

The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Emotional Empathy among Iranian Teachers of the Institute of English as a Foreign Language

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This study attempted to assess the relationship between EI and emotional empathy (a factor known to affect teachers' performance) among Iranian institute EFL teachers. It was hypothesized that an augmentation in EI would lead to a higher level of emotional empathy and vice versa. Furthermore, the relationship between EI and emotional empathy was assessed with regard to gender, age, and the years of experience of the participants. The instruments of data collection were the two questionnaires of Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte et al., 1998), and Multi- Dimensional Emotional Empathy Scale (Caruso & Mayer, 1998). A Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was conducted to assess the result of the questionnaires. The correlation showed that there was a positive significant correlation between EI and emotional empathy ($r = 0.76$). Conducting a T-Test, there appeared to be no significant difference among Iranian institute EFL teachers with different genders regarding their EI and emotional empathy. Using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, there came to be no significant differences among Iranian institute EFL teachers with different ages concerning their EI and emotional empathy. Regarding years of experience and EI no relations were found, however, this study showed that teachers with lower years of experience were more emotionally empathetic.

Keywords: emotional Intelligence, emotional empathy, EFL teachers

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Apart from the situation-specific educational training, the teacher educators have been doing much less regarding the emotional side of the teachers and its effect on their performance. However, research on Emotional Intelligence (EI) is gaining momentum in the context of teaching, and this is going to change the face of teacher education. Nevertheless, EI is not a stand-alone issue. It is in relation with many other factors. Emotional intelligence (EI) has attracted considerable interest among researchers (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008). Looking at emotional intelligence from different perspectives, one might make a list of almost infinite applications of it. From one point of view, it can be divided into two parts. The first concerns intrapersonal use of one's emotional intelligence: how to develop and use it with regard to oneself. The second part deals with interpersonal use: how to be more effective in one's relationships with others (Weisinger, 2000). Opening the gate for another construct to enter, empathy comes to be related with the two parts of emotional intelligence mentioned above; however, empathy, in the eyes of many researchers, has taken a backseat to emotional intelligence. For instance, Hare (1991) believes that being able to empathize is an important part of emotional intelligence (as cited in Ali, Amorim, & Chamorro – Premuzic, 2009).

This study acknowledges emotional empathy as a separate related concept not a component part of the emotional intelligence construct. This premise is in accordance with Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (1999) who refer to emotional empathy as one of the concepts related to the mixed models of emotional intelligence.

This study attempts to assess EFL teachers' perceived emotional intelligence (EI) and its relationship with empathy. The impact of emotional intelligence on teaching is undeniable; it has been the focus of attention of many researchers (e.g. Rastegar & Memarpour, 2009). This study is going to extend this finding and relate it to emotional empathy. It is hypothesized that teachers with low perceived emotional empathy might

also have low perceived emotional intelligence, and that would considerably affect teaching and consequently learning. Therefore, some actions should be taken to help teachers develop their EI and emotional empathy. In addition, this study takes age, gender, and teaching experience of the teachers into consideration and investigates their relations with respect to the correlation of EI and emotional intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence

Although emotional intelligence has received much attention, it has been difficult for researchers to reach an agreed-upon definition for the construct. Mayer and Salovey (1997) presented the following definition of emotional intelligence:

...The capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the ability to accurately perceive emotions, to assess and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth (p. 10).

This definition refers to an ability-based model. This model of emotional intelligence presented emotional intelligence as a cognitive ability. As such, the ability-based model of emotional intelligence claims to be more cognitively loaded.

Bar-On (2002) had a more broadly defined interpretation of emotional intelligence. Bar-On explained that emotional intelligence includes one's emotional, personal, and social dimensions of general intelligence: "Emotional intelligence involves abilities, competencies, and skills related to understanding oneself and others, relating to peers and family members, and adapting to changing environmental situations and demands" (p. 1). This definition is known as the mixed model, because it is an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures (Bar-On, 1997).

The good news about EI is that it can be developed (Goleman, 1995). This development should be taken into consideration in the context of pedagogical milieu. Many researchers have emphasized the role of emotional intelligence in the realm of teaching and learning (e.g. Frederickson, 2001; Kremenitzer, 2005).

