Does Emotional Intelligence Have Anything to Do with Risk-taking among Iranian EFL Learners?

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Abstract—The current study was after investigating the tentative link(s) between Emotional Intelligence (EQ, also EI) and risk-taking among Iranian EFL learners. For this purpose, 100 EFL language learners completed the "Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire" and the "Risk taking self-report Questionnaire". The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. The analysis of the data revealed that there is no correlation between the students' risk taking and their EQ. But it revealed that five of the subscales of EQ have a predictive power of learners' Risk-taking. The results help understand the relationship between students' emotional intelligence and their risk-taking.

Index Terms—EFL learners, emotional intelligence, flexibility, optimism, risk-taking

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning a language is an undeniable and an indispensible neccessity of life of at least academicisans in the interdependent world. Horizons are broadened as science progresses; thus, there is an increasingly urgent need for meticulous investigations. In the realm of teaching and learning languages, affective factors have been found to have an importance at least equal to cognitive ones, if not more. According to Jenkins, Oatley and Stein (1998), emotions are central to human life. EQ is among those discovered affective concepts which is increasingly being studied and revealed to be very influencial in successful learning(p. 136). Davis (2004) argued that whereas IQ affordes the floor for accomplishments, EQ determines the 'ceiling' - that is, how high one can rise compared to others with the same cognitive and technical skills(p. 12). Goleman (2008), for example, stated that intelligence is no longer regarded as a predictor of success; it was claimed by him that IQ causes only 20% of success whereas 80% is caused by emotional intelligence. Goleman (1995) cited a lot of research on the brain in his book (Emotional Intelligence) to support that abilities such as perseverance, self-control, and self-motivation - emotional intelligence – are probably more important than IQ in causing general success. He also indicated that those skills are educable, particularly during childhood.

Another important affective factor is Risk Taking, which is a personality trait that may have something to do with EQ. It seems logical to theorize that the two constructs (i.e.: EQ & Risk-taking) may covary. The significance of the covariance of the two constructs in the field of language learning emerges from considering the results of many previous related research. Risk-taking is not irrelevent to language classes. Bang (1999), for example, found that in a language classroom setting, taking risks in using the target language has something to do with greater language skills. He stated that risk-taking is a great opportunity which gives learners more background and heightens their proficiency in second language. Ely (1986) found a correlation between risk-taking tendencies and classroom participation. "The notion of risk as being integral to successful learning is widely accepted amongst classroom practitioners, especially those involved in teaching English to speakers of other languages. Skehan (1989) has shown that language proficiency is influenced directly by classroom participation which reflects, among other things, the contributing influences of risk-taking" (cited in: Zafar& Meenaksh 2012, p. 30-44). Skehan (1989) found that risk taking was observed in social interactions as likely to raise opportunities to hear language and obtain input in SLA. Risk-takers do not afraid of getting involved in interaction, speaking language, using output and engaging in functional practice because they prefer what they intend to express without any concern. A risk-taker is more probable of taking his existing language system to the limit. In brief, research suggests that risk-taking in foreign language learning leads to greater foreign language capacities and this statement will be supported more in the review of the related literature in the current paper. All in all, the possibility of a link between the EQ of the individuals and their risk taking potential is not far-fetched since the two constructs are related to affective domain and deal with emotions while learning is in progress. The bulk of research on EQ and its crucial importance along with the role of affective factors in learning clarifies the significance of studies like the current one.

II. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

A. EQ

EQ in general, improves an individual's social effectiveness. We sometimes become mislead by the unimportant, and spend our energy in the wrong direction. We intend to go west, but find ourselves heading east. EQ, can function as a compass so that we can be accertained that we are on the right track. The first academic use of the term emotional intelligence seems to go back to a doctoral dissertation by Wayne Leon Payne in 1985. After 5 years in which no one else seemed to have had used the term, Mayer and Salovey (2004) tried to develop a way of scientifically measuring people's emotions in academic articles. They asserted that:

"The high EI individual, most centrally, can better perceive emotions, use them in thought, understand their meanings, and manage emotions, than others. Solving emotional problems likely requires less cognitive effort for this individual. The person also tends to be somewhat higher in verbal, social, and other intelligences. The individual tends to be more open and agreeable than others"(p. 210).

Accordingly, EQ is the ability to recognize emotions, to access and generate them in order to aid thought, to comprehend emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively control them to advance emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). EQ also was described as the ability to recognize, understand, adjust, and harness emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Schutte, et al., 1998). From among the three known models for measuring EI, the mixed model proposed by Goleman (1998) which is a combination of the other two models (namely: the ability model of Salovey and Mayer (2004), and the trait model of Konstantin et al. (2001)) is used in the present study to measure learners EQ. Bar-on's mixed model (1997) drived from a mixed approach to measuring EQ. EI here "is an integration of interconnected emotional and social competencies and skills determining how successfully we comprehend and convey ourselves, realize others and communicate with them, and deal with daily necessities and problems" (cited in: Ghanizadeh & Moafian, 2011, p. 26). In brief, based on what went before EQ could be defined as "the ability to know feelings and emotions within one and in others _be it verbalizable or not_ and using it to control thinking and action to achieve success" (Ebrahimi & Khoshsima 2014, p. 148).

