



Exploring the Relationship between EQ and Intermediate EFL Learners' Speaking Performance: A Gender Study

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Abstract

This study was an attempt to investigate the relationship between speaking proficiency of Iranian EFL learners and their Emotional Intelligence (EI) and gender. To this end, 40 students aged 16 to 19 from Avaye Zaban Institute in Tehran during the academic year of 2015-2016 took part in this study. The data was analyzed through SPSS (21), using descriptive statistics and analysis of the results of the Nelson English Language Test, Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory, and Farhady et al. speaking proficiency scales. The results of this study showed that there was a significant relationship between EI and the intermediate Iranian learners' speaking performance. Besides, a significant relationship was found between their EQ scores and the amount of their English language proficiency on fluency. Finding of the study also showed that there was a significant difference in problem solving, independence, self-actualization, optimism, and self-regard components of emotional intelligence. This indicates that the emotional capacity of male and female students has developed differently, and they have their own strengths and weaknesses when it comes to emotional intelligence.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence (EI), Gender Differences, Speaking Performances

INTRODUCTION

Emotional Intelligence (EI), a concept rooted in the theory of social intelligence, is the combination of factors which allows a person to feel, to be motivated, to regulate mood, to control impulse, to persist in the face of frustration, and thereby to succeed in day to day living also, EI is a different way of being smart (Goleman, 1995). In recent years, there has been a substantial amount of interest in individual differences among learners. They bring to the language learning situation a wide spectrum of individual differences that influence the learning rate and the ultimate learning results. It is worth mentioning that intelligence is often thought to be one of the most significant predictors of language learning Success.

Students who receive higher intelligence quotient (IQ) scores are usually considered more intelligent. Intelligence as a general concept encompasses social and emotional factors besides the cognitive factors. Goleman (1995) stresses that, IQ contributes about 20 percent to the factors that determine life success; the rest is related to other factors including EI. Emotional intelligence refers to the capacities to recognize and regulate emotions in ourselves and in others. EI can be as much powerful, and at times, more powerful than IQ in predicting success in various life challenges (Goleman, 1995).

By development of the concept of EQ, different issues and variables are attributed to it. Sternberg (1997) believes that academic achievement and intelligence are not measured only by academic scores, and we should consider people skills and attitudes. Sternberg researches on intelligence resulted into a new theory called "successful intelligence" and he (1997) believes that successful intelligent is required to achieve success in life and this theory is substantially broader than conventional theories of intelligence. It defines intelligence in terms of the ability to achieve one's goals in life. Conventional views of intelligence favor individuals who are strong in memory and analytical abilities, while to achieve success in life, practical and creativity abilities are important. Speaking is "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts" (Chaney, 1998, p. 13). Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information (Burns & Joyce, 1997). Speaking is a crucial part of second language learning and teaching.

Previous studies have been carried out to investigate the relations of affective factors including Emotional Intelligence of learners with distinctive areas of learning a foreign language. Most of the research which has been done till now in Iran about emotional intelligence and its relation with various skills of learning strategies, are about listening, reading and writing strategies. In comparing with other skills, quite a few studies have been conducted to explore the effects of emotional intelligence in speaking skill. This research was determined to compensate the failure and pay more attention to this field. Globalization has encouraged everybody to get the knowledge of English as a second language. English language then has become the international language for communication.

This paper specifically concerned on discovering the relationship between student Emotional Intelligence and their English speaking performance in intermediate EFL learner among gender. In addition, this study also tried to find out which dimensions of Emotional Intelligence such as Self-Awareness, Self-Control, Self-Motivation, Empathy and Social skills, can mostly predict students' English speaking ability. This study employed the theory of Emotional Intelligence of Goleman which defines EI as the way in which an individual processes information about emotion and emotional responses. Furthermore, oral presentation was administered to measure students' English speaking ability. The students were asked to deliver a speech in English language.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND NULL HYPOTHESES

- RQ1: Is there any significant relationship between emotional intelligence as a whole and speaking performance among intermediate EFL learners?
- RQ2: Is there any significant relationship between components of EI and speaking performance among intermediate EFL learners?
- RQ3: Is there any significant difference between EI and its components among intermediate EFL learners based on gender?
- RQ4: Is there any significant difference between females and males' performance on speaking among intermediate EFL learners?

