

The Interplay among Emotional Intelligence, Classroom Management, and Language Proficiency of Iranian EFL Teachers

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Abstract

The present study was an attempt to investigate the interplay among Iranian EFL teachers' emotional intelligence, classroom management, and their general English language proficiency. The result of the data analysis showed that: 1) there was a statistically significant relationship between the emotional intelligence and the classroom management of Iranian EFL teachers, 2) there was a statistically significant relationship between the emotional intelligence and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers, and 3) there was a statistically significant relationship between the classroom management and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers. Teacher trainers, researchers in teacher education, and language teachers may benefit from the findings of the present research.

Keywords: classroom management, EFL teachers, emotional intelligence, language proficiency

1. Introduction

Darling-Hammond (1997) believes that outside the child's home environment, it is the classroom teacher who has the most influence on students' achievement. The effectiveness of a good language teacher can be interpreted in different aspects. Several components constitute the value of a language teacher; classroom management, emotional intelligence, and language proficiency are some of them. Classroom management refers to the ways in which student behavior, movement, interaction, etc., during a class is organized and controlled by the teacher (or sometimes by the learners themselves) to enable teaching to take place most effectively (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). On one hand, teachers with high classroom management ability tend to have better behavior and instructional management (Martin & Sass, 2010). On the other hand, teachers who are emotionally more able to understand their students' needs may have better control on students and classroom atmosphere, thereby promoting student success (Rust, 2014).

Researchers have tried to find the relationship between and among several teacher characteristics including either classroom management or emotional intelligence as one of their study variables; the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and learning English language vocabulary (Alavi & Rahimi, 2011), the relationship between classroom teachers' EI and their classroom management approaches (Tok, Tok, & Dolapcioglu, 2013), the relationship between English as a foreign language students' emotional intelligence and their language achievement (Abdolmanafi, Hamidi, & Gorgani, 2014), the relationship between EFL teachers' language proficiency level, classroom management, and learning achievement of L2 learners (Borzou, 2014), the relationship between the cultural and emotional intelligence of physical education teachers and their classroom management styles (Ezzati, Amirtash, & Tojari, 2015), the relationship among EFL teachers' critical thinking skills, classroom management, and years of experience (Hamidi, Azizinejad, & Rezaei, 2016). However, there has not been a general consensus whether classroom management, emotional intelligence, and language proficiency are positively correlated. Nor has a study been carried out to simultaneously find the relationship among these variables. Therefore, the

present study aimed at investigating the possible relationship among Iranian EFL teachers' emotional intelligence, classroom management, and language proficiency.

RQ1. Is there any statistically significant relationship between emotional intelligence and classroom management of Iranian EFL teachers?

RQ2. Is there any statistically significant relationship between emotional intelligence and language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers?

RQ3. Is there any statistically significant relationship between classroom management and language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers?

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1. Emotional Intelligence

According to Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2004), emotions are one of the three fundamental categories of mental operations which include motivation, emotion, and cognition.

Hence a person with good emotions should be able to think positively and be productive and vice versa. Accordingly, emotional intelligence is said to be the mixture of the term emotion and intelligence, which are related to each other. Gardner (1993) claimed that old IQ tests only measure language and logic, not other skills. It is believed that our brain has other brilliant kinds of intelligence as well, such as emotional intelligence (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Emotional intelligence is a part of big group called multiple intelligences (MI).

Bar-On (2004) associates emotional intelligence with effectively understanding oneself and others, relating well to people, and adapting to and coping with the immediate surroundings to be more successful in dealing with environmental demands. Bar-On (2004) believes that training can improve the EI of people; hence it can develop over time.

Bar-On (2004) summarized the components of emotional intelligence as follows:

- Intrapersonal (self-awareness and self-expression)
- Interpersonal (social awareness and interpersonal relationship)
- Stress Management (emotional management and regulation)
- Adaptability (change management)
- General Mood (self-motivation)

Recent research has proven the role of EI in academic achievement (Abdolmanafi et al., 2014; Brackett & Salovey, 2006; Mayer et al., 2004). This study aims to find the relationship between two abilities of language teachers; the emotional intelligence and the classroom management.