Emotional Empathy

The human being, as a social creature, wants to live and communicate with other people in society; therefore, a great knowledge about others is needed. In order to understand others better, a projection of one's personality into the personality of others, that is empathy, is needed. Empathy can be defined as a vicarious emotional response in reaction to another's emotional state or condition that is similar to what the other person is experiencing or would be expected to feel (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990). Guiora (1972) defined empathy as "a process of comprehending in which a temporary fusion of self-object boundaries permits an immediate emotional apprehension of the affective experience of another" (as cited in Brown, 2007, p. 165). Brown extracts two important notions from Guiora's definition: first, an awareness and knowledge of one's own feelings, and second, identification with another person. Empathy has a lot to do with teaching and learning, and it may contribute to the degree of success with which a person learns another language (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Accordingly, learners' empathy would affect their learning.

This study is related to the extent to which empathy is related with teachers. There are a number of studies that have considered empathy as a factor affecting the culture of classroom and other areas that human beings are involved. Tettegah and Anderson (2007), in a study, assessed the pre-service teachers' empathy and cognitions. They analyzed the open ended responses to animated narrative vignette simulations (ANVs) which were used as means depicting students in victim and perpetrator situations. The results suggested that very few teachers showed empathy toward the victim in ANVs. Myyry and Helkama (2001) investigated how university

students' value priorities are related to their emotional empathy. They concluded that social science students scored higher on emotional empathy than business students who were more emotionally empathetic than technology students. Kellett, Humphrey, and Sleeth (2006) assessed empathy and the emergence of task and their effect on relations leaders with specific attention towards emotional intelligence. They found that people rated highly on empathy garnered attributions of leadership from their peers.

Two important facets of empathy are cognitive and emotional empathy. This study takes the emotional empathy into consideration. Mehrabian and Epstein (1972) defined emotional empathy as a "vicariously emotional response to the perceived emotional experiences of the others" (p. 525). Smith (2009) in a study defined emotional empathy as "an emotional response in an individual that stems from and parallels the emotional state of another individual" (p. 1747). These two definitions emphasize the role of emotional responses in interpersonal relationships. Among the finest interpersonal relationships is the teacher-learner relationship. An increase in the amount of emotional empathy would improve the interpersonal relationships.

Literature Review

Jolliffe and Farrington (2004) believe that empathy is positively related to social intelligence (as cited in Albiero, Matricardi, Speltri & Toso, 2009). Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Kaukiainen (2000), in a study assessed whether empathy subtracted from social intelligence equals aggression. They contended while social intelligence and empathy are strongly correlated, they should be regarded as different concepts. They also found that with the absence of empathy, correlations between social empathy and all types of aggression increase. On the other hand, emotional intelligence has its root in the concept of social intelligence (Rastegar & Memarpour, 2009). Therefore, social intelligence seems to be a critical point where emotional empathy and emotional intelligence meet.

Okun, Shepard, and Eisenberg (2000) assessed the relations of emotionality and regulation to dispositional empathy-related responding among volunteers-in-training. Their classification of empathy-related reactions included two types: sympathetic and personal distress. Their study showed that negative emotional intensity would be a predictor of impairment in both types. In another study, Austin, Evans, Goldwater and Potter (2005) have studied the effect of emotional intelligence and empathy on exam performance in first year medical students. They found that females scored higher than males concerning their EI. Their study also showed direct effects of gender and EI on autumn term exam performance, but no direct effects other than previous exam performance on spring and summer term performance.

Finally, Badea, and Pana (2010) have investigated the role of empathy in developing the leader's emotional intelligence. They believe empathy to be a prerequisite to improve one's emotional intelligence, and their relations with others.

The purpose of this study, in the first place, is to assess the relationship between emotional empathy and emotional intelligence among individuals and more specifically, in the second place, among teachers and to assess how the finding would affect the realm of teaching implemented by teachers. The studies carried out up to now have not emphasized the effect of the relationship between emotional empathy and emotional intelligence on teachers' teaching. It seems to be remained in darkness. The present study is going to shed light on such a relation and its effect on the teaching of the teachers and, consequently, the learning of the learners. More specifically, this study seeks to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian institute EFL teachers' emotional intelligence and emotional empathy?
2. Are there any significant differences among Iranian institute EFL teachers' demographic characteristics (gender, age, and years of experience) regarding their emotional intelligence and emotional empathy?

