The Relationship Between EFL Instructors' Emotional Intelligence and Learners' Academic Achievement

Roghayeh Pourbahram
Morteza Hajizadeh

To cite this article:

Pourbahram, R., & Hajizadeh, M. (2018). The relationship between EFL instructors' emotional intelligence and learners' academic achievement. *Language Teaching and Educational Research (LATER), 1*(1), 42-51.

View the journal website ⌂

Submit your article to *LATER* ⤷

Contact editor ✉

Research Article

The relationship between EFL instructors' emotional intelligence and learners' academic achievement

Roghayeh Pourbahram[1]
Lecturer, Azarabadeghan University, Urmia, IRAN
Morteza Hajizadeh[2]
Instructor, The Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research, Urmia, IRAN

Abstract

With the growing interest in studying people's emotional information to guide thinking and behavior, the present study aimed at examining the emotional intelligence of EFL instructors and to find possible relations of instructors' emotional intelligence and their corresponding students' academic achievement. To this end, 20 EFL instructors were randomly selected from an Iranian language center (Academic Center for Education, Culture, and Research) and were asked to fill in the Bar-On EQ questionnaire, to be able to measure their emotional intelligence. In addition, 515 EFL students also participated in the study and their final exam score was used as an indication of their achievement level. SPSS (Statistical Package for Social sciences, version 21) was utilized to analyze the data and Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to determine if a relationship could be proven between the two variables. Conclusions and pedagogical implications are discussed at the end.

---

[1] Corresponding Author (✉ r.pourbahram@gmail.com)

İngilizce öğretmenlerinin duygusal zekâ durumları ile öğrencilerin akademik başarıları arasındaki ilişkinin incelenmesi

Öz

İnsanların duygusal durumlarının düşünce ve davranışlarını yönlendirmesi ile ilgili çalışmalar artış göstermektedir. Bu çalışma, İngilizce öğretmenlerinin duygusal zekâ durumları ile öğrencilerinin akademik başarıları arasındaki potansiyel ilişkiyi incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla, İran Dil Merkezi'nden (Akademik Eğitim, Kültür ve Araştırma Merkezi) 20 İngilizce öğretmeni rastgele seçilmiş ve duygusal zekâ durumlarını ölçebilmek için Bar-On-EQ anketini doldurmaları istenmiştir. Buna ek olarak, 515 İngilizce öğrencisi de çalışmaya katılmış ve final sınavı notları başarı seviyelerinin göstergesi olarak değerlendirmeye alınmıştır. Verilerin analizde SPSS (Sosyal Bilimler İstatistik Paketi) programından faydalanılmış olup iki değişkenin arasında ilişki olup olmadığını belirleyebilmek amacıyla Pearson Korelasyon kullanılmıştır. Sonuçlar ve pedagojik çıkarımlar tartışılmıştır.

Introduction

Having past the post-method era in language teaching, and finding that there is no unique method in teaching English as a Foreign language (TEFL) that can bring about perfect results for all language learners, and that a combination of methods and activities are needed to get the desired results in classes, the field has entered a new realm, exploring the affective domains that influence language learning in classroom context. According to Fiske (2000), there are two main factors, influencing students' academic achievement: contextual factors (including socio-economic level of the community and the educational attainment of parents) and school-related factors (including length of school year, homework policies, availability of textbooks and teacher qualifications). Meanwhile, researchers "*hunt for the magic bullet* that enables instructors to measure student needs and make relevant connections, in order to better encourage and teach their students within the classrooms" (Rust, 2015, p. 2). At the same time, research has highlighted the importance of teachers and their effective teaching in students' learning (Block, Crochet, Jones & Papa 2012). Regarding educational success, lots of attention has been attracted to the connection between educational success and emotional and social competency by Goleman (1995), who suggested that "emotional intelligence is more important than IQ (Intelligent Quotient) in predicting success in life, including academic success" (Stough, Saklofske & Parker, 2009, p. 239). The meaning of emotional intelligence has developed during the previous years, by the amount of research projects and studies carried out on the topic. The most famous known scholars of the field include Peter Salovey, John D. Mayer, Daniel Goleman and Reuven Bar-On who have provided us with different definitions and domains of emotional intelligence, with their work originating from ideas of Edward Thorndike and Howard Gardner (1983).