And the following hypotheses were formulated:

H01: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence as a whole and speaking performance among intermediate EFL learners.

H02: There is no significant relationship between components of EI based on bar-On model and speaking performance among intermediate EFL learners.

H03: There is no significant difference between EI and its components among intermediate EFL learners based on gender.

H04: There is no significant difference between females and males' performance on speaking among intermediate EFL learners.

METHOD

Participants

Participants of this study were 40 (20 males and 20 females) EFL learners from Avayeh Zaban Institute, Tehran, Iran, who had been selected from early total of 60 (30 males and 30 females) students of two classes after taking the Nelson English Language Test as an English language proficiency test. The ages range for participants were between 16 and 19.

Instruments

Three different instruments were used to conduct this study. The Nelson English Language Test was the first instrument which was used as a tool for homogenizing participants of the study. This test was consisting of 40 separate tests for ten levels of language proficiency which range from beginner to the advanced. The levels were numbered from 0, 50, 100,..., to 500. Each test consisted of 50 items measuring the general level of English which forms the basis for all specific uses of language. In the present study a test in the intermediate level – level 250 – was used.

The second instrument was a speaking performance scale developed by Farhady (1995) was used by the instructor teaching the course of oral production of short stories. The same scale had been used by the researcher too. An interview was utilized for each class group to assess the EFL students' speaking ability in terms of the following components:

1. Accent
2. Structure
3. Vocabulary
4. Fluency
5. Comprehension

The third instrument was Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory which originally developed by Bar-On in 1980. The Emotional Quotient Inventory was used to measure the Emotional Intelligence of the participants. Bar-On inventory was a self-report questionnaire that includes 133 Likert-scale items. To conduct the present study a translated version of this questionnaire to Persian was used. Samouei (2005) and her colleagues translated this questionnaire to Persian and also omitted some of its items for the reasons such as lack of conformity with Iranian context, causing low Cronbach alpha, etc. and reduced the total number of the items to ninety. They also tested the reliability and validity of the adjusted version of the questionnaire. The reason for the use of this type of questionnaire was Dornyei's (2007) idea that "some personality test items ... follow a true-false rating to ensure reliability in domains where the respondent may not be able to properly evaluate the degree to which a particular feature was present/true or not" (p. 106).

Design

The overall design of this study was correlational. Since the aim of this study was to determine if there is any significant relationship between emotional intelligence and foreign language speaking performance of intermediate EFL learners, a self-report instrument was administered to male and female learners in a regular class session.

RESULTS

The Distribution of the Initial Participants Language Proficiency as Table 1 showed, the mean of 60 initial participants Nelson English Language Test was 35.53 with standard deviation of 9.477.

Table1. Descriptive Statistics for the Distribution of the Initial Participants' Language Proficiency

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Nelson	60	17	50	35.53	9.477

Those students whose scores in Nelson English Language Test were between one standard deviation minus and plus the mean have been selected as the participants of the main study and others have been excluded. It means that 40 students whose scores were between 27 and 45 have been selected.

Since the scores of speaking skills of participants were given by two raters, estimating the inter-rater reliability was necessary to determine whether or not their given scores are reliable. Table 2 shows correlations between the scores of the raters in relation to pronunciation, vocabulary, structure, fluency and comprehensibility which are

significant at levels below .05. However, this level of significance is reduced to .08 regarding ratings on participants' achievements on vocabulary, which, obviously, means that in all cases, except one, the raters were in agreement over the achievements of the participants.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Test for Inter- Rater Reliability

	Comprehensibility	Fluency	Vocabulary	Structure	Pronunciation
Pearson Correlation	0.495	0.499	0.399	0.726	0.563
Sig. (2 -tailed)	0.027	0.025	0.081	0.000	0.010

The Distribution of the Participants' Emotional Intelligence and Speaking Fluency, Accuracy, and Complexity Scores

Tables 3 and 4 present the results of the participant emotional intelligence and the fluency, accuracy, and complexity of student oral performance, respectively. These tables indicate descriptive statistics such as number of participants, minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation of their scores.