2.2. Classroom Management

Definitions of classroom management abound, yet agreement can be found among researchers and practitioners. According to Martin and Sugarman (1993, p. 19), classroom management "refers to those activities of classroom teachers that create a positive classroom climate within which effective teaching and learning can occur". Classroom management, based on Nasey (2012), refers to those actions of the teacher which ensure that things get done. It has to do with rules, routines, structures – meaning instruction, organizing learning materials and activities. Generally speaking, classroom management is the ability to control what happens in the classroom. According to Scrivener (2012, P.1), "classroom management is the way teachers manage students' learning by organizing and controlling what happens in their classroom. Sometimes, teachers consciously decide not to organize and control, and sometimes they delegate or relinquish such control to the learners".

Evertson and Weinstein (2006) defined Classroom management as "the actions teachers take to create an environment that supports and facilitates both academic and social-emotional learning" (p.4). This definition focuses on both the facilitating aspect of the classroom management and its didactic role in learning moral-social issues. Other scholars defined classroom management in various ways. Classroom management covers a wide range of techniques, one such technique is

discipline. Discipline, as believed by Scrivener (2012, p.2) is “certainly one area of classroom management, but it is only one, and, interestingly, many of the biggest problems associated with keeping order are often best answered by dealing with other seemingly separate issues of classroom management”. Encouraging all students to participate in classroom interaction is another classroom management technique.

Al-Hamdan, (2007) asserted that an effective classroom management means to minimize tension inside the classroom, moderate students' behavior, listen to students' ideas, encourage students to do better and pay attention to their needs. According to Psunder (2005), effective classroom management in multi-cultural contexts is establishing a positive teacher-student relationship and teachers' adapting their teaching methods to students' responses. In such setting most teachers did not refer to the cultural and ethnic background of their students. Every teacher has his/her own style of classroom management. Considering this, well-managed classroom help teachers have good relationships with their students, and better organization and instruction. Similarly, as Good and Brophy (2000) and Ritter and Hancock (2007) put it, classroom management is the indication of the teachers' endeavor to monitor students' learning, behavior and control the classroom in the way that leads to student achievement.

2.3. Language Proficiency

Stern (1983) defines proficiency as the actual performance of a learner in a given language, and it includes the mastery of (a) the forms, (b) the linguistic, cognitive, affective and socio-cultural meanings of those forms, (c) the capacity to use the language with focus chiefly on communication and minimum attention to form, and (d) the creativity in language use. Clark (1972, as cited in Farhady, 1982) defines language proficiency as “to use language for real-life purposes regardless of the manner in which that competence was acquired” (p. 5). Bachman and Palmer (1996) believe that learner's language proficiency level is defined as his or her knowledge of L2 grammar and vocabulary, which is a subcomponent of general language ability. Language proficiency is the degree of skill which a person can use a language, such as how well a person can read, write, speak, or understand language. This can be contrasted with language achievement, which describes language ability as a result of learning. Proficiency may be measured through the use of a proficiency test (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

2.4. Empirical Studies

Alavi and Rahimi (2011) examined the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and learning English language vocabulary. The results of their study showed a low and negative correlation between the students' emotional intelligence and vocabulary knowledge. Their findings revealed that male and female students were significantly different from each other in performing on some components of EI.

Tok, Tok, and Dolapcioglu (2013) examined the relationship between classroom teachers' EI and their classroom management approaches, and tried to find out whether EI significantly predicted classroom management approaches. The findings showed that EI was a positive predictor of teacher-centered classroom management with weak predictive power and there was a low-level, positive, and significant relationship between primary school teachers' EI levels and teacher-centered classroom education approach. The results also revealed that EI significantly predicted student-centered classroom management and there was a medium-level, positive, and significant relationship between primary school teachers' EI levels and their student-centered classroom management approaches.

Abdolmanafi et al. (2014) investigated the relationship between English as a foreign language students' emotional intelligence and their language achievement at university level. Their study revealed that there was a significant relationship between the students' emotional intelligence and their language achievement. They also found that girls had higher EQ level than boys.