B. Risk Taking

Generally, risk-taking refers to a "developmental trait that consists of moving toward something without being concerned of the consequences" (Alshalabi, 2003, p. 22). Also it is defined as "The perceived probability of receiving the rewards associated with success of a proposed situation, which is required by an individual before he will subject himself to consequence associated with failure, the alternative situation providing less reward as well as less severe consequences than the proposed situation" (Brockhaus, 1980, p. 513). Beebe (1983) defined it as a "situation where an individual has to make a decision involving choice between alternatives of different desirability; the outcome of the choice is uncertain (p. 39); there is a possibility of failure"; in the developmental literature, risk taking is defined as engagement in behaviors that are associated with some probability of undesirable results (Byrnes, 1998; Furby & Beyth-Marom, 1992; Irwin, 1993). And ultimately Begley, (1995) defined risk-taking propensity as the willingness to take moderate risks. All in all, risk-taking could be defined as choosing between two alternatives, in anticipation of receiving reward and without any concern of failure or undesired consequences.

Risk taking is unintentional. A significant amount is caused by proactive or reactive motivation. Some argued that being able to interpret potentially risky situations and the ability to avoid excessive risks are among the most important skills an individual develops (e.g., Halpern-Felsher & CauVman, 2001; Steinberg & Scott, 2003). So, it is important to study it as a trait which triggers many activities including learning.

From what went above about risk taking construct, it could be safely concluded that it is related to other pivotal learner variables including classroom participation and willingness to communicate (WTC) while learning a language; Investigations on risk-taking behaviors is related to other broader areas like the levels of motivation and anxiety at the time of speaking in class (Dewaele, 2012). Risk-taking, with regard to classroom situation, is defined as the willingness to venture into the unknown, the eagerness to try something different without being worried about success or failure. Learning is the reward of taking risks (Brown, 2001, p. 149).

Some studies have discovered relationships between risk taking and language learning. Language learning proceeds best when learners are encouraged to take risks and make mistakes (Wells, 1986). Risk-taking has been described as a personality trait desirable for language learning. McCarthy (2005) maintained that "risk-taking is one of the qualities in the affective domain of the personality factors" which is related to success in second language learning (p. 2). In SLA academic risk-taking has been defined as a situation-based process that can be controlled by appropriate contexts for its application (Lee & Ng, 2010). According to Brown, "interaction requires the risk of failing to produce intended meaning, of being laughed at, of being shunned or rejected. The rewards, of course, are great and worth the risks" (2001, p. 150). It is also possible that risk-takers loose accuracy to have speed in speech production which may cause the production of poor linguistic output (Dewaele & Furnham, 1999).

A considerable number of works published in the literature of the field has related risk taking to other classroom factors which in turn increases the probability of the relationship between risk taking and emotions. In a research done in 1986 (as cited in Nga, 2002), Ely stated that risk taking is inherently relevant to self-confidence and classroom participation and referred to an essential factor in a language class: willingness to participate. Classroom participation may represent a valuable opportunity to improve students' skills (Hongwei, 1996). Considering risk takers' characteristics, students displaying this personality trait highly appreciate occasions for language production; thus, these students more actively engage in classroom participation (Alshalabi, 2003). Risk takers frequently demonstrate

extroverted traits, apply strategic techniques like guessing to manage uncertainty and risk levels which exist in a special condition (Beebe, 1983). Thus, pondering upon the complicated process of participating in an activity in a language class helps us understand that it seems that risk-taking stands as the first step (or possibly one of the first steps) which is supposedly the hardest, and hence merits further investigation.

C. Previous Studies on the Relationship between EQ and Risk-taking

To the best of researchers' knowledge, no study has directly addressed the relationship between risk-taking and EQ in the world of teaching and learning foreign languages so far. In the only more or less related study which was done on university students of psychology, Masnabadi M. (2014) did not find a significant relationship between EQ and Social Adjustment and Risk-Taking of 170 participants in her study, but EQ was found to be related to social adjustment. She used Social Adjustment Scale, then the Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire and at the end risk questionnaire. The philosophy behind a more or less replication of that study is that risk taking is highly at work in language classes where each and every class participation is borne and shaped by many affective factors including risk taking. Based on what is stated in the current paper, it is revealed that both of the constructs are related to affective domain, therefore there seems to be a link between the two. All in all, emotional intelligence comprises the ability to adaptively understand and regulate emotions; thus, one might rightly expect that individuals higher in EQ would maintain a more positive affective level of controlled risk-taking. For the purpose of this study, the following research questions were posed:

1. Is there any significant relationship between risk-taking and EQ?
2. Among the subscales of the EQ, which one(s) is/are positive predictor(s) of risk-taking?