Table 3. The Results of the Participants' Emotional Intelligence

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
EQ	39	311	423	375.45	25.511
Intrapersonal	39	119	143	133.50	6.039
Interpersonal	39	71	86	80.11	3.645
Adaptability	39	71	77	74.42	1.687
Stress management	39	43	51	46.89	2.178
General mood	39	50	59	55.39	2.422

Table 4. The Results of the Participants' Oral Task Fluency, Accuracy, and Complexity

	N	Min	Max	Mean	S.D
Fluency	39	.5512	.5999	.579	.0132
Accuracy	39	.6172	.7199	.666	.0308
Complexity	39	2.6440	2.7348	2.696	.0256

The Results Regarding the First Research Hypothesis

Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to find answer for the first research question of the study. The correlation between participants' emotional intelligence as a whole factor and their fluency, accuracy, and complexity in performing oral tasks was calculated. Table 5 presents the results of this analysis:

Table 5. The Relationship between EI and Oral Task Fluency, Accuracy, and Complexity

		Fluency	Accuracy	Complexity
EQ	Pearson Correlation	-.156	-.058	.421**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.351	.727	.008

It is observed from the Table 5 that emotional intelligence as a whole factor does not have a significant relationship with Fluency ($p=0.351>0.05$) and Accuracy ($p=0.727>0.05$) of the oral performance. But, there is a moderate positive correlation between emotional intelligence as a whole factor and oral performance complexity ($p=0.008<0.01$). This finding is in agreement with the findings of Khooei (2011) concerning the effect of emotional intelligence and its relation to oral task and fluency, accuracy, and complexity among Iranian EFL learners speaking skills.

The Results Regarding the Second Research Hypothesis

To determine whether there is any significant relationship between each component of emotional intelligence and fluency, accuracy, and complexity of oral performance among Iranian EFL learners, Pearson correlation analysis has been conducted whose results are presented in the Table 6:

Table 6. The Relationship between EI Components and Oral Task Fluency, Accuracy, and Complexity

		Fluency	Accuracy	Complexity
Intrapersonal	Pearson Correlation	-.075	-.006	.369*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.654	.973	.023
Interpersonal	Pearson Correlation	.988**	.347*	-.272
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.033	.099
Adaptability	Pearson Correlation	-.072	-.005	.372*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.670	.975	.022
Stress Management	Pearson Correlation	.339*	.988**	.034
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.037	.000	.841
General Mood	Pearson Correlation	-.079	-.006	.361*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.635	.971	.026

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

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

From the statistical analysis of the second research question it became clear that among five dimensions of emotional intelligence interpersonal and stress management components were correlated with fluency and accuracy of oral performance and intrapersonal, adaptability, and general mood components had a significant relationship with complexity of speaking. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Kassaian, Koosha and Ketabi (2011). In their study concerning the effect of oral summery of short stories on male/female learners' speaking proficiency, significant relationship was found between EQ components and the speaking skills.

The Results Regarding the Third Research Hypothesis

About the third question of the researcher whether there are any significant differences between emotional intelligence and its components among intermediate EFL learners based on gender, an independent samples t-test was performed to examine the difference between males' and females' emotional intelligence. The results reported in Table 7 indicate that there is a significant difference in problem solving, independence, self-

actualization, optimism, and self-regard components of emotional intelligence. This indicates that the emotional capacity of male and female students has been developed differently, and they have their own strengths and weaknesses when it comes to emotional intelligence.