Borzou (2014) investigated the relationship between EFL teachers' language proficiency level, classroom management, and learning achievement of L2 learners. The results of her study showed no significant relationship between the teachers' language proficiency level and their classroom management, but a high significant relationship with learning achievement of L2 learners.

Ezzati, Amirtash, and Tojari (2015) investigated the relationship between cultural and emotional intelligence of physical education teachers and their classroom management styles in a descriptive-correlational study. They found a significant positive relationship between cultural intelligence and classroom management styles. They also found a positive and significant relationship between emotional intelligence and classroom management styles. They concluded that the cultural intelligence and emotional intelligence were good predictors of physical education classrooms' management styles.

Hamidi et al. (2016) investigated the relationship among EFL teachers' critical thinking skills, classroom management, and years of experience. Their study showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' classroom management and their critical thinking. They also found that teacher's years of experience had statistically significant role in their classroom management ability, and concluded that more experienced teachers had better classroom management ability.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

There were totally 118 (75 female and 43 male) participants, M.A. students and M.A. holders, from three majors of TEFL, English translation, and English literature. Their teaching experience and age ranged from 3 to 12 and 26 to 37 respectively. Participants were selected from among the teachers applied for the teacher entrance exam at Poya, Simin, Adib-e Daneshvaran, and Idea English language institutes in Mazandaran, north of Iran, and Sharif English language institute located in Hamedan.

3.2. Instruments

The instruments used in this study were as follows:

Classroom Management: The first instrument used in this study was the standardized classroom management questionnaire developed by Martin and Sass (2010). This questionnaire was in Likert-scale format, having originally 6 options, which was reduced to 5 options in this study in order to ease the answering and scoring process. The questionnaire had 24 items under two components of behavioral and instructional management. Each component included 12 items. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability of the questionnaire used in this study was calculated to be .83 which shows high reliability index based on the triple division rule (Hamidi, 2015).

Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire: The other instrument was Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-I), which has been proved to be both valid and reliable. Abdolmanafi et al. (2014) reported its validity to be .82 which shows high reliability index. It was developed by Bar-On (1997) and was employed in this study. It consists of 32 positively or negatively-keyed items presented on a Likert Scale of five points. The participants were required to decide whether they 1) strongly disagree 2) disagree 3) neither disagree nor agree 4) agree 5) strongly agree with each statement. A value of 0 was assigned for those who did not answer any items. Higher scores indicate higher level of emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 1997).

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL): The language proficiency test was an 80-item multiple choice test chosen out of Longman's TOEFL preparation guide book (Phillips, 2003). There were 20 questions of listening, 20 questions of vocabulary, 20 questions of grammar, and 20 questions of reading comprehension (totally 80). The reliability of the test calculated through KR-21 formula in a pilot study with 30 participants was found to be .86 which shows high consistency.

3.3. Procedure

First, the test of TOEFL was prepared out of the TOEFL preparation sample tests (Phillips, 2003). Then, it was piloted with 30 participants for its reliability. The test was then sent to the 5 English language institutes to be administered to the teachers who wanted to apply for the teacher entrance exam of the language institutes. Those who got the scores between ± 1 SD below and above the mean were considered homogenous members and the rest were discarded.

The remained participants were told that they were participating in a research about teacher abilities. Next, the two questionnaires of classroom management by Martin and Sass (2010) and EI by Bar-On (1997) were given to the participants to fill out. They had 25 minutes to complete the two questionnaires. Finally, the data gathered out of the questionnaires were extracted to be analyzed through SPSS 22.

4. Results

This section presents the results of data analysis. The reliability of the questionnaires and the analysis of the research questions are provided. This chapter presents related data analysis for the following null hypotheses:

H01. There is no statistically significant relationship between emotional intelligence and classroom management of Iranian EFL teachers.

H02. There is no statistically significant relationship between emotional intelligence and language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers.

H03. There is no statistically significant relationship between classroom management and language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers.

4.1. Demographic Information

Before presenting the analysis for research question, the demographic information of the participants is shown.

