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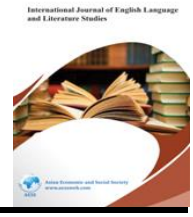

THE STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, READING MOTIVATION, AND ANXIETY WITH READING COMPREHENSION AMONG IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

The present study was carried out to investigate the relationship between the emotional intelligence, reading motivation, and anxiety with reading Comprehension. The participants in the study were selected from six classes consisting of 75 intermediate students studying English in English Institute Their level of English proficiency was determined on the basis of their scores on the PET proficiency test.. After all participants in both groups were given PET proficiency test, those participants placing between +_ 1 SD were considered as the main Finally, there were 64 EFL learners selected for the purpose of this study. A correlational design was the most appropriate design for this study because the study explored the relationship between emotional intelligence, reading motivation, and reading anxiety and reading correlation study seeks to determine relationships between variables or to use those relationships to make predictions. Then, three questionnaires including Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire and the Reading Motivations questionnaire, and reading anxiety questionnaire were given to the selected participants. Finally, the results of the test and three questionnaires were analyzed to see the relationship among variables. The results of the study indicated that there is a positive relationship between the students' level of reading comprehension and their emotional intelligence. Also, there is a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and reading motivation. Finally, there is a negative relationship between reading anxiety and reading comprehension.

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Keywords: Emotional intelligence, Reading motivation, Anxiety, Reading comprehension.

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Contribution/ Originality

As no study has been reported in EFL context regarding the comparison of the role of motivation, anxiety, and emotional intelligence as affective variables and reading comprehension as a cognitive variable, the results of the present study can pave the way for EFL teachers in order to have an effective teaching by considering the positive role of these variables.

1. INTRODUCTION

Historically, in education, emotions have been thought to be peripheral to the process of learning. Recent research (Elias, 2004), however, has begun to indicate that Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a necessary component of any educational community. EI has been defined by Elias as a set of skills necessary for effective social interaction and classroom success: (a) emotional recognition and regulation, (b) self-control, (c) goal setting, (d) social responsibility, (e) empathy, (1) problem solving, (g) conflict resolution, and (h) skills needed for leadership and effective group participation.

An increased interest in research in the area of emotional intelligence has led to a quest for a strong empirical case connecting the measurement of social and emotional learning (SEL) programs that teach EI to improved school behavior and academic performance. Recent brain research has defined EI as a measurable connection in the human brain between responses to emotions and their influence on one's actions (Bradberry and Greaves, 2009). Educational programs that focus on SEL generally instruct learners with curriculum designed to help them understand and use EI abilities. Students, teachers, administrators, and schools have begun to realize the positive effects of high-qua1ity SEL programs that are integrated into the curriculum of public-school life (Zins *et al.*, 2004).

Furthermore, foreign language anxiety has been identified as one of the major affective factors that influence foreign language learning (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991). Early studies in language anxiety had an obvious focus on the language skill of speaking since speaking was considered as the most anxiety-provoking skill among all the four language skills: speaking, reading, writing and listening (e.g., (Young, 1986; Philips, 1992)). Students were later found to have different anxiety levels related to different language skills and therefore anxiety study related to language skills other than speaking began to appear in 1990s (e.g., (Cheng *et al.*, 1999; Saito *et al.*, 1999)). Foreign language reading anxiety did not draw researchers' attention until recently (Saito *et al.*, 1999).

Reading used to be regarded as an individual activity that happens within a person's brain, and reading did not require the interaction that speaking did (Bernhardt, 1991). Readers were believed to have the advantage of rereading and thinking; consequently, affective factors in second language reading, such as anxiety, were neglected. However, reading was an active meaning constructing process from a socio-cognitive perspective (Bernhardt, 1991) in that readers played an important role in reading comprehension. Readers interacted with texts, which led to different interpretations of the text based on the readers' background knowledge and language knowledge. First language

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(L1) literacy, second language (L2) language knowledge (e.g., word recognition skills, grammar knowledge, and discourse structure knowledge) and background knowledge were considered to be the major factors that influence L2 reading performance (Grabe, 2009). Bernhardt (1991) found that L1 literacy and L2 language knowledge accounted for about 50% of the variance in reading performance and these two factors were insufficient to explain the variances in reading performance. She pointed out that the role of affect such as anxiety had been neglected from the previous reading models, which might explain some more of the variance in reading performance.

However, an old question remains incompletely answered by reading theorists. It is the question about the processes that take place, either inside our brains or in actual eye movements, on texts which make us read. What does it mean when we say we "read something"? These questions have played a crucial role in driving reading research in the past century.