After Howard Gardner (1983) who talked about multiple intelligences, the concept of emotional intelligence was mentioned by Salovey and Mayer (1990). The theory of multiple intelligences of Howard Gardner was not limited to one linguistic capacity. Gardner suggested that people possess different kinds of intelligences. In order to capture full range of abilities that people have, he suggested eight types of intelligence including: visual-spatial intelligence, linguistic-verbal intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence and natural intelligence. Afterwards, in 1995, Goleman declared that people should develop emotional intelligence in order to overcome challenges in life. Goleman (1995) and Cooper (1996) mixed the ability to understand and process emotion with other parts of the personality in order to extend the meaning of emotional intelligence. Goleman (1995) classified five domains of EQ (Emotional Quotient): 1) knowing one's emotion, 2) managing emotion, 3) motivating oneself, 4) recognizing emotions in others, and 5) handling relationships. According to Goleman (1995), a person with high EI (Emotional Intelligence) should become happier, motivated, outgoing and optimistic. Similarly, Cooper (1996) identified five general attributes to EI in a measure called EQ-Map.

According to Mayer and Salovey (1997), emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive precisely, evaluate, and express emotion, the ability to access and/or engender feelings when they assist thought, the ability to comprehend emotion and emotional knowledge and the ability to adjust emotions to stimulate emotional and intellectual growth. Bar-on (2007)

also believes that people who are emotionally and socially intelligent can better understand and express themselves, and can understand and communicate well to others, while they can also manage the demands of daily life more successfully. Serrat (2009) considers emotional intelligence as one of the important factors in human resources in terms of "planning, job profiling, recruitment interviewing and selection, management development, customer relations and customer service, and even more" (p. 50).

In the last decades, there has been much attention to the effect of emotional intelligence on academic success (Elias, Arnold & Hussey, 2003; Saeidi & Nikou, 2012). Considering that emotional intelligence serves both internal mechanisms and external ones in the process of language learning (Goleman, 2001), many research projects studied EFL learners' emotional intelligence and its effect on their learning achievement (e.g., Motallebzadeh, 2009; Zarezadeh, 2013). However, rarely did the studies consider the emotional intelligence of the instructors. As it is clear, one of the important factors in improving education is enhancing the efficiency of teachers (Wright, Hom & Sanders, 1997). Few studies (Frost & Harris, 2003; Gu & Day, 2007) report the influence of higher emotional intelligence level of teachers in their performance and students' motivation. The importance of teachers become more outstanding when we consider Hamre and Pianta's (2006) statement that if instructors are sensitive to students' needs and therefore offer regular and consistent positive feedback, then students with major behavior problems in their first few years of education, will be less likely to have problems later in school. In addition, Rust (2014) cites Whitfield and Klug (2004) who consider teachers as healers in the classroom and emphasize that schools must employ those teachers that can improve success for all students. Though the critical role of teachers has already been emphasized in EFL contexts, enough attention has not yet been paid to teachers and teacher education courses (Brown, 2001). As Akbari and Tavassoli (2011) believe, more research is needed on teachers' characteristics and the challenges they face. On the other hand, studies in recent years, have pinpointed the importance of emotional intelligence in identifying employees with affective skills who are able to motivate others (Othman, Abdullah & Ahmad, 2008). Therefore, considering the importance of the role that teachers play in learners' motivation and achievement, this study aimed to measure EFL teachers' emotional intelligence and to examine its possible effect on learners' academic achievement. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research question:

Is there a relationship between the measured emotional intelligence of EFL instructors and academic achievement of true language beginners?

The answer to this question will be of high importance because it aims to determine whether the students of teachers with different emotional intelligence score differ in their academic achievement. The current body of research does not provide us with many findings on this issue. Therefore, the findings of the study will assist school managers and principals in better selection of effective teachers and teacher educators in focusing on influencing factors in terms of success in language classrooms.

Methodology

Participants

Twenty EFL teachers from a language center in Iran were chosen randomly from among 100 existing teachers in the center to participate in the current study. 515 EFL learners

who were taught by the corresponding teachers, and were all beginners in learning the language, were studied in this paper as well. The whole population of the beginners in this language center were above 1000 students.

