2	.646	1.831	.163

Research Question 7: Is there a significant relationship between gender and major and general mood as a scale of EI?

The results of two-way ANOVA showed that there was no significant relationship between gender on one hand and General Mood as a scale of EI on the other hand. In other words, the General Mood of male and female students was not significantly different (Table 10). Besides, the General Mood of females, regardless of major, (3.81) was significantly higher than males (3.65). Furthermore, there was no significant relationship between major and General Mood, not taking into account the gender factor.

Table 10 *Two-way ANOVA for the Interaction of Gender and Major on General Mood*

Source	Sum of the Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Effect Size
Gender	1.543	1	1.543	5.428	.021	.027
Major	1.135	2	.567	1.996	.139	.020
Gender and major Interaction	.720	2	.360	1.267	.284	.013

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Conclusion

Reading Comprehension Ability, Major, and Gender

The relationship between gender and reading comprehension ability was found to be statistically significant. Besides, the reading comprehension ability of female students was found to be higher than males. However, no significant relationship was found between gender and major on one hand and reading comprehensions ability on the other hand. The relationship between major and reading comprehension ability was also statistically significant. In fact, the reading comprehension ability of the participants was statistically significant in different majors.

EI Scales and Gender

This study showed no significant relationship between EI scales (interpersonal, stress management, adaptability, and general mood) except for the intrapersonal intelligence. The intrapersonal intelligence of females in general, regardless of major, was found to be significantly higher than males.

Competing evidence exists surrounding whether or not males and females differ significantly in general levels of emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman (1998) asserts that no gender differences in EI exist, admitting that while men and women may have different profiles of strengths and weaknesses in different areas of emotional intelligence, their overall levels of EI are equivalent. However, studies by Mayer and Geher (1996), Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey (1999), and more recently Mandell and Pherwani (2003) have found that women are more likely to score higher on measures of emotional intelligence than men, both in professional and personal settings.

The discrepancy may be due to measurement choice. Brackett and Mayer (2003) found that females scored higher than males on EI when measured by a performance measure (the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test). However, when using self-report measures such as the Bar-On Emotion Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) and the Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SREIT), they found no evidence for gender differences. Perhaps gender differences exist in emotional intelligence only when one defines EI in a purely cognitive manner rather than through a mixed perspective. It could also be the case that gender differences do exist but measurement artifacts such as over-estimation of ability on the part of males are more likely to occur with self-report measures.

EI, Gender, Major, and Reading Comprehension Ability

The result showed that there was a significant relationship between gender, major, five EL scales (intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability, and general mood) on one hand and reading comprehension ability on the other hand.

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This is in line with Abdolrezapour,Tavakoli, and Ketabi (2013) who also found that EI and reading comprehension achievement are positively correlated. Utami (2013) also found that there is a positive correlation between students' emotional intelligence and reading comprehension. A number of other studies have also documented empirical evidence in support of the positive relationships between EI and academic success (Eastabrook, Duncan, & Eldridge, 2005; Parker et al. 2004; Stottlemayer, 2002). Also, there is some evidence indicating that EI and second language performance are positively related (Aki, 2006; Fahim & Pishghadam, 2007; Pishghadam, 2009). In this regard, then, this study complements and contributes to the existing body of evidence confirming the impact of EI on reading comprehension achievement.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The findings of the present study suggest several implications for English language teaching profession. The study's findings suggest that the educators should be aware of the impact intelligence has on foreign language learning. Student intelligence needs to be developed in order to facilitate reading comprehension. Teachers can improve students' intelligence by using the ideas of Buschkuehl and Jaeggi (2010), who believe that "intelligence can be improved by training on working memory and using some executive functions" (p. 267).

Other studies are suggested to do focusing on the other skills of English learning including listening, speaking, and writing. The results may be different for a different group of participants regarding their proficiency and major. In this study, EI was measured through Bar-On's EQ-i. Other questionnaires of EI may yield different results.

On the whole, If we believe that emotional intelligence can be increased, trained, and schooled (Elias et al., 1997), and if we assume that it may be possible to educate those who are low in emotional competencies to improve their abilities to better recognize their feelings, express them, and regulate them (Mayer & Geher, 1996), language policy makers are expected to include programs to raise the emotional competencies of their learners. Besides, in order to have more efficient and effective language instruction, language teachers need to use instructional techniques that raise EFL learners' EI.

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