Recent brain research has defined EI as a measurable connection in the human brain between responses to emotions and their influence on one's actions (Bradberry and Greaves, 2009). Educational programs which focus on social and emotional learning (SEL) generally teach learners with curriculum designed to help them understand and use EI abilities. Students, teachers, administrators, and schools have begun to realize the positive effects of high-quality SEL programs that are integrated into the curriculum of public-school life (Zins *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, the present researcher wanted to find out whether EI can play a significant role in Iranian EFL context within teaching reading course.

Furthermore, the role of anxiety as part of the emotional variables in foreign and second language teaching and learning has been studied extensively indicating that it can enhance or hinder second language acquisition.

Krashen (1981) explains that levels of anxiety (affective filter) will affect the student's performance in a second language. Among other affective variables, anxiety stands out as many of the blocking factors for effective language learning (Schumman 1997, as cited in Nassaji (2003)). Under these circumstances, reducing anxiety can aid learners to reach optimum levels of anxiety-free states through some relaxation techniques. For instance, breathing deeply greatly reduces the impact of negative emotions on the human body. In other words, breathing techniques can help students learn to breath properly and reduce the level of stress on the body.

On the other hand, research suggests many adolescent readers appear to have very low levels of motivation for reading (Guthrie *et al.*, 2006). In an attempt to address the problem of low motivation, Guthrie and Davis (2003) conducted a study aimed at inspiring a teacher to use six instructional practices to help motivate disengaged readers. The authors suggest a teacher develop goals for reading, encourages students to make connections to life experiences, build extensive libraries, allow for individualized selection of books, use explicit instruction to teach reading strategies, and foster students' ability to work together. The study reveals how using these types of instructional approaches can promote student literacy engagement and achievement. Guthrie and Davis (2003) examined students' perception of themselves as readers using a student motivation survey. Next, the researchers distinguished between two contrasting teacher perceptions in school.

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A teacher was labeled as either focusing instruction on task goals or focusing instruction on performance.

By considering all the above-mentioned issues, the major concern of the present study is to shed light on the relationship between emotional intelligence, anxiety, reading motivation and Iranian EFL learners' English language reading proficiency. To be more specific, the researcher targets the relationship between emotional intelligence anxiety, reading motivation and the reading comprehension among Iranian EFL learners.

1.1. Research Questions

Research questions designed to investigate the purposes provided above are as follows:

1. Is there a relationship between the ability to demonstrate and use emotional intelligence competencies and reading comprehension among Iranian EFL learners?
2. Is there any relationship between anxiety and reading comprehension among Iranian EFL learners?
3. Is there any relationship between reading motivation and reading comprehension among Iranian EFL learners?

1.2. Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is thought to play a critical role in determining one's success in life (Goleman, 2006). Although, many have regarded the concept of emotional intelligence as new, its historical roots are well embedded in psychological thought over the past century. Yet, the recent rash of attention seems to have created a ferment of interest in this way of conceiving human abilities since the publication of *Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman, 1995). Emotional Intelligence has become popular in classrooms and boardrooms.

Goleman (1995) proposes that emotional intelligence plays a critical role in determining one's success in life. The question of why some people become successful while others fail despite their natural gifts, abilities, and talents has provoked inquiries into those qualities that determine success (Richburg & Fletcher, 2002, as cited in Goleman (2006)).

For years, research has been conducted in the field of emotional intelligence. Studies have covered such areas as identifying methods for measuring emotional intelligence, determining the importance of emotional intelligence skills to one's effectiveness, and applying and integrating emotional intelligence in a variety of settings, including school rooms (Weissinger, 1998).

1.3. Anxiety and Cognition

In recent years, there has been ongoing discussion about the relationship between anxiety and cognition. A large body of research has revealed that affective variables, including anxiety, attitudes, and motivation influence language achievement. Two of the most common indices of language achievement are course grades and standardized proficiency tests; research has consistently shown significant, negative correlations between language anxiety and performance in

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these indices of language achievement (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991). Horwitz *et al.* (1986) acknowledge the negative effects of language anxiety on broad-based measures such as course grades, but they suggest that researchers should study its more subtle effects, that is, the relation between language anxiety and more specific processes involved in language acquisition and communication. Some of the more subtle effects of language anxiety to which Horwitz *et al.* (1986) refer might be demonstrated by considering more than just overt performance. Eysenck (1992) notes that most anxiety research has focused exclusively on the quality of performance and may overlook effects in other areas, such as attentional processes. In addition, he suggests that individual differences in anxiety cannot be understood fully without a proper assessment of cognitive functioning. The models discussed below provide a useful way to address this issue.