Men and women have different kinds of Emotional Intelligence, high EQ for both sexes is key factor to learning success. Both men and women have emotional intelligence, according to EQ test developers MHS, but each gender has a significantly different Emotional Intelligence profile. Women have much stronger interpersonal skills than their male counterparts but men have significantly higher sense of self and independence. This means that women are much more aware of their own feelings as well as those of others and relate much better interpersonally than do men. Men however score more highly on self-regard and independence than women and also do better on dealing with events that are immediately stressful.

These findings have important implications in their performances. In the past men have dominated the top positions, partly because of their stress tolerance and independence, but people skills are now becoming more important as a culture of team working and partnerships takes effect. Women's higher scores in the interpersonal areas will now help them reach higher levels in the corporate world. This is especially true if they also develop high stress tolerance. Men need to develop their empathy to balance their strong independence scores.

Table 7. Comparing the EI Components of Male and Female intermediate learners

EQ components	Sex	N	Mean	SD	t	df
Sig (2-tailed)						
Problem Solving 0.01	Male Female	119 98	72.54 76.32	11.57 10.68	-2.47	215
Happiness 0.37	Male Female	119 98	79.43 81.22	15.15 14.37	-0.88	215
Independence 0.05	Male Female	119 98	58.09 62.00	15.27 13.56	-1.97	215
Stress Tolerance 0.17	Male Female	119 98	70.67 73.09	13.18 12.94	-1.35	215
Self – Actualization 0.01	Male Female	119 98	74.56 78.77	12.82 11.16	-2.54	215
Emotional Self-Awareness 0.20	Male Female	119 98	68.43 70.68	13.14 12.98	-1.26	215
Reality Testing 0.23	Male Female	119 98	61.87 63.91	12.85 12.20	-1.18	215
Interpersonal Relationship 0.83	Male Female	119 98	78.48 78.87	13.34 14.22	-0.20	215
Optimism 0.00	Male Female	119 98	70.89 75.47	11.97 12.48	-2.75	215
Self-Regard 0.02	Male Female	119 98	74.31 78.74	13.51 14.95	-2.28	215

Impulse Control 0.72	Male	119	58.45	18.42	-0.35	215
	Female	98	59.31	17.46		
Flexibility 0.38	Male	119	60.95	11.13	-0.87	215
	Female	98	62.27	11.12		
Social Responsibility 0.88	Male	119	87.84	9.38	-0.14	215
	Female	98	88.02	9.21		
Empathy 0.22	Male	119	83.08	9.64	1.20	215
	Female	98	81.42	10.46		
Assertiveness 0.70	Male	119	63.27	13.72	-0.38	215
	Female	98	63.97	13.28		

The Results Regarding the Forth Research Hypothesis

The forth hypothesis sought to determine whether or not there was a differences between gender and speaking skills. More specifically the hypothesis was: There is no significant difference between gender and speaking skills among EFL learners. Regarding this hypothesis as statistics in the multivariate tests (Table 8) clearly show there is no meaningful associations between these two factors. As results show there is also no significant difference at the 0.05 level of significant. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Gorjian, Moosavian and Shahramiri (2011). In their study concerning the effect of oral summary of short stories on male/female learners' speaking proficiency, no significant relationship was found between gender and the speaking skills.

The findings also show that it is safe to conclude that that there is a significant relationship between EQ and fluency; however, the other components of oral production do not meet the requirements of being statistically significant. In accordance with previous studies, this study shows females' spoken language to be more advanced than the spoken language of males. The present study is particularly notable; however, because it identifies differences in syntactic development among adolescents, a population rarely studied by language development researchers. It now follows to discuss particular factors that may play a contributing role to such differences in language between males and females.