Instruments

An emotional intelligence questionnaire (Bar-On 1997), non-participant observation of classes, and students' final exam results were the main data collection tools of the study. The questionnaire which is also called emotional quotient inventory (EQ-I) is a self-report measure of emotionally and socially intelligent behavior and is composed of 125 items, considering the evaluation and expression of emotions in oneself and others, the regulation of emotion and use of emotions in solving problems (Bar-On, 1997). EQ-I scales include Intrapersonal (self-regard, emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, independence, & self-actualization), Interpersonal skills (Empathy, Social responsibility, interpersonal relationships), Stress Management (stress tolerance, Impulse control), Adaptability (reality-testing, flexibility, problem-solving) and General Mood (Optimism & happiness) (Bar-On, 2014). The questionnaire has five-response Likert Scale. The participating instructors were asked to attribute the number between 1 to 5 that best describes them. Responses were scored using a five-point Likert type scale: 1) very seldom true of myself, 2) seldom true of me, 3) sometimes true of me, 4) often true of me, 5) true of me. Scale scores were determined by summing the items and taking an average for each teacher. There were several items that had to be reverse scaled (R). For reverse-scaled items, 1 = 5, 2 = 4, 3 = 3, 4 = 2, and 5 = 1. Samouei (2003) piloted the test against its reliability and validity in Iran. Based on Samouei's study (2003), the test has reliability and validity in Iranian culture and Cronbach's alpha was reported to be 0.93.

Non-participant observation of the classes was another tool to check the teaching methods, syllabus and teaching materials in the classrooms. Non-participant observation is an instrument in which the researcher observes participants without actively participating in the activities being done. It is used to understand a phenomenon, by entering the system and still staying separate from all the activities being performed in the system.

Finally, the students' achievement was judged based on their final exam scores. All the participants were chosen from one of the language centers of ACECR (Academic Center for Education, Culture, and Research) and were at the same level of language proficiency (true-beginners, they had no prior knowledge of the language before entering the course) and passed the course under the same curriculum, and attended the final exam session together. The final exam questions were prepared by ACECR committee, were checked against reliability, and all students of one level had the exam at the same time and under the same conditions. Therefore, considering the mentioned reasons, their final exam scores seem to be an appropriate criterion to compare their achievement. The ACECR which is the Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research in Iran, engages in research and developmental projects in different fields of study and has more than 3000 full time research and academic staff, with post graduate students contributing to the research projects on a part-time basis. As both of the authors are teaching language courses at this center, the data were specially gathered from one of the language centers of ACECR.

Procedure

All the teachers in this language center (N=100) were asked to fill in the emotional intelligence questionnaire during the semester. Then 20 questionnaires belonging to the teachers who taught for true-beginners (7-10 years old) were randomly selected to be checked for the study. One of the authors regularly observed the classes (non-participant observation) and through a checklist made sure that all the classes followed standard methodology and material. As the syllabus and the materials are planned by ACECR supervisor and committee before the beginning of the semesters and all teachers attend TTC (Teacher Training courses) before entering the language center, it can be concluded that the teaching methodology, syllabus, and teaching materials were standard in all the classes.

Finally, after 19 sessions of instruction (from 08 July to 13 September 2017, two sessions each week), the learners in beginner level (N= 515) were asked to take the final exam at a specific time and under the same conditions. The researchers attended the exam session also to make sure that all learners got the same instruction and guidance during answering the exam questions.

Results

To analyse the collected data of the study, SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) was used. Descriptive data and results of the Pearson correlation coefficient analysis are revealed in the following tables.

Table 1 demonstrates the collected data. Each row of the table belongs to one of the teachers who participated in the study. The number of students and the average mean score of students' achievement are also reported in the table. The scores are reported out of 35, which is the final score of learners at ACECR. The last column of the table reports the teachers' score on the emotional intelligence inventory.

Table 1. Collected data of the study

No	Teacher name	Number of students	Mean achievement score of students	Questionnaire score
1	Teacher A	77	30.55	460
2	Teacher B	21	31.07	406
3	Teacher C	14	33.57	439
4	Teacher D	38	30.5	484
5	Teacher E	37	29.30	483
6	Teacher F	19	26.52	456
7	Teacher G	19	31.81	458
8	Teacher H	18	30.61	452
9	Teacher I	20	30.92	442
10	Teacher J	27	33.1	474
11	Teacher K	20	31.37	411
12	Teacher L	19	30.78	494
13	Teacher M	9	33.5	437
14	Teacher N	59	31.61	393
15	Teacher O	13	33.34	419
16	Teacher P	21	25.57	522

17	Teacher Q	20	31.10	455
18	Teacher R	29	28.97	527
19	Teacher S	14	33.03	369
20	Teacher T	21	31.33	462

Having gathered the data, normality of the distribution is checked by Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Table 2 shows significance value>0.005, that is, the distribution is normal and therefore Pearson correlation coefficient is used to compare the two variables.