1.4. Motivation and Language Acquisition

A number of factors have been shown to influence performance in the second or foreign language classroom. Motivation is an important variable in second language learning achievement. Gardner (1999) found motivational components such as attitudes towards learning the language, desire to learn the language and motivational intensity, had a positive influence on performance in the language-learning classroom. Researchers have confirmed motivation as an influence on performance in the second or foreign language learning classroom, with attitude as a situational support (Garner, 2007).

Motivation, according to Gardner and Lambert (1972, as cited in Garner (2007)), relates to learning a language which is comprised of the following two types of motivation: 1) *Instrumental Motivation* - the desire to learn a language because it would fulfill certain practical goals, such as getting a job, passing an examination, etc.; and 2) *Integrative Motivation* – the desire to learn a language in order to communicate with people from another culture that speak that language. The desire is also there to identify closely with the target language group. The motivational construct, which is derived from the two types of motivation, are motivational intensity, the desire to learn a language and the attitude one has towards learning the language (Gardner, 1999).

1.5. Previous Studies Done in the Area

The first study to be discussed investigated cognitive and social factors in L2 acquisition. Tucker, Hamayan, and Genesee (1976, as cited in Trabasso and Bouchard (2002)) conducted a pilot study using junior high school students. All were native speakers of English learning French as a second language. The results indicated a significant negative correlation between reading and anxiety but not between anxiety and oral French. The two immersion groups performed better on the reading comprehension measure than the English group that learned French as a second language. The researchers asserted that motivation and attitude were relatively more important in predicting reading achievement than was aptitude.

In an unpublished doctoral dissertation, Oh (1990) investigated the relationship between anxiety and reading in English as a foreign language (EFL) among Korean university students in

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Korea. A total of 114 students in freshman English courses participated in the study. In general, anxiety was found to have the potential to hamper reading processes and outcomes.

Finally, Motallebzadeh (2009) studied the relationship between the emotional intelligence of Iranian EFL learners and their reading comprehension and structural ability. His purpose was to determine whether EQ, as an interpersonal skill and innate potential, had any relationship with reading comprehension and structural ability of language learners. Results revealed that except for social responsibility and empathy as interpersonal categories, there was a strong relationship between Emotional Intelligence and EFL learners' reading comprehension and structural ability.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Participants

The participants in the study were selected from six classes consisting of 75 intermediate students studying English in English Institute. Thirty of them were female and 45 of them were male. Their age ranged from 18 to 26 years. Their level of English proficiency was determined on the basis of their scores on the PET proficiency test.. After all participants in both groups were given PET proficiency test, those participants placing between +_ 1 SD were considered as the main Finally, there were 64 EFL learners selected for the purpose of this study

2.2. Instrumentation

General English Proficiency Test: The PET proficiency test was utilized as the pedestal for assessing the subjects' level of proficiency in English. This test comprised 45 questions. The test has four parts including reading, writing, listening and speaking . The researcher piloted the test with 30 students with the same level and similar characteristics to those of subjects of this study. It should be mentioned that the reliability of PET proficiency test estimated by KR-21 (Kudar Richardson) formula appeared to be .70.

The emotional quotient inventory (EQ-I): The researcher chose Bar-On (1997) version of the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) because Goleman (1995) and Bar-On (1997), as cited in Bar-On and Parker (2000)) definitions of emotional intelligence are much more inclusive than the ability-based definition of Mayer *et al.* (2000) and encompass various personal traits, thus straying from the traditional view of intelligence (Livingstone and Day, 2005). Cox (2001, as cited in Gallagher and Vella-Brodrick (2008)) asserts the Emotional Quotient Inventory is designed to assess the multifactor construct of emotional intelligence, which refers to capabilities, competencies, and skills required to cope with environmental demands and pressures. The selected version of the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) is a mixed model, self-report measure of emotionally and socially competent behavior which provides an estimate of emotional and social intelligence. The EQ-i consists of 133 items assessing 15 subscales that are re-classified under five main factors: (a) *Intrapersonal Functioning (Emotional Self-awareness, Assertiveness, Self-regard, Self-actualization,* and *Independence),* (b) *Interpersonal Skills (Empathy, Interpersonal relationships,* and *Social responsibility),* (c) *Adaptability (Problem solving, Reality testing,* and

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Flexibility), (d) *General Mood (Happiness* and *Optimism),* (e) *Stress Management (Stress tolerance* and *Impulse control)* Livingstone and Day (2005). *The Reading Motivations questionnaire:* In each of the classes, the researcher administered the pre/post adapted version of the Motivation to Read Profile reading survey.

