

The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Willingness to Communicate among Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract

English has changed into an international language after second world war and over a million people speak into it as their first, second or third language across the world. However, knowing a language is accompanied with speaking skill and the ability to communicate with it. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to find the factors which affect EFL students' willingness to communicate (WTC). To find the relationships between willingness to communicate and students' emotional intelligence (EQ- i) two questionnaires were used and 130 intermediate students were selected randomly from 6 language institutes in Saveh. Their level of language proficiency was determined through administering Cambridge Language Proficiency Test (Language, PET) and results of the Person Correlation Test showed a positive relationship between EFL Learners' WTC and four factors of the EQ-i named: Interpersonal Relationship (IP), Empathy (EM), Assertiveness (AS), and Emotional Self-Awareness (ES) and emotional intelligence.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, willingness to communicate, EFL.

Introduction

Today, more than one and a half billion native and non-native speakers use English all around the world as their first, second, or foreign language (Strevens, 1992). From this population, only one fourth are native speakers, while the remaining majority use English as a second or foreign language in order to communicate with both native and non-native speakers of English (Strevens, 1992). Statistics show that the number of people who use English language continues to increase and this language is used in different areas such as international trade, tourism, diplomacy, international media, technology, air-traffic control, and technology. All of these indicate that English has become an international language and is used for interaction among various nations and cultures across the world (Alptekin, 2002; Norton, 1997; Smith, 1992; Strevens, 1992).

Even if that the goal of teaching English was learning grammar of the language for many years, as communicational devices are improving every day, learning to communicate in English appears to play a key role in this era of technology. Hence, the aim of teaching this language has shifted from learning its structure to finding the skill to use it for communicative goals. Consequently, now the final purpose of language learning is defined as "authentic communication between persons of different languages and cultural backgrounds" (McIntyre, Clement, Dornyei, & Noels, 2002, p. 559).

Also the arrival of communicative language teaching (CLT) in the 1970s and 1980s was a decrease in formal grammar pedagogy and its advocates stated that grammar could be learnt during

practical development of communication skills through participation in meaningful interaction (Brumfit, 1979; Canale & Swain, 1980; Savignon, 1991). The essence of communicative language teaching is the involvement of language learners in communication to permit them to develop their communication competence (Savignon, 2005). Consequently, in order to provide a basis for curriculum design, apply instructional strategies, and improve language teaching effectiveness, understanding and identification of learners' communication orientation and needs are necessary (Yu, 2009). According to Brown (2000), there are four interconnected characteristics to describe the communicative language teaching approach, consists of "classroom goals are focused on all of the components of communicative competence" and "language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, and functional use of language for meaning purposes" (p. 266).

Regarding the significant role that the communicative language teaching approach plays in second and foreign language teaching, it is clear that there is a focus on the use of language for meaningful communication in the process of language learning and acquisition. The communicative language teaching has been under the influence of language acquisition theories like Sociocultural Theory (SCT) (Yu, 2009). According to this theory speaking and thinking are firmly related to each other and speaking mediates thinking (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Lantolf (2005) distinguished differences between sociocultural theory and other typical approaches to second language acquisition. He pointed out that language should be considered as a developing system made of fragments that come out and were shaped in communicative interaction.

Similarly, Swain (2005) argued that, based on sociocultural theory, producing language played an important and considerable role in second language learning. He asserted that, speaking and writing are considered as cognitive, regulative, and constructive tools. Therefore, language is learned through interactive meaningful communication in a pragmatic setting and it is important to understand the variables that restrict and improve language learners' chances to produce language, to use language to communicate, and to acquire a language through communication (Swain & Lapkin, 2002).

Moreover, theoretical exploration and pedagogical application in the present decade have mainly promoted the significant role of using language to communicate in second and foreign language learning and teaching. In this regard, MacIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) stated that the crucial objective of second or foreign language learning should be to "engender in language students the willingness to seek out communication opportunities and the willingness actually to communicate in them" (p. 547).

