The Relationship among Critical Thinking, Emotional Intelligence, and Speaking Abilities of Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract

The present study investigated the relationship among critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and speaking abilities of Iranian EFL learners. To this end, one hundred Iranian EFL learners filled out the Bar-On (1980) emotional intelligence questionnaire, took the California Critical Thinking Skills Test (CCTST) form B, and sat an interview. The results of the multiple correlation analyses revealed a) emotional intelligence, followed by critical thinking, correlated significantly highly with speaking abilities, b) all components of emotional intelligence correlated significantly highly with speaking abilities, c) there was a significant positive relationship between critical thinking and emotional intelligence. The results of multiple regression analyses revealed that emotional intelligence was a stronger predictor of speaking abilities with critical thinking standing at the second place.

1. Introduction

In order to communicate effectively, EFL and ESL learners should promote their speaking abilities in the foreign/second language. EFL/ESL learners are usually judged on their speaking abilities at first glance. Teaching and learning speaking are usually regarded as demanding and labour-intensive. Despite this significance of speaking, it is sometimes ignored (Bora, 2012). A substantial body of studies has been conducted to identify the relationship between speaking abilities and other areas of education. Critical thinking and emotional intelligence are assumed to be two major components in promoting EFL and ESL learners speaking abilities (Barzdžiukienė,
1.1. Critical thinking

Critical thinking skills in the present study were defined as a set of higher-level thinking skills such as analysis, inference, deductive and inductive reasoning which are assumed to be taught and transferred (Ennis, 1989; McPeck, 1990; Paul, 1995; Yang & Chou, 2008; Facione, 2011). Barzdžiukienė, Urbonienė, and Klimovienė (2006) suggest that only conscious learning and reasonably active teaching with the focus on critical thinking might help a learner achieve positive results in foreign languages, and any other fields. Behak and Massari (2004) claim that the reason which inhibits students’ personal expression is lack of critical reflections or critical analyses and their inability to structure their ideas or opinions. Wang (2009) found that students who took part in critical thinking English conversation class attained better critical thinking skills. He further maintained that after applying the critical thinking ability learning system in the class, students were more satisfied with the instructional objectives, materials, and method; they were also satisfied with the teacher’s characteristics, and the condition of the class.

1.2. Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is defined as “the ability to understand and manage emotions” (Barchard & Hakstian, 2004). It is further regarded as a set of skills hypothesised to contribute to the accurate appraisal and expression of emotion in oneself and in others. It also refers to the regulation of the emotion in self and others, and the use of feelings and emotions to increase motivation, make and implement plans, and achieve the predetermined goals (Mayer and Salovey, 1995). Bora (2012) revealed that students who had high levels of emotional intelligence were more engaged in speaking and brain-based activities, because they had high levels of self-esteem and social skills, and were able to cooperate with others. They also revealed that students with low level of emotional intelligence did not have appropriate relations with the society; as a result they were isolated from the classroom atmosphere, and denied taking part in speaking and brain-based activities. Ghanizadeh and Moafian (2011) found that there was a significant relationship between students’ emotional intelligence and their critical thinking skills. They also maintained that among the components of emotional intelligence, flexibility and social responsibility had the highest correlations with critical thinking.

1.3. Research questions

The following research questions were postulated for the present study:
1. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners’ critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and their speaking abilities?
2. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners’ emotional intelligence and their critical thinking?
3. Between critical thinking, and emotional intelligence which one is a stronger predictor of Iranian EFL learners’ speaking abilities?
4. Among the components of emotional intelligence, which one(s) predict(s) Iranian EFL learners’ speaking abilities?
5. Among the components of emotional intelligence, which one(s) predict(s) Iranian EFL learners’ critical thinking?

2. Methodology

The design of the study was quantitative and mainly correlational in nature and included multiple correlations and multiple regression. The study was carried out in private language institutes in Sanandaj, a western province in Iran. The participants were asked to answer the following instruments: 1. “The California Critical Thinking Skills Test form B” 2. Bar-On’s (1980) emotional intelligence questionnaire, adapted for the context of Iran, containing 90 Likert-scale items, which was also factor analysed. 3) The Language Oral Ability Assessment adapted from Walker (1990). The test and the questionnaire were given to the participants in two different sessions. Participants’ speaking ability was also assessed through interviews by the researchers. Multiple correlation and multiple regression analyses were run to investigate the relationships and the amount of prediction among the variables.
3. Results

To answer questions 1 and 2, multiple correlation analyses were run.

| Table 1: Multiple correlations of the variables of the study |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|
|                            | Critical Thinking | Emotional Intelligence | Speaking Abilities |
| Critical Thinking          | Pearson Correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) | 1 | .331 | .001 | .000 |
| Emotional Intelligence     | Pearson Correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) | .331 | 1 | .653 | .000 |
| Speaking Abilities         | Pearson Correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) | .503 | .653 | 1 | .000 |

| Table 2: Multiple correlations, investigating the relationship among different components of emotional intelligence and speaking abilities |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Speaking Abilities | Sig. |
|-------------------|------|
| Problem solving   | 0.451| 0.000|
| Happiness         | 0.398| 0.000|
| Independence      | 0.400| 0.000|
| Stress tolerance  | 0.256| 0.010|
| Self-actualisation| 0.516| 0.000|
| Emotional self-awareness | 0.378| 0.000|
| Reality testing   | 0.445| 0.000|
| Interpersonal-relationship | 0.333| 0.001|
| Optimism          | 0.475| 0.000|
| Self-regard       | 0.448| 0.000|
| Impulse control   | 0.376| 0.000|
| Flexibility       | 0.417| 0.000|
| Social responsibility | 0.528| 0.000|
| Empathy           | 0.483| 0.000|
| Assertiveness     | 0.448| 0.000|