The researcher asked each group of students to silently read the Motivational to Read Profile reading survey and fill in the corresponding circle that best described them. The Motivation to Read Profile reading survey (MRP) examined two specific subtopics of reading motivation, self-concept as a reader and value of reading. This 4-point Likert scale survey consisted of 20 items to examine two specific aspects of reading motivation including: 10 items measuring self-concept as a reader and 10 items measuring value of reading.

The Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS): This questionnaire was designed by Saito *et al.* (1999) and used to measure the anxiety that students experience in reading in a foreign language. The FLRAS was composed of 20 items, each of which was answered on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The highest degree of anxiety received a 5 and the lowest received a 1. In this study, the words "Russian, French and Japanese" in the original scale was changed to "Farsi"

2.3. Procedure

First, the participants in the study were selected from six classes consisting of 75 intermediate students studying English in English Institute. Then, in order to determine the homogeneous students, their level of English proficiency was determined on the basis of their scores on the PET proficiency test. Finally, 65 EFL learners selected for the purpose of this study.

In the next stage, the reading comprehension part of PET proficiency test was used for determining their level of reading proficiency. Then, the three questionnaires including Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire and the Reading Motivations questionnaire, and reading anxiety questionnaire were given to the selected participants. Finally, the results of the test and three questionnaires were analyzed to see the relationship among variables by considering the hypotheses.

2.4. Data Analysis and Results

Research question 1: Is there a relationship between the ability to demonstrate and use emotional intelligence competencies and reading comprehension among Iranian EFL learners?

In order to answer the research question, Pearson correlation was used for data analysis according to table 1.

As it is evident from Table 1, there is a positive relationship between the students' level of reading comprehension and their emotional intelligence, where the amount of correlation (r) is .842. and P value was .000. In other words, we can come to this conclusion that those who are emotionally intelligent have a good level of reading comprehension.

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Table-1. Results of Pearson correlation coefficient for reading comprehension test and emotional intelligence test

		Reading	Intelligence
Reading	Pearson Correlation	1	.842(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	65	65
Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	.842(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	65	65

Research question 2: Is there any relationship between anxiety and reading comprehension among Iranian EFL learners?

In order to see whether there is any relationship between anxiety and reading comprehension among Iranian EFL learners, Pearson correlation was used for data analysis. As it is clear from table 2, the amount of correlation coefficient (r) is -.83 and P value is .000. Therefore, by considering these results, we can conclude that there is a negative relationship between reading anxiety and reading comprehension . In fact, the results indicated that the more the anxiety of the students, the less the students' score in reading comprehension.

Table-2. Results of Pearson correlation coefficient for reading anxiety and reading comprehension test

		Reading	Anxiety
Reading	Pearson Correlation	1	-.830(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	65	65
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	-.830(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	65	65

Research question 3: Is there any relationship between reading motivation and reading comprehension among Iranian EFL learners?

In order to see whether there is any relationship between motivation and reading comprehension among Iranian EFL learners, Pearson correlation was again used for data analysis. As it is clear from table 3, the amount of correlation coefficient (r) is .799 and P value is .000. Therefore, by considering these results, we can conclude that there is a positive relationship between motivation and reading comprehension. In other words, the more the students' amount of motivation for reading, the better their performance in answering reading comprehension test.

Table-3. Results of Pearson correlation coefficient for reading motivation and reading comprehension

		Reading	Motivation
Reading	Pearson Correlation	1	.799(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	65	65
Motivation	Pearson Correlation	.799(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	65	65

3. DISCUSSION

Regarding the relationship between reading motivation and emotional intelligence, the results of the present study indicated that there is a positive significant relationship between reading

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comprehension and reading motivation. The results can confirm the research done on motivation and text comprehension (Wang and Guthrie, 2004; Guthrie *et al.*, 2006). Students who have more motivation, especially intrinsic motivation, spend more time reading and are more likely to be successful in text comprehension (2004, 2006).

Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) illustrated that reading motivation could be used to predict the amount and breadth of reading a person does. Again, students with the highest intrinsic motivation read nearly three times as many minutes per day as did the group on the lower end of the scale .