Table 8. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	dependent variable	Type3 sum of squares	df	Mean square	f	Sig
Corrected model	pronunciation	1.000a	5	.200	.404	.838
	Structure	.957b	5	.191	.168	.970
	Vocabulary	.640c	5	.128	.220	.948
	Fluency	8.715d	5	1.743	3.630	.026
	comprehensibility	2.749e	5	.550	.554	.733
Intercept	pronunciation	101.869	1	101.869	205.573	.000
	Structure	141.411	1	141.411	123.788	.000
	Vocabulary	122.508	1	122.508	210.193	.000
	Fluency	118.120	1	118.120	246.001	.000
	comprehensibility	156.133	1	156.133	157.382	.000
Gender	pronunciation	.460	1	.460	.927	.352

	Structure	.094	1	.094	.083	.778
	Vocabulary	.204	1	.204	.350	.563
	Fluency	.131	1	.131	.272	.610
	comprehensibility	.314	1	.314	.317	.583
EQ	pronunciation	.697	3	.232	.469	.709
	Structure	.341	3	.114	.100	.959
	Vocabulary	.329	3	.110	.188	.903
	Fluency	.157	3	1.725	3.593	.041
	comprehensibility	.507	3	.169	.170	.915
Gender EQ	pronunciation	.389	1	.389	.785	.391
	Structure	.094	1	.094	.083	.778
	Vocabulary	.040	1	.040	.068	.798
	Fluency	2.531	1	2.531	5.271	.038
	comprehensibility	.314	1	.314	.317	.553
Error	pronunciation	6.938	14	.196		
	Structure	15.995	14	1.192		
	Vocabulary	8.160	14	.583		
	Fluency	6.722	14	.980		
	comprehensibility	13.889	14	.992		
Total	pronunciation	270.750	20			
	Structure	343.000	20			
	Vocabulary	313.000	20			
	Fluency	273.250	20			
	comprehensibility	390.750	20			
Corrected Total	pronunciation	7.937	19			
	Structure	16.950	19			
	Vocabulary	8.800	19			
	Fluency	15.437	19			
	comprehensibility	16.638	19			

a. R Squared = .126 (Adjusted R Squared = -.186)

b. R Squared = .056 (Adjusted R Squared = -.281)

c. R Squared = .073 (Adjusted R Squared = -.258)

d. R Squared = .565 (Adjusted R Squared = .409)

e. R Squared = .165 (Adjusted R Squared = -.133)

DISCUSSION

The newly developed theory of emotional intelligence that its initial appearance in academic articles goes back to the 1990s has entered the stage that can take hands of those who are particularly engaged the learning and teaching processes. The concept had attracted considerable popular attention, and powerful claims were made regarding its importance for predicting success. Research has shown that emotional intelligence can be developed through a systematic and consistent approach to building competence in personal and social awareness, self-management, and social skill (Cavallo & Brienza, 2001). Research findings also indicate that personal factors and emotional intelligence are important to student achievement and college success. More recently, scholars have argued that using emotional intelligence as a whole factor to investigate one's foreign language learning process will be of benefit to those who are on the front line of education.

Although several studies are conducted to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and different aspects of foreign language learning, as far as the researcher knows, there is little or no research on addressing the relationship between components of emotional intelligence and different aspects of speaking skill. Therefore, one to one comparison of the findings of this study with others would not be possible and the researcher is to be content with available studies. Results of the study are, to some extent, in line with the findings of Pishghadam (2009). He indicated that emotional intelligence as a whole factor and intrapersonal, interpersonal, and general mood components are significantly related to speaking ability of the students and rejected the existence of statistically significant relationship between stress management and adaptability components and speaking skill. Mohammadi (2012) investigated the role of emotional intelligence on English learning as a foreign language and found that emotional intelligence as a whole factor and intrapersonal, interpersonal, adaptability, and stress management components were correlated with English language learning and general mood component failed to have this relationship. Therefore, the findings of the present study somehow confirm her results.