Method

Participants

The participants of this study were 50 English teachers (21 males, 29 females) teaching at language institutes in Kerman. These teachers were between the ages of 21 and 40, and had been in the teaching profession for 1–15 years. Kerman (a city in Iran) has different language institutes at which males and females work as teachers. All institutes were listed and 50 teachers were chosen randomly from different areas.

Instruments

The following instruments were used in this study:

- a. Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte et al., 1998)
- b. Multi- Dimensional Emotional Empathy Scale (Caruso & Mayer, 1998)

The Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS), developed by Schutte and her colleagues based on Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model of EI (as cited in Rategar & Memarpour, 2009) was used in this study. This scale assesses EI based on self-report responses to 33 items tapping the evaluation and expression of emotion in oneself and others, the regulation of emotion in oneself and others, and the use of emotions in solving problems. The original EIS had demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha ranging from .87 to .90), and good 2-week test-retest reliability ($r=.78$) (Schutte et al., 1998). Austin, Saklofske, Huang, and McKenney (2004) reported the internal reliability of 0.84 for EIS. Participants responded to the items by indicating their degree of agreement with each of the 33 statements using a five-point likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

To assess the participants' emotional empathy, Multi- Dimensional Emotional Empathy Scale, developed by Caruso and Mayer in 1998, was also used. This scale consists of 30 items. The alpha reliability for the total 30-item scale scores was 0.88 (Caruso & Mayer, 1998). Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey (1999) also reported an alpha reliability of 0.86 for the scale's

overall self-reported empathy score. Participants responded to the items by indicating their degree of agreement with each of the 30 statements using a five-point likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

In this study, the EFL teachers' demographic characteristics (years of experience in teaching English, age and gender) were also gathered.

Data Collection

The Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) and Multi - Dimensional Emotional Empathy Scale were distributed among the participants simultaneously. Participants were given time (15–20 minutes) to answer these questionnaires and there were accompanying instructions. They were assured that the information would be kept completely confidential. They were also told that the gathered information would be used only for research purposes.

Results

The descriptive statistics of the EFL institute teachers' emotional intelligence, emotional empathy, age, and years of experience are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Emotional intelligence	50	76	149	120.56	18.315
Emotional empathy	50	57	145	104.94	18.603
Age	50	21	40	26.52	4.176
Years of experience	50	1	15	4.50	2.971

The Relationship between EI and Emotional Empathy

In order to test the relationship between EI and emotional empathy, a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was run using SPSS. The results

(Table 2) indicate that there is a positive significant correlation ($r = 0.76$) between EI and emotional empathy at the level of 0.01.

Table 2
Correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Emotional Empathy

		Emotional intelligence	Emotional empathy
Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	1	.760**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	50	50
Emotional empathy	Pearson Correlation	.760**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	50	50

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

EI and Emotional Empathy According to the Demographic Characteristics

To explore whether there were significant gender differences in EFL teachers' EI and emotional empathy, an independent t-test analysis was conducted. The results (Table 3 and 4) revealed that there was no significant difference between male and female EFL teachers concerning their EI and emotional empathy.

Table 3
T-Test Analysis – EI and Gender

Groups	N	M	SD	T	df	P
Male	21	116.38	20.684	-1.386	48	<i>NS^a</i>
Female	29	123.59	16.088			

^a Non- significant

Table 4
T-Test Analysis–Emotional Empathy and Gender

Groups	N	M	SD	T	df	P
Male	21	100.24	17.612	-1.542	48	<i>NS</i> ^a
Female	29	108.34	18.853			

^a Non- significant

In order to determine whether there were any significant differences among EFL teachers with different ages and teaching experiences concerning their EI, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was run. The results (Table 5) showed that there was no significant difference among EFL teachers with different ages ($r=-0.111$) and different years of experience ($r = -0.240$) concerning their EI. In other words, age and years of experience had no effect on EFL teachers' EI.