As far as the relation between emotional intelligence and reading comprehension is concerned, the positive relation was obtained from the results of the present study between emotional intelligence and reading comprehension. Different studies examined the relationship between EQ and second language success such as the studies done by Clement *et al.* (1994), Mills *et al.* (2006). For instance, Aghasafari (2006) found a positive relationship between overall EQ and language learning strategies. Furthermore, Riemer (2003) argues that EQ skills contribute to the learning potential of foreign language acquisition, particularly as it relates to acknowledging the legitimacy of other cultures as being equally valid. Furthermore, the results of this study confirm the results of the study done by Motallebzadeh (2009). He revealed that except for social responsibility and empathy as interpersonal categories, there was a strong relationship between Emotional Intelligence and EFL learners' reading comprehension and structural ability.

Finally, regarding the relation between reading anxiety and reading comprehension among Iranian EFL learners at elementary level, results indicated a significantly negative relationship between foreign language reading anxiety and foreign language reading performance score. Students with higher foreign language reading anxiety tended to score lower in the foreign language reading performance. This finding conforms to the result obtained by Shi and Liu (2006) in which they found the foreign language reading anxiety was negatively correlated to the reading performance scores among the college EFL students in China. The foreign language reading anxiety level in Shi and Liu was also measured by the FLRAS. Students in their study did eight reading passages from two standardized CET tests and the reading scores were used as an index for the reading performance. However, this result is in conflict with the results obtained in the research of Mills *et al.* (2006) in which they found no significant relationship between anxiety and foreign language reading performance.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicated that there is a positive relationship between the students' level of reading comprehension and their emotional intelligence. Also, there is a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and reading motivation. Finally, there is a negative relationship between reading anxiety and reading comprehension.

It has been established that emotional intelligence impacts reading comprehension. The findings of this study show students who obtained high EQ scores also scored high in reading comprehension and students who obtained low EQ scores also obtained low reading

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comprehension scores. These findings suggest that one impacts the other. In my opinion, there is a need to incorporate emotional intelligence skills, such as self-regulation, self-awareness, and empathy, in the curriculum to improve students' emotional well-being.

Iranian learners experienced a similar level of foreign language reading anxiety and general foreign language anxiety, which supported Saito *et al.* (1999) that claimed reading was anxiety provoking to some foreign language learners. The major source of foreign language reading anxiety identified in this study was unfamiliar scripts, which also supported one of the hypothesized sources of foreign language reading anxiety proposed by Saito *et al.* (1999). The negative correlation between foreign language reading anxiety and foreign language reading performance conformed to the findings that such a negative correlation existed between foreign language anxiety and foreign language performance (Horwitz *et al*., 1986; Shi and Liu, 2006).

Finally, as the results of this study showed. Motivation may be beneficial in enhancing comprehension of texts, just as it has been found to be beneficial by other researchers (Gambrell, 1996; Guthrie and Davis, 2003). There exists a strong correlation between a student's motivation to read and reading achievement (Gambrell, 1996). Student motivation to read increases with successful reading experience resulting from a cognitive resource of metacognitive reading strategies students can choose from to better comprehend a text.

4.1. Implication of the Study

As Goleman (1995) believes, IQ alone is no longer the measure for success and that IQ counts only for 20%, and the rest goes for emotional intelligence and luck. Since emotional intelligence is considered essential for today's success, its components should be taught in the classrooms. Since there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and reading comprehension, and reading is considered vital to all core areas, emotional intelligence skills must be integrated into the overall school curricula. It is believed that by teaching emotional intelligence skills, reading comprehension and academic success will increase. Therefore, the main role of the teachers has been to facilitate learning by helping students to reach their optimal level of academic functioning. However, students are confronted with far more social-emotional and academic challenges than ever before.

The results of this study have the potential to be used by both special education and general education teachers as they develop plans for student academic growth. Teachers would be able to incorporate emotional intelligence learning through literature as well as other disciplines. It is recommended for teachers to consider the following practices in the classroom:

• Administer motivation in reading surveys to identify student's self-concept as a reader and the value student places on reading.

• Administer metacognitive comprehension strategy surveys to identify student's use and value of self-assessment strategies.

• Engage in higher-level thinking discussions by providing teacher facilitated peer-led discussions on using strategies allowing students to share thinking and value for strategy usage.

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Finally, the results of this study show that reading in English was anxiety provoking to some learners. Anxiety related to speaking an L2 is usually more easily detected by instructors while anxiety related to reading is not easily noticed since reading does not require the interaction that speaking does. Therefore, this finding reminded Iranian instructors of the existence of reading anxiety. With this awareness, they will be more likely to detect students with high reading anxiety, show a sympathetic attitude towards the problems students are facing and adopt according measures to help students. In a word, instructors should be understanding and sensitive to students' anxiety about foreign language learning (Vogely, 1998) in general and foreign language reading in particular.

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