In this paper, an attempt was made to see whether there is any significant relation and difference between male and female learners in their language learning strategies or not. Despite the limited scope of the study (Iranian EFL learners), it seems that male and female learners differ in the language learning strategies. The findings of the relationship between gender and strategy use in the present study was consistent with former studies such as Green and Oxford, (1995), Mohamed Amin, (2000), Mohd Nazali, (1999), and Punithavalli, (2003) in which female learners tended to use social/affective strategy more frequently than male learners. Green and Oxford (1995) concluded that the effect of the use of LLS that are attributed to gender difference may originate from biological and socialization related causes. A close examination of the results of this study reveals that Iranian EFL learners use social/affective strategy more than other language learning strategies. The high use of social/affective strategies among Iranians is almost similar to that observed among learners from Asian countries like Japan, China, Korea and Taiwan as reported in some of the studies on Asian students (e.g., Oxford, 1990). As suggested by Oxford (1989), the gender difference may have been associated with women's greater social orientation, stronger verbal skills, and greater conformity to norms, both linguistic and academic. Evidence from this study also supports the conclusion of second language acquisition studies that females are better than males both in second and first language acquisition (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Slavin, 1988). Female learners also reported a greater use of social/affective strategies than male learners. One explanation for this finding might relate to the theories of psychology which mention that sensitivity, empathy, nurturance and emotion are strong female traits, whereas aggression, dominance, assertiveness and emotional in expressiveness are male traits (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Therefore, these psychological traits of males and females may influence LLS use. The present study verified that gender has been a rudimentary predictor in the fields of education, psychology, and linguistics research. The fact that male more than female students used social affective strategies goes against

Politzer's (1983) findings, which revealed that these strategies were used by the girls more than the boys.

CONCLUSION

In this research the effect of emotional intelligence and gender on speaking proficiency was investigated. One of the first conclusions that can be reached from the results is that there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and participants speaking scores. Even if emotional intelligence and speaking skills are not tightly associated, it does not mean that emotional intelligence has no role in speaking. It may be playing an important role in indirect ways. According to Goleman (1995) emotional intelligence is an important factor in success. Furthermore, the second result of this study demonstrated that there was no significant difference between male and female of students. So, there is no relationship between gender and participants' scores. As the results of the statistical analysis revealed, that emotional intelligence as a whole factor does not have a significant relationship with Fluency and Accuracy of the oral performance. But, there is a moderate positive correlation between emotional intelligence as a whole factor and oral performance complexity. In this study 40 language learners who possessed a higher level of emotional intelligence were more aware of the appropriate conventions of the target language features than language learners who possessed a lower level of emotional intelligence. The significant role of emotional intelligence in determining the level of oral language performance features, as proved in the current study, suggests that language learner emotional intelligence should be invoked through incorporation of emotion-driven authentic native English stories and videos (Shakib & Barani, 2011; Bora, 2012; Abdolrezapour, 2012; Zarezadeh, 2013). This not only can be served as a language practice but also can provide exposure to authentic emotional aspect of the target language.

From the statistical analysis of the second research question it became clear that among five dimensions of emotional intelligence, interpersonal and stress management components were correlated with fluency and accuracy of oral performance and intrapersonal, adaptability, and general mood components had a significant relationship with complexity of speaking. Considering the nature of English language classes in EFL contexts, the existence of a relationship between second language speaking and emotional intelligence is expected. Krashen (1981) believes that speaking a second language appears to be difficult, challenging, and stressful for the learners, especially for adults who have to speak a language other than their mother tongue and it may lead to making lots of mistakes and facing problems.

According to Gardner (1993), language is a means of communication which transfers the speaker ideas through different channels, including words, pictures, etc. to the audience. Communication includes linguistic factors, intrapersonal mechanisms, and interpersonal skills. This idea inspired the researcher to conduct the study of the relationship between emotional intelligence and speaking fluency, accuracy, and complexity. The results of this study also showed that there existed a significant relationship between the total amount of EI and the performance of speaking strategies used by Iranian EFL learners. Besides, a

relationship was found between their EQ scores and the amount of their English language proficiency on fluency.

Finding of the study showed that there is a significant difference in problem solving, independence, self-actualization, optimism, and self-regard components of emotional intelligence. This indicates that the emotional capacity of male and female students has been developed differently, and they have their own strengths and weaknesses when it comes to emotional intelligence.

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