Table 5
Correlations of the Variables

Variables		Emotional Intelligence	Emotional Empathy	Age	Years of Experience
Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	1	.760**	-0.111	-0.240
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.443	.093
	N	50	50	50	50
Emotional Empathy	Pearson correlation	.760**	1	.017	-0.317*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.904	.025
	N	50	50	50	50
Age	Pearson Correlation	- 0.111	.017	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.443	.904	.	
	N	50	50	50	
Years of Experience	Pearson Correlation	-0.240	-0.317*		1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.093	.025		.
	N	50	50		50

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

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

In order to explore age and years of experience in relationship with emotional empathy, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was run. The results (Table 5) showed that there was no significant difference among EFL teachers with different ages ($P = 0.904$ and $r = 0.017$) concerning emotional empathy. However, the results indicated that there is a meaningful relationship between years of experience and emotional empathy ($r = -0.317$). As shown in Table 5, there is a negative significant correlation between emotional empathy and years of experience ($r = -0.317$) at the level of 0.05. The negative number indicates that the more are the years of experience, the less is the emotional empathy and vice versa.

Discussion

Regarding the first research question, this study reveals that there is a positive significant relationship between EI and emotional empathy (Table 2). This finding is in line with the aforementioned hypothesis. Teacher empathy is the ability to express concern and take the perspective of a student, and it involves cognitive and affective domains of empathy. Over recent decades, there have been researches which support the positive impact of teacher empathy on teaching and consequently on learning (e.g. Tettegah & Anderson, 2007). Furthermore, according to Bar-On (2000), EI develops over time and can be improved through training, programming, and therapy (as cited in Moafian & Ghanizadeh, 2009). In light of the obtained results and by considering Bar-On's views, we can justify exploiting and developing courses for EFL teachers focusing on skills associated with EI. Therefore, it is very beneficial to EFL teachers that EI and emotional empathy are positively correlated, since each of them can be developed under specific instruction and practice. To put it in another way, development of EI would lead to the development of emotional empathy and vice versa.

Considering the second research question, an analysis of the results for EI by gender and age revealed no significant differences. These findings were in line with those reported by Chan (2004), and Hopkins and

Bilimoria (2008) , while in conflict with the findings of Harrod and Scheer (2005) (as cited in Rastegar & Memarpour, 2009) which indicated that there were significant differences between females and males, with females reporting higher EI levels. However, the reason for this conflict may be related to such factors as culture, the kind of environment, and the nature of the population of the study.

Regarding the considerations of gender, age, and experience of teaching, it was found that there was no significant difference between the emotional empathy level and male and female EFL teachers, so was the difference between emotional empathy and the age of the participants. According to this study, the less the years of experience, the more the level of emotional empathy. In other words, the novice teachers are more emotionally empathetic.

This study had some limitations, including the small sample size and a lack of opportunity to generalize the findings which were based on the specific sample of Iranian institute EFL teachers. Another limitation was the age and the years of experience of the teachers, for most of EFL teachers at institutes in Iran have low years of experience and are young. Another major limitation was the reliance on self- report data in assessing the level of EI and emotional empathy. The inclusion of other ways of data collection such as interviews and diaries would help other researchers have a better understanding and, of course, assessing the level of each variable.

Further studies would have the possibility to assess the finding in this study that the teachers with lower years of experience showed to be more emotionally empathetic.

Conclusion

Entering the realm of teaching and learning, one may encounter a host of factors coming to the surface. The role of the teacher is an indispensable one. This study assessed two factors affecting the performance of the EFL teachers, EI and emotional empathy. The first finding was that there was a positive relationship between EI and emotional empathy. This finding

implies that the enhancement and development of each of these variables would result in the enhancement and development of the other, and, consequently, the enhancement of teaching performance.

The EFL teachers should not cast their look exclusively towards the students and the process of teaching itself. At one point, they can stop “looking around” and start “looking inside” and enhance the level of constructs such as EI and emotional empathy. Then they may have a wider scope towards learners and other individuals. The good news is that both constructs can be developed and augmented by practice (Weisinger, 2000).

Regarding factors of age, gender, and years of experience with respect to the relationship between EI and emotional intelligence, this study showed that there was no significant difference regarding the age and the gender of the EFL teachers. Therefore, both male and female EFL teachers with different ages can continue their way in developing the level of EI and emotional empathy. In this study, the teachers with lower years of experience showed to be more emotionally empathetic. This finding, if come to be supported by other researches, can leave the message for more experienced teachers to revert to previous days of teaching rather than looking exclusively forward to the upcoming days of teaching.

Findings from this study might also encourage the other researchers and teacher educators to do much more about enhancing EI and emotional empathy of the EFL teachers.

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