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Brief report

Brief report: Trait emotional intelligence, peer nominations, and scholastic achievement in adolescence

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Current research on trait EI in adolescents suggests that the construct impacts on several important domains of youths' psychological functioning, including school adjustment and achievement. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of trait EI and of its sub-components, on adolescent's academic achievement. Data were collected from 321 Italian adolescents (162 female; Mage = 15.5, SD = 1.86; aged 13—18 years) recruited from secondary schools. The effects of perceived and actual peer nominations, gender, personality dimensions, and non-verbal cognitive abilities were also controlled. Results highlight that trait EI as assessed by means of the TEIQue impacts Italian but not math's grades, while trait EI's factors predicted both academic subjects, with significant contributions of Self-Control and Sociability. Limitations and implications are discussed.
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1. Introduction

Emotional Intelligence (EI) captures individual differences in how we perceive, communicate, regulate, and understand our own emotions and the emotions of others (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2009). An increasing number of studies and meta-analysis (e.g., Sánchez-Álvarez, Extremera, & Fernández-Berrocal, 2015) attest to the importance of the construct and its applications in different domains, including health (e.g. Martins, Ramalho, & Morin, 2010), work (Schlaerth, Ensari, & Christian, 2013) and education (Fernández-Berrocal & Ruiz, 2008).

One of the most popular model of EI is trait EI or 'trait emotional self-efficacy' (Petrides & Furnham, 2000, 2001). Trait EI conceptualizes the construct as a combination of dispositions measurable through self-report questionnaires, and located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies (Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki, 2007). Particularly, trait EI refers to a person's perception of their emotional skills. As self-beliefs are important determinants of adaptive functioning and behaviors (e.g., Castiglione, Rampullo, & Licciardello, 2014), high trait EI scores may be especially relevant in buffering against the development of maladaptive outcomes. Though current literature suggests that the construct impacts on several important domains of youths' psychological functioning (Resurrección, Salguero, & Ruiz-Aranda, 2014), mixed evidence is available on the relationship between trait EI and academic performance (e.g., Andrei, Mancini, Mazzoni, Russo, & Baldaro, 2015; Qualter,

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Gardner, Pope, Hutchinson, & Whiteley, 2012; Siegling, Vesely, Saklofske, Frederickson, & Petrides, 2015). In addition, thus far no study has explored the role of trait EI's subcomponents in such relationship. This is considered by scholars of the field an essential step for an advancement in the field of EI (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2015).

The present study aims to investigate the role of trait EI considering both the global construct's composite and its subdimensions on adolescent's academic achievement. Given their relevance for a good school adjustment (Beeri & Lev-Wiesel, 2012; Bowker & Spencer, 2010), the effects of perceived and actual peer acceptance/rejection will be controlled, together with those of gender, Openness and Conscientiousness from the Big Five personality trait model (McCrae & Costa, 1999), and non-verbal cognitive abilities.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

This study involved 321 Italian adolescents (162 female, M_{age} = 15.5 years, SD = 1.86, age range from 13 to 18 years). We recruited participants from two State high schools in northern Italy. Students were excluded from subsequent analysis if they reported a diagnosis of psychological disabilities certified by the public mental health service and if they missed more than 15% of the items on the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Adolescent Full Form (TEIQue–AFF; Petrides, 2009).

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Trait EI

We used the Italian adaptation of the TEIQue–AFF to measure trait EI (Andrei, Mancini, Trombini, Baldaro, & Russo, 2014; Petrides, 2009). The TEIQue–AFF comprises 153 brief statements responded to on a 7-point scale, ranging from completely disagree to completely agree. The TEIQue-AFF (α = 0.83) comprises 4 factors: Well-Being (α = 0.82), Self-Control (α = 0.65), Emotionality (α = 0.71), Sociability (α = 0.72).

2.2.2. Peer nominations

We measured actual and perceived peer acceptance/rejection using a sociometric approach. Participants were asked to imagine that they were going to go on a school journey, and to indicate an unlimited number of classmates on each of four questions asking to nominate: (a) the peers they would like to take with them on the trip (peer acceptance); (b) those they would rather not take along (peer rejection); (c) those classmates who would accept them (perceived peer acceptance), and (d) those classmates who would reject them (perceived peer rejection).

2.2.3. Personality traits

The Big Five Questionnaire-2 (BFQ-2; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Vecchione, 2007) is a self-reported questionnaire comprising 134 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. It provides scores on the five personality trait of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional stability, and Openness. Cronbach's reliability coefficients for the BFQ-2 scales were: 0.82 for Extraversion, 0.85 for Agreeableness, 0.83 for Consciousness, 0.90 for Emotional stability, and 0.84 for Openness.

2.2.4. Non verbal cognitive ability

We used Raven's Standard Progressive Matrices (SPM; Raven, 2008) to measure non-verbal cognitive ability. It comprises 60 items presented in five sets of 12 each, and providing a global IQ score.

2.2.5. Scholastic performance

School offices provided first and second term grades in the core areas of high school curricula, namely Italian language-literacy and math. Because these two subjects reflect pupils' performance in writing, reading, and arithmetic abilities, they were thought to be highly representative of academic achievement. Grades ranged from 1 to 10 (excellent), with sufficiency being 6.

2.2.6. Recruitment and procedures

We obtained informed consent from parents/careers. All measures were administered collectively in classrooms at a time agreed upon with each institute, by specialized personnel, with respect for the ethical guidelines regarding privacy. A code number was assigned to each individual.

2.3. Statistical analyses

All statistical analyses were performed using PASW (SPSS version 21.0 for Windows). Bivariate correlations were used to explore the association among variables, while hierarchical multiple regression analyses were employed to predict scholastic achievement. Each model comprised individual difference predictors entered in separate steps to assess for their incremental