Therefore, especially over the last two decades, many second language acquisition researchers, applied linguists, syllabus designers and teachers have searched for different techniques to increase language learners' willingness to communicate. Willingness to communicate (WTC) refers to the idea that language learners who are willing to communicate in the second or foreign language (L2) essentially try to find opportunities to communicate and at last they will really do communicate in the L2 (McCroskey & Richmond 1987). It was originally conceptualized with reference to first or native language (L1) verbal communication and for the first time was introduced to the literature by McCroskey and Richmond (1987), based on Burgoon's (1976) work on unwillingness to communicate. Given the personality trait of WTC, McCroskey and his associates proposed that WTC revealed a constant predisposition to talk, which was relatively consistent across various communication contexts and different types of receivers. MacIntyre et al. (1998) proposed that a proper objective for second language education should be creating willingness to communicate.

As a result, the main purpose of the learning process in language education should be to provoke students' willingness to communicate (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei & Noels, 1998) and

the current study attempts to examine any probable relation between emotional intelligence and willingness to communicate among EFL students.

Methodology

Participants

One hundred thirty (130) out of 200 intermediate male and female students in six institutes of Saveh (the research site) whose level of language proficiency was determined through administering Cambridge Language Proficiency Test (English: PET) participated in this study with a response rate of 85%. All of the students were native Persian speakers who were learning English as a foreign language.

Instruments

The questionnaires employed were self-report scales. McCroskey (1997) stated that self-report measures were the most commonly used ones for measuring matters of affect and/or perception. Since affective and perceptual constructs were directed toward the cognition of persons, they were well matched with self-report measurement if care was taken to keep away from leading respondents to give false answers.

Participants were given questionnaires written in their native language, in this case, Persian. A back translation method was used to ensure the validity of the translated version of the measures. These included the following: 1) Participant Background Information Questionnaire, 2) Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Questionnaire, 3) Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, 4) Language Proficiency Test.

A. *Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire:* Samouei's (2002) EQ questionnaire was used which consists of 90 Likert Scale items. There are four subscales in this questionnaire including: Interpersonal Relationship (IP), Empathy (EM), Assertiveness (AS), and Emotional Self-Awareness (ES).

B. *Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Questionnaire:* McCroskey's (1992) thirty two items questionnaire was to assess willingness to communicate in English in terms of the communication context (public speaking, talking in meetings, group discussions, and interpersonal conversations) and types of receivers (stranger, acquaintance, and friend). It is operationally defined as the sum of the points that the student achieve based on this WTC scale. The respondents chose the percentage of the time ranging from 0% to 100% that they would be willing to communicate in each case.

C. *Background Questionnaire:* this questionnaire consisted of general questions about learners' gender, age, first language (since in the setting selected for the current study the first language of some of the people is Turkish and not Persian), and how long they had studied English (elementary, middle, high school, university, institute).

D. *Language Proficiency Test:* Cambridge Language Proficiency Test (English: Pet) at intermediate level was used to assessed the level of the language proficiency of the participants. This test included 15 items on reading comprehension, 15 items on grammar, 15 items on listening comprehension, and 2 writing tasks.

Procedure

The data were gathered in June and July 2013 during the summer semester in six language institutes in Saveh, Iran. During three weeks, quantitative data were collected from 130 randomly selected students through the questionnaires. Before the delivery of the questionnaires, the researcher explained the basic concepts involved in this research to the participants. The intention and purpose of this study were also clarified at the beginning. The participants were informed that they would complete questionnaires about their background information, their emotional

intelligence and their willingness to communicate in English. Before collecting the data from the questionnaires, the researcher presented the consent form, which includes detailed information about the research and assures confidentiality. The researcher also informed the participants that the participation was voluntary.

Then, the participant background information questionnaire was specifically designed to collect background information concerning the participants' gender, age, year of English learning. It was assumed that the participants should have enough years of English learning experiences to be aware of their communication avoidance and approaching tendencies in English. The information obtained through this instrument would assist a better understanding of the participants in terms of the generalizability of the findings.

