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The relationship between emotional intelligence and EFL learners' writing performance

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to investigate the effect of emotional intelligence on EFL students' writing performance. 44 intermediate EFL learners studying in a language centre in Iran participated in this study and they were randomly assigned to two groups (control and experimental). To make sure of the initial comparability of the two groups, they had a writing test and the TEIQue-ASF was administered prior to the experiment. Then, learners of the experimental group went through emotional activities and those in the control group were taught under the ordinary approaches that did not place any emphasis on the emotional content or words.

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1. Introduction

For decades, schools have tried to predict which students would do well both in higher education and in the workplace. The tools they used to make their best guess were standardized achievement tests and IQ scores. Recent studies, however, indicate that there may be a better predictor--the measurement of a child's emotional intelligence (Bar-on and Parker, 2000). Experts now believe that success is influenced 20% by IQ and 80% by various factors that constitute a person's character and personality, or their *emotional intelligence*. Therefore, if teachers are concerned with helping students develop their L2 abilities, they might want not only to improve their emotional intelligence skills but also reduce foreign language anxiety, if possible.

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According to Harvard Psychologist Daniel Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence is a combination of five characteristics: a) knowing one's emotion, b) managing one's emotion (i.e. handling fear, anxiety), c) motivating oneself (emotional control, the ability to delay gratification), d) recognizing emotions in others, and e) handling relationships. Emotional Quotient (EQ) is about the intelligent use of emotions and utilizing the power or information contained in emotion to make effective decisions (Ciarrochi and Mayer, 2007). According to this definition, emotional intelligence provides the bedrock for the development of a large number of competencies that help learners perform more effectively. Among the many factors which contribute to second language learning, emotional intelligence could be thought to have a pivotal role.

Before the popularity of emotional intelligence in the 1990s, Gardner (1983) proposed the existence of seven types of intelligence (to which he has added more, such as natural, spiritual, and existential) consisting of linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Of these separate types of intelligences, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences, called personal intelligences, are about the capacity to regulate one's own life through accurate self-understanding of emotions and abilities. Gardner (1993), among other researchers, (e.g. Mayer, Perkins, Caruso, and Salovey, 2001), acknowledged that interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences are comparable to Goleman's (1995) emotional intelligence.

Until quite recently, emotional intelligence has not been given much consideration in areas other than business and its significance for education, especially foreign language learning, was largely neglected. Among those studies which pay attention to the effect of emotional intelligence on academic success in education is the one carried out by Stottlemayer (2002). In a study of EQ and its relation to student achievement among 200 eleventh and twelfth grade American students in Texas, Stottlemayer found that EI skills were statically significant predictors of academic achievement. Rossiter (2003) reports differential success in second or foreign language learning as being attributed to individual differences such as intelligence, aptitude, personality, motivation, attitude and anxiety. More recently Downey, Mountstephen, Lloyd, Hansen and Stough (2008) found that high EI contributes to increased motivation, planning, and decision making, which positively influence academic performance.

Recently a growing body of literature has begun to support the predictive validity of emotional intelligence in EFL/ESL contexts. Dewaele, Petrides and Furnham (2008) pointed to a negative relationship between trait EI and foreign language anxiety (FLA) which was defined as "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language (L2) contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning" (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994, p.284). Aki (2006) considered EI, i.e. having the ability to recognize, employ, comprehend and manage emotions, more important in language learning than possessing high intelligence values. Abdolrezapour and Tavakoli (2012) found a high positive correlation between one's achievement in reading comprehension and her/his emotional intelligence. Also, a positive relationship between EI and learners' L2 oral performance as measured in terms of complexity, accuracy, and fluency was found in Abdolrezapour's (in press) study.

But to date, virtually no research has studied the effects of emotional intelligence on writing performance in second language context. So, this study sets out to investigate the influence of making students aware of their emotions as far as their writing performance is concerned.

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