Table 2. One-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

		Ns	Ms	Qs
N		20	20	20
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean	25.750	29.550	452.150
	Std. Deviation	16.3896	6.5979	40.2182
Most Extreme	Absolute	.314	.315	.103
Differences	Positive	.314	.271	.103
	Negative	-.168	-.315	-.103
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.209	1.209	.462
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.061	.062	.983
a. Test distribution is Normal.				
b. Calculated from data.				

To answer the research question, Pearson correlational coefficient was run to examine the relationship between EFL teachers' emotional intelligence and their students' academic achievement. According to the output table below (Table 3), as it is seen in the first row of the table [1], the Pearson Correlation Coefficient is 0.009, (which can vary between 1 and -1). The amount shows that there is nearly no correlation between the two variables. In addition, the obtained p-value here is 0.0969, which is higher than 0.05, thereby indicating no significant relationship between the two variables.

Table 3. Pearson correlation coefficient

		Average class	Questionnaire score
Average class	Pearson Correlation	1	.009
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.969
	N	20	20

Questionnaire score	Pearson Correlation	.009	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.969	
	N	20	20

Discussion

Education has reached a stage where experts wait for findings of the research to help them decide about the characteristics of successful teachers and how these qualities correlate with students' learning. Studying the relationship between language instructors' emotional intelligence and corresponding learners' academic achievement is a new one. Outside of the home environment, classroom teachers are reported (Darling, 1997) to have the most influential effect on learners' achievement. Considering the changes in teacher education courses worldwide and the significant importance of teachers in all academic plans and the importance that principals and managers give to hiring efficient and successful teachers, the study aimed at measuring the relationship between an emotional characteristic of teachers and students' academic achievement. Emotional intelligence, as a construct, with its five subcategories has the ability to predict the successful relationship between teachers and students, in other words, teachers with higher levels of emotional intelligence are predicted to better have the capability to interact with students and colleagues, and this ability of instructors leads to better academic achievement of their students. In a study by Mahmoodi and Ghaslani (2013), the researchers concluded that increasing EFL teachers' emotional intelligence, which has a reducing effect on their burnout can lead to increasing teachers' professional motivation and development and consequently improvement of learners' achievement. The analysis of the collected data in this study, however, represented a very weak and insignificant relationship between teachers' emotional intelligence and EFL learners' academic achievement. In a study by Allen (2014), also there seemed to be a teacher with a high total EQ but the lowest student achievement scores, which seems to defeat a possible relationship between instructors' emotional intelligence and learners' achievement, supporting the findings of the current study.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Certainly, additional studies are needed to determine the possible correlation of different subscales of teachers' emotional intelligence and students' learning. Regardless of teachers' score in emotional intelligence inventory, and as it is proved that raising teacher's quality is in fact a key instrument in improving students' achievement (Rockoff, 2004), improving teachers' emotional intelligence can be of significance in future years. It is worth citing Goleman (1995) who states that emotional intelligence can be studied and expanded as well. Thus, teachers can work and improve their emotional intelligence, which could provide useful information in students' learning in further studies.

Considering the limitations of this study, such as the restricted number of teachers (N=20), and the age range of learners (7-10), different conditions in each class, such as the number of students, different time of the day and educational space, it is recommended to

replicate the study with larger population and controlling the environmental variables to better generalize the findings. The study did not take into account teachers' years of experience either, which can be a variable in this topic. As Mahmoodi and Ghaslani (2013) found, experienced teachers have higher levels of emotional intelligence and feel more competent in their profession, therefore, considering instructors' years of experience can be of importance in future studies as well.

More research is recommended to make sure of the effect of teachers' years of experience, their personal demographics and trainings on the level of emotional intelligence. It is worth considering different subscales of the emotional intelligence and studying their relationships with students' achievement one by one. On the other hand, students' achievement is influenced by many other variables such as their own styles and strategies of learning. According to literature, besides a quantitative approach, a qualitative approach is also suggested to better describe teachers' emotional intelligence. The emotional intelligence inventory reflects perceptions rather than objective measurement. Therefore, it is also suggested to re-conduct the study using various data collection tools besides the emotional intelligence inventory that can more efficiently and objectively assess instructors' emotional intelligence. Considering the criticism surrounding current measures of emotional intelligence, devising more efficient tools to measure the aforementioned construct is recommended as well. Another area of interest could be to determine the extent to which emotional intelligence can be enhanced and learned by instruction.