Participants' language proficiency test was administered to select those learners whose level of language proficiency was intermediate. Therefore the data related to 20 learners were removed from the final analysis since their level of language proficiency did not match with the specified level. Then, participants received three questionnaires (Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Questionnaire, Background Questionnaire).

Data analysis

Introduction

The study examined English language learners' willingness to communicate in a context where English was learned as a foreign language. This chapter is a presentation of the findings drawn from 130 Iranian students who studied English in different institutes. In order to provide answer to the research question, a series of statistical analysis was applied to the collected data through using SPSS software. The results are presented in three different sections, followed by the discussion of the results. A description of the sample's demographic information provides a context for summarizing the study's findings. Statistical analysis results are reported aligned with the research question:

Is there a significant correlation between Iranian EFL learners' emotional intelligence and their willingness to communicate in English language?

Demographic Information of the Participants

This section summarizes the demographic characteristics of the 130 Iranian institute students who answered the demographic questionnaire. These characteristics are shown in Table 4.1. As shown in this table, a majority of the participants were female (61.5%) while less than half were male (38.5%). The age of these students ranged from 16 to 32, with a mean of 19.5. Almost half (47%) of the students who were university student too majored in engineering.

The number of years of English instruction that these students had received in institute apart from the instruction that they received at school ranged from 1 to 6 years, with a mean of five. While 13% of these students had been studying English for one year or less, 40% of them for three or four years, and 47% of them for six years.

Although 80% of the students wanted to visit a foreign country within the next 10 years, so far only 8% of the students had been abroad. More than half (78%) of the students indicated that they had not communicated in English either face to face or through the internet with either native or non-native speakers of English during the last year.

Descriptive Statistics

In order to answer the research question, information obtained from the WTC questionnaire and EQ questionnaire were statistically analysed. The following sections show the descriptive statistics for WTC and EQ:

Descriptive Statistics for WTC

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for WTC

Number	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Scatterdness
130	43.35	17.8	0.37	0.28

As it is shown in the above table, the mean of WTC among the participants is estimated as 43.35 which its average is 42. The small standard deviation is 17.8 and skewnes is 0.37 show that the distribution is normal. These findings are also illustrated in the below histogram.