Table 4.1. The Demographic Information of the Initial Participants of the Study

Gender	Number	Level	Teaching Experience	Age
Male	43	M.A. students and M.A.	4 to 12	27-37
Female	75	M.A. students and M.A.	3 to 10	26-35

Table 4.1. shows the information of the participants. There were totally 118 (75 female and 43 male) participants, M.A. students and M.A. holders, from three majors of TEFL, English translation, and English literature. Their teaching experience and age ranged from 3 to 12 and 26 to 37 respectively.

Table 4.2. The Descriptive Statistics of the Initial Administration of the TOEFL

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Primary Sample	118	40.00	32.00	72.00	54.8136	9.90722	98.153
Valid N (listwise)	118						

As Table 4.2. shows, the mean and standard deviation of the 118 participants were 54.81 and 9.90 respectively. The next table shows the descriptive statistics of the homogenized participants.

Table 4.3. The Descriptive Statistics of the Homogenized Participants

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Homogenized Sample	84	44.00	65.00	55.8333	5.60085	31.369
Valid N (listwise)	84					

According to Table 4.3, out of 118 participants, 84 teachers who got a score within the range of one standard deviation below and one standard deviation above the mean were considered homogenized members. The mean and standard deviation of the homogenized participants were 55.83 and 5.60 respectively

4.2. Testing the First Null Hypothesis

The first research question of this study investigated the relationship between the emotional intelligence and the classroom management of Iranian EFL teachers. Since the data gathered out of the questionnaires were of ordinal type, the Spearman rank-order correlation test was used to determine the possible relationship between the two variables. The descriptive statistics of the two sets of scores is presented below.

Table 4.4. The Descriptive Statistics for the Emotional Intelligence and Classroom Management Scores

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Emotional-Intelligence	84	1.80	2.91	4.71	3.6899	.53133	.282
Classroom-Management	84	1.66	2.02	3.68	2.6555	.35128	.123
Valid N (listwise)	84						

Based on Table 4.4. above, the minimum and maximum scores taken out of emotional intelligence and classroom management questionnaires were 2.91, 4.71 and 2.02, 3.68 respectively. The next table shows the result of the Spearman rank-order correlation test.

Table 4.5. The Result of the Spearman Rank-Order Correlation Test for the Emotional Intelligence and Classroom Management Scores

Spearman's rho		Emotional-Intelligence	Classroom-Management
	Emotional-Intelligence	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.879**
		N	84
	Classroom-Management	Correlation Coefficient	.879**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000
		N	.000
			84

The Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to determine the relationship between the emotional intelligence and the classroom management of Iranian EFL teachers. There was a strong, positive correlation between these two variables, which was also statistically significant, $r_s(82) = .88$, $p < .05$. Therefore, the researcher safely rejects the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between the emotional intelligence and the classroom management of Iranian EFL teachers.

4.3. Testing the Second Null Hypothesis

The second research question of this study investigated the relationship between the emotional intelligence and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers. Since the data gathered out of the emotional intelligence questionnaire were of ordinal type and the language proficiency data were interval, the Spearman rank-order correlation test was used to determine the possible relationship between the two variables. The descriptive statistics of the two sets of scores is presented below.

Table 4.6. The Descriptive Statistics for the Emotional Intelligence and the Language Proficiency Scores

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Emotional-Intelligence	84	1.80	2.91	4.71	3.6899	.53133	.282
Language-Proficiency	84	18.00	46.00	64.00	55.4524	5.05012	25.504
Valid N (listwise)	84						

Based on Table 4.6 above, the minimum and maximum scores taken out of the emotional intelligence questionnaire and TOEFL were 2.91, 4.71 and 46, 64 respectively. The next table shows the result of the Spearman rank-order correlation test.

Table 4.7. The Result of the Spearman Rank-Order Correlation Test for the Emotional Intelligence and the TOEFL Scores

Spearman's rho	Emotional-Intelligence	Emotional-Intelligence	Language-Proficiency
		Correlation Coefficient	
		1.000	.542**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	84
	Language-Proficiency	Correlation Coefficient	
		.542**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	84

The Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to determine the relationship between the emotional intelligence and the language proficiency scores of Iranian EFL teachers. According to the rule of triple division suggested by Hamidi (2015), there was a medium, positive correlation between these two variables, which was also statistically significant, $r_s(82) = .54$, $p < .05$. Therefore, the researcher safely rejects the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between the emotional intelligence and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers.