References

Akbari, R., & Tavassoli, K. (2011). Teacher efficacy, burnout, teaching style, and emotional intelligence: Possible relationships and differences. *Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics (IJAL)*, *14*(2), 31-61.

Bar On, R. (2014). The Bar-ON model of emotional–social intelligence. *Psicothema*, *18*.

Block, E., Crochet, F., Jones, L., & Papa, T. (2012). The importance of teachers' effectiveness. *Creative Education, 3*, 1164-1172.

Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy (*2nd Ed.)*. New York: Longman.

Cooper, R. (1996). *EQ-Map interpretation guide.* San Francisco: Essi Systems.

Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). Doing what matters most: Investing in quality teaching. New York: National Commission on Teaching & America's Future.

Elias, M., Arnold, H., & Hussey, C. (2003). *EQ+IQ= Best leadership practices for caring and successful school.* CA: Thousand Oaks.

Fiske, E. B. (2000). *Assessing learning achievement.* International Consultative Forum on Education for All.

Frost, D., & Harris, A. (2003). Teacher leadership: Towards a research agenda. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 33* (3), 479-498.

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences.* NY: Basics.

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence.* NY: Bantam Books.

Goleman, D. (2001). Emotional intelligence: Issues in paradigm building. In C. Cherness, & D. Goleman (Eds.), *The Emotionality intelligent workplace* (pp. 13-26). San Francisco: Jossey- Bass.

Gu, Q., & Day, C. (2007). Teachers resilience. A necessary condition for effectiveness. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 23* (8), 1302-1316.

Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2006). Student-teacher relationships. In: Bear G.G., Minke K.M., editors. *Children's needs III: Development, prevention, and intervention.* Washington, DC: Natl. Assoc. School Psychology; pp. 59–71.

Mayer, J. D., & Salovey, P. (1997). What is emotional intelligence? In P. Salovey & D. Sluyter (Eds.), *Emotional development and emotional intelligence: Educational implications* (pp. 3-31). New York: Basic Books.

Mahmoodi, M. H., & Ghaslani, R. (2013). Relationship among Iranian teachers' emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and burnout. *Iranian Journal of Applied Language Studies*, *6*(1), 89-116.

Motallebzadeh, K. (2009). The relationship between the emotional intelligence of Iranian EFL learners and their reading comprehension and structural ability. *Journal of Teaching English as a Foreign Language and Literature*, *1*(4), 39-55.

Othman, A. K., Abdullah, H. S., & Ahmad, J. (2008). Emotional intelligence, emotional labor and work effectiveness in service organizations: a proposal model. *Vision the Journal of Business Perspective, 12* (1), 31-42.

Rockoff, J. E. (2004). The impact of individual teachers on student achievement: Evidence from panel data. *AEA Papers and Proceedings.* 247-252.

Rust, D. A. (2014). *Relationship between the emotional intelligence of teachers and student academic achievement* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Kentucky.

Saeidi, M., & Rimani Nikou, F. (2012). EFL teachers' emotional intelligence and their students' language achievement. *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Linguistics, 6*(12).

Samouei, R. (2003). Azmoune houshe hayajani (Bar-On's EQ-i). Tehran: Moasseseye Tahghighate Olume Raftarie Sina.

Serrat, O. (2009). Understanding and developing emotional intelligence. *Knowledge Solutions, 49.* Retrieved December 15, 2017, from http://www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/understanding-developing-emotional-intelligence.pdf

Stough, C., Saklofske, D. H., & Parker, J. D. A. (Eds.) (2009). *Assessing emotional intelligence: Theory, research, and applications*. NY: Springer.

Whitfield, P. T., & Klug, B. J. (2004). Teachers as healers: 21st-century possibility? Or necessity. *Multicultural Perspectives, 6*(1), 43-50.

Wright, S. P., Hom, S. P., & Sanders, W. L. (1997). Teacher and classroom context effects on student achievement: Implications for teacher evaluation. *Journal of Personal Evaluation and Education, 11,* 57-67.

Zarezadeh, T. (2013). The effect of emotional intelligence in English language learning. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences.* 1286-1289.