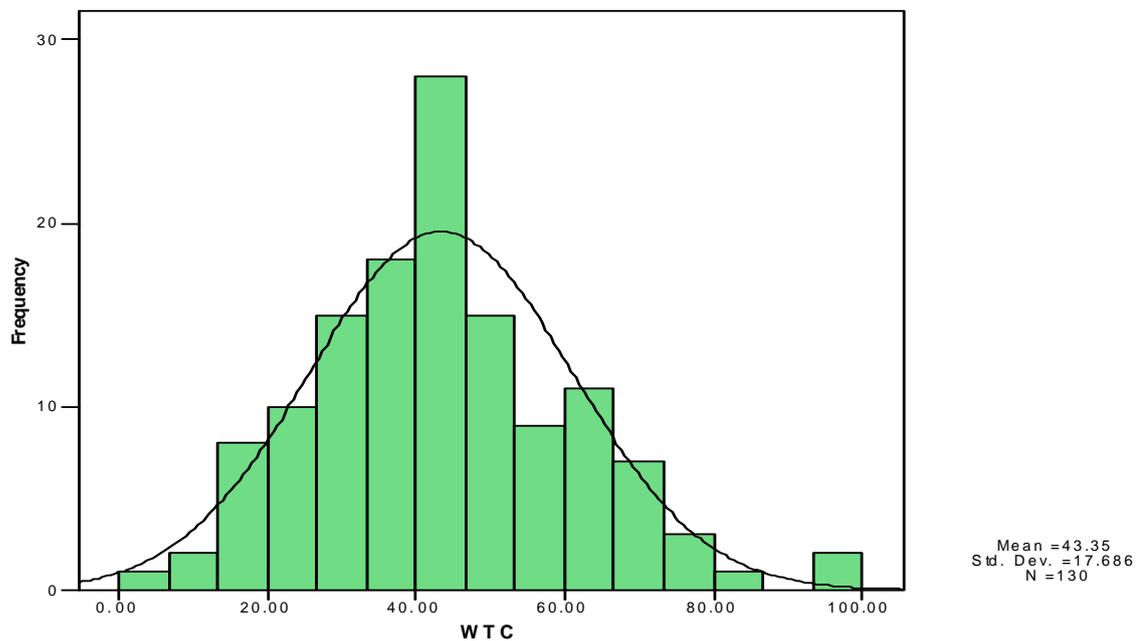


Figure 1. The histogram for WTC

Descriptive Statistics for EQ

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the subscales of the EQ

Subscales	Mean	Std. Deviation
Interpersonal Relationship (IR)	31.9	4
Empathy (EM)	27	2.8
Emotional Self-Awareness (ES)	22	4.1
Assertiveness (AS)	4.3	19.8

Based on the information presented in this table, the mean of the Interpersonal Relationship (IR) is 33,30. while the mean of the Empathy (EM) is 27. The means of the next two subscales (Emotional Self-Awareness (ES) and Assertiveness (AS)) are estimated as 22 and 19.80 respectively. Figure 2 shows the mean comparison for these subscales.

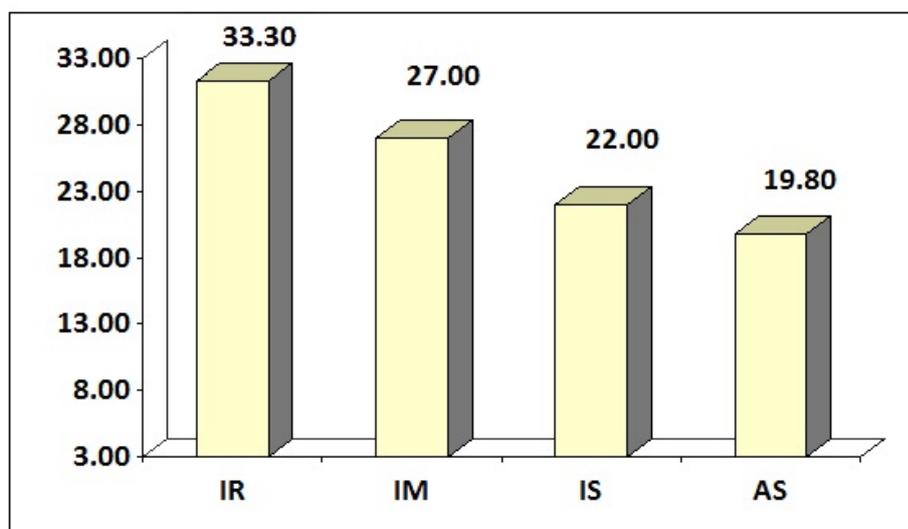


Figure 2. The mean comparison for EQ subscales

Normality of the Distributions

To answer the research question, first the Shapir and Wilk test was run to confirm the normality of the distributions of data and the legitimacy of using parametric tests. The results are presented in table 3.

Table 3. Shapir and Wilk test for normality of the data

Variables	P value	Sig
Interpersonal Relationship (IR)	0.984	0.38
Empathy (EM)	0.980	0.20
Emotional Self-Awareness (ES)	0.984	0.39
Assertiveness (AS)	0.981	0.18
WTC	0.991	0.80

As the table shows, the level of significance is bigger than .05 for all of the distributions, in other words all the distributions are normal for the variables under the study.