4.4. Testing the Third Null Hypothesis

The third research question of this study investigated the relationship between the classroom management and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers. Since the data gathered out of the classroom management questionnaire were of ordinal type and the language proficiency data were interval, the Spearman rank-order correlation test was used to determine the possible relationship between the two variables. The descriptive statistics of the two sets of scores is presented below.

Table 4.8. The Descriptive Statistics for the Classroom Management and the Language Proficiency Scores

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Classroom-Management	84	1.66	2.02	3.68	2.6555	.35128	.123
Language-Proficiency	84	18.00	46.00	64.00	55.4524	5.05012	25.504
Valid N (listwise)	84						

Based on Table 4.8 above, the minimum and maximum scores taken out of the classroom management questionnaire and TOEFL were 2.02, 3.68 and 46, 64 respectively. The next table shows the result of the Spearman rank-order correlation test.

Table 4.9. The Result of the Spearman Rank-Order Correlation Test for the Classroom Management and the TOEFL Scores

Spearman's rho	Classroom-Management	Classroom-Management	Language-Proficiency
		Correlation Coefficient	
		1.000	.683**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	84
	Language-Proficiency	Correlation Coefficient	
		.683**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	84

The Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to determine the relationship between the classroom management and the language proficiency scores of Iranian EFL teachers. According to

the rule of triple division suggested by Hamidi (2015), there was a strong, positive correlation between these two variables, which was also statistically significant, $r_s(82) = .68$, $p < .05$. Therefore, the researcher safely rejects the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between the classroom management and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This correlational study was an attempt to investigate the relationship among Iranian EFL teachers' emotional intelligence, classroom management, and their general English language proficiency. The summary of the result and related discussion are presented below.

a) There was a statistically significant relationship between the emotional intelligence and the classroom management of Iranian EFL teachers, $r_s(82) = .88$, $p < .05$. The result of this research question is in line with the findings of Tok et al.'s (2013) study. They found a low-level, positive, and significant relationship between primary school teachers' emotional intelligence levels and teachers' classroom management. They also found that emotional intelligence is a predictive of the classroom management ability of the teachers. The findings of Ezzati et al.'s (2015) confirm that emotional intelligence has positive relationship with teachers' classroom management and can be a good predictor of classroom management styles.

b) There was a moderate positive relationship between the emotional intelligence and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers, $r_s(82) = .54$, $p < .05$. The findings of Abdolmanafi et al. (2014) in which a significant relationship between the students' emotional intelligence and their language achievement was found are in line with the result of this research question. The result of this research question is in contrast to the findings of Alavi and Rahini (2011) in which they found low and negative relationship between emotional intelligence and vocabulary knowledge of Iranian EFL learners.

c) There was a statistically significant relationship between the classroom management and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers, $r_s(82) = .68$, $p < .05$. The result of this research question is in contrast to Borzou's (2014) study in which no significant relationship between the teachers' language proficiency level and their classroom management was found. However, Hamidi (2016) found that there was a positive relationship between the classroom management and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers.

It might be claimed that those teachers with a higher level of emotional intelligence are more capable of controlling the class in terms of behavior management and thereby creating a more positive relationship with the students. A well rapport with students can lead to mutual understanding and a better bilateral relationship between teachers and students. Poor classroom management of the teacher can have demotivating effects on student learning (Hu, 2011). However, teachers with more experience usually have a better classroom management ability. Years of teaching and learning may also add to the language proficiency of the ELT teachers especially if they are permanently exposed to the target language practicing the four skills.

The present research has shed some light on some abilities of a language teacher such as classroom management, emotional intelligence, and language proficiency. It is suggested that Iranian EFL school teachers be compared to EFL institute teachers in terms of their emotional intelligence and classroom management ability. It is also suggested that the role of gender of the ELT teachers be investigated in their emotional intelligence and classroom management ability.

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