| Table 3: Multiple correlations, investigating the relationship among different components of emotional intelligence and critical thinking |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Critical Thinking | Sig. |
|-------------------|------|
| Problem solving   | 0.211| 0.035|
| Happiness         | 0.215| 0.032|
| Independence      | 0.277| 0.005|
| Stress tolerance  | 0.185| 0.065|
| Self-actualisation| 0.234| 0.019|
| Emotional self-awareness | 0.150| 0.138|
| Reality testing   | 0.300| 0.002|
| Interpersonal-relationship | 0.106| 0.292|
| Optimism          | 0.198| 0.048|
| Self-regard       | 0.161| 0.109|
| Impulse control   | 0.176| 0.080|
| Flexibility       | 0.224| 0.025|
| Social responsibility | 0.184| 0.066|
| Empathy           | 0.204| 0.042|
| Assertiveness     | 0.420| 0.000|

| Table 4: Multiple regressions, investigating the amount of prediction of different components of emotional intelligence on speaking abilities |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Unstandardised Coefficients | Standardised Coefficients |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| B   | Std. Error | Beta | t     | Sig.  |
|-----|------------|------|-------|------|
| (Constant) | -3.692 | 3.243 | 1.138 | .258 |
| Problem solving | 0.517 | .771 | .008 | .067 | .947 |
| Happiness | -.125 | .754 | -.020 | -.166 | .869 |
| Independence | .457 | .792 | .060 | .576 | .566 |
| Stress tolerance | -.610 | .627 | -.092 | -.973 | .333 |
| Self-actualisation | .837 | .835 | .130 | 1.002 | .319 |
| Emotional self-awareness | -.374 | .798 | -.047 | -.468 | .641 |
| Reality testing | 1.466 | .681 | .212 | 2.153 | .034 |
| Interpersonal-relationship | -.669 | .677 | -.100 | -.988 | .326 |
| Optimism | .861 | .817 | .136 | 1.054 | .295 |
| Self-regard | 1.555 | .595 | .226 | 2.613 | .011 |

| Table 5: Multiple regressions, investigating the amount of prediction of different components of emotional intelligence on critical thinking |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Unstandardised Coefficients | Standardised Coefficients |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| B   | Std. Error | Beta | t     | Sig.  |
|-----|------------|------|-------|------|
| (Constant) | -3.692 | 3.243 | 1.138 | .258 |
| Problem solving | 0.517 | .771 | .008 | .067 | .947 |
| Happiness | -.125 | .754 | -.020 | -.166 | .869 |
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| Optimism | .861 | .817 | .136 | 1.054 | .295 |
| Self-regard | 1.555 | .595 | .226 | 2.613 | .011 |
Table 6 shows the amount of contribution of the independent variables (critical thinking and emotional intelligence) to the dependent one (speaking abilities).

### Table 6: Multiple regressions, investigating the amount of prediction of critical thinking and emotional intelligence on speaking abilities

| Unstandardised Coefficients | Standardised Coefficients |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| B                           | Std. Error                | Beta | t     | Sig. |
| (Constant)                  | -1.701                    | 2.591 | -657  | .513 |
| Critical Thinking           | 8.854                     | 2.051 | .322  | 4.318 | .000 |
| Emotional Intelligence      | 5.529                     | .756  | .546  | 7.313 | .000 |

4. Discussion and Implications

In order to improve students’ speaking abilities, teachers should encourage their critical thinking skills which manifest themselves in speaking classes by learners asking questions and challenging the learning task, so that the message is completely conveyed and negotiated which provides the learners with more opportunities to speak. The findings of the study in this regard are in line with those of Wang (2009) who found that students who took part in critical thinking English conversation class attained a greater level of satisfaction with their conversation class. As a result they were more willing to participate.

EFL learners’ emotional intelligence tends to enhance their beliefs in their speaking abilities to organise and execute the courses of action required for successful performance. Learners who are able to perceive, control, and evaluate their emotions might be more capable in their speaking abilities. The findings are harmonious with those of Bora (2012), who revealed that students who had a high level of emotional intelligence were more engaged in speaking and brain-based activities. He added that these students had a high level of self-esteem and they were more enthusiastic to cooperate with others. The results further suggested that students’ emotions were more involved in their abilities in speaking than their critical thoughts. The students who are more able to control their own emotions and the emotions of others might be considered as better speakers than those who have the characteristic of thinking critically. The findings are in line with those of Ghanizadeh and Moafian (2011) who found a significant relationship between students’ emotional intelligence and their critical thinking. As the results of the present study showed, assertiveness, social responsibility, and reality testing were the predictors of EFL learners’ speaking abilities. Students who are more assertive assume themselves as being more confident and dominant; as a result, they might look for some opportunities to speak. Students who feel more social responsibility sense an obligation in themselves to act to benefit their societies. These people might be in more contact with other people; as a result, they need to be good speakers. The students whose reality testing feature is high would always evaluate their own performance. As a result, it enables them to differentiate between the external and the internal worlds and between the self and others. Among the fifteen components of emotional intelligence assertiveness was assumed to be the only predictor of EFL learners’ critical thinking. This might be pertinent to the students’ confidence and dominancy. The students who are more assertive would always challenge things and ask more questions. Iranian EFL learners might benefit from the findings of the present study. The knowledge about what the levels of Iranian EFL learners’ critical thinking and emotional intelligence are might help teachers to develop their speaking abilities. The findings can contribute to ELT material developers and textbook designers to develop and design materials and textbooks.
which incorporate ways of enhancing critical thinking and emotional intelligence.

5. References

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