Results

To find the relationship between EQ and WTC subscales, Pearson correlation coefficient was used and the results are presented below for each research hypotheses separately:

RH1: There is no significant correlation between Iranian EFL learners' Interpersonal Relationship (IR) and their willingness to communicate in English language.

$$H_0 : \rho = 0$$

$$H_1 : \rho \neq 0$$

Because two variables were interval, and Pearson correlation coefficient was run and results showed that there is a significant relationship between two variables at .05 level of significance $p = .01$ and $r = 0.413$. Therefore, the first null hypothesis is rejected and it can be concluded that there is a positive relationship between the participants' Interpersonal Relationship (IR) and their willingness to communicate. Table below shows these results:

Table 4. Pearson Correlation of WTC with Interpersonal Relationship (IR)

	IR	WT
IR	1	p= .01 r= 0.413**
WTC	p=.01 r= 0.413**	1

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

Regarding the second research hypothesis:

RH2: There is no significant correlation between Iranian EFL learners' Empathy (EM) and their willingness to communicate in English language.

$$H_0 : \rho = 0$$

$$H_1 : \rho \neq 0$$

Again, the Pearson correlation coefficient was run and results showed that there is a significant relationship between two variables at .05 level of significance $p = .01$ and $r = 0.301$. Hence, the second null hypothesis is rejected and it can be concluded that there is a positive relationship between the participants' Empathy (EM) and their willingness to communicate in English. This means that the willingness to communicate among students is increasing as their empathy is increasing. (see Table 5).

Table 5. Pearson Correlation of WTC with Empathy (EM)

	IR	WT
IR	1	p= .01 r= 0.301**
WTC	p= .01 r= 0.413**	1

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

RH3: Regarding the third research hypothesis again the results show that there is a positive relation between learners' Emotional Self-Awareness (ES) and their willingness to communicate in English language. These results are presented in table 5.

$$H_0 : \rho = 0$$

$$H_1 : \rho \neq 0$$

Table 6. Pearson Correlation of WTC with Emotional Self-Awareness (ES)

	IR	WT
IR	1	p= .01 r= 0.342**
WTC	p= .01 r= 0.342**	1

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

As it is shown in the above table, the level of significance for both variables is equal ($p = .01$ and $r = 0.342$). Therefore, it is possible to reject the third null hypothesis with 995 of certainty. This

means that with increasing of the “Emotional Self-Awareness” in the learners their willingness to communicate in English is also increased.

RH4: Moreover, the same procedure was done for the fourth null hypothesis and result also showed a significant positive relationship between learners’ Assertiveness (AS) and their willingness to communicate in English language. Table 6 shows these findings.

$$H_0 : \rho = 0$$

$$H_1 : \rho \neq 0$$

Table 7. Pearson Correlation of WTC with Emotional Assertiveness (AS)

	IR	WT
IR	1	p= .01 r= 0.386**
WTC	p= .01 r= 0.386**	1

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

Conclusions

In order to answer the research question related to the relationship between Iranian EFL learners’ willingness to communicate and their emotional intelligence, the correlation between learners’ WTC with four subscales of the Samouei’s (2002) EQ questionnaire were analysed and results of Pearson correlation test showed a positive relation between these variables. Therefore, the answer to the research question is yes and all four null hypotheses are rejected in this way. This means that there is a positive relationship between WTC and learners’ all four subscales of the EQ (Interpersonal Relationship (IR), Empathy (EM), Emotional Self-Awareness (ES), Assertiveness (AS)).

The results of the current study remained consistent with other studies conducted in different countries (e.g. Cetinkaya, 2005; Mohammadzadeh & Jafarigohar, 2012; Xie , 2011). However, as far as the significance of correlations between WTC with different stable variables was concerned, the inconsistent statistical significant relationships between variables in a second/foreign communication context may imply that in an L2 communication context, there is a more complex manner with those variables that influenced L1 communication. In other words, when language learners used a second/foreign language to communicate, there might be other critical variables which could affect their willingness to communicate other than communication apprehension, anxiety, motivation, and self-perceived communication competence.

In fact, the obtained results can for the most part be attributed to the pronounced role of emotional intelligence in successful communication, as previously noted by various authors such as Armstrong (2003), Gardner (1999b), Nicolini (2011), etc. A further interpretation may be that learners with high emotional intelligence need to learn in social settings rather than solitary ones. Therefore, their willingness to communicate is higher than those with low emotional intelligences. Maybe, the main reason for this is that the variable itself is made of some sub-variables that show the person is sociable.

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