III. METHOD AND INSTRUMENT

For the purpose of the study, 115 students were chosen from EFL institutes in Khorasan-e-Razavi and Sistan and Balouchestan provinces in Iran. Two questioners were given to them to be filled. Participants filled the related questionnaires. Out of 115 EFL learners, 100 returned completed questionnaires (about 87 % return rate). Their ages ranged from 15 to 26 years old, including high school students and university students, some of the participants did not specify their age. For obtaining reliable data and considering the ethics of research, the objective of the research was explained to the participants and they were assured that they would remain anonymous. Participation suggested implied consent. After gathering the questionnaires, some of the participants were selected randomly and were interviewed to check the reliability of their responses.

A. Instruments

To do the study the "Bar-On EI" test and "Risk taking self-report Questionnaire" were distributed. For measuring individuals' emotional intelligence, Bar-On developed a 133 -item self-report Emotional Intelligence scale. This EI test, (the emotional quotient inventory EQ-I), provides an estimate of EQ including 5 major scales and 15 subscales (using five-point Likert Scale ranging from 'Never' to 'Always'). In the present study, the Persian version of the test was administered. Dehshiri (2003) stated that the test is valid and reliable in the culture of Iran. Estimated via Cronbach's alpha, the total reliability of the questionnaire was 0.82. "Risk Taking self-report Questionnaire" was used to collect data on risk-taking of students along with a demographic form asking questions about their age, gender, and major. The self-report questionnaire -extracted from the book "Understanding Yourself", SIGNET publication (1980) validated for Iranian culture and translated by Rezakhani (2001) investigates students' risk-taking with questions which allow for 3 choices.

B. Data Collection

The study was done in 3 language institutes of Khorasan-e-Razavi and Sistan and Balouchestan in IRAN, over a period of 2 months in the summer of 2014. Students were informed of the questionnaires, and then the "Bar-On EQ test" and the "Risk-taking questionnaire" were distributed. Questionnaires were coded numerically for the sake of increasing reliability of answers. The questionnaires were filled after informing the participants of the significance of the investigation and the possible influence of that on their future academic life to guarantee ethical procedures. Therefore, they were not reluctant to participate in the study and affirmed their consent verbally. 330 questionnaires (115 EQ and 115 risk-taking questionnaires) were distributed out of which 200 (100 EQ and 100 risk-taking questionnaires) were returned (about 87% return rate).

C. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed in the current study. To determine the relationship between learners' Risk Taking and EI, a Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted.

IV. RESULTS

In order to do an analysis on the relevant data in the current experiment, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 22 was employed. The level of significance was set at 0.05. Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the two instruments – Risk-taking and EQ Scale –utilized in this study.

TABLE 1.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR RISK-TAKING AND EQ

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Risk-taking	100	50.00	107.00	81.2700	11.94673
EQ	100	374.00	566.00	465.3300	52.48608

To analyze the data, based on risk- taking classification, the participants were divided into three groups: The subjects who scored 75 and below comprised the low risk-taking group, those scoring between 76 and 99 were placed in the mid risk-taking group, and those who got above 100 formed the high group.

To ensure the normality of the distribution of the three groups, a Shapiro-Wilk test was run. The results showed that there was a normal distribution of scores in each group (p> .05) except for the Mid (p< .05) (see Table 2).

TABLE 2.
THE TEST OF NORMALITY FOR THE THREE GROUPS

	Group	Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.
EQ	**Low**	.929	24	.093
	Mid	.950	70	.007
	High	.833	6	.113

Thus, the researchers determined to use non-parametric statistics. In doing so, for comparing the mean scores of the three groups in EQ, a Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted. As Table 3 displays, the high group at 64.83 had the highest ranking and the ranking for the other groups were respectively as follows: there was 49.21 for the mid group and 50.67 for the low group (see Table 3).

TABLE 3.
THE RANKS FOR THE THREE GROUPS IN EQ

	Group	N	Mean Rank
EQ	**Low**	24	50.67
	Mid	70	49.21
	High	6	64.83

Table 4 shows a chi-square statistic that has a probability of p=.449 at 2 degrees of freedom. Consequently, it was concluded that there weren't statistical differences between the three groups at EQ.

TABLE 4.
TEST STATISTICS FOR THE THREE GROUPS AT EQ

	EQ
Chi-square	1.603
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.449

To investigate which components of EQ might have more predictive power in predicting learners' risk-taking and how other components contribute to this model, a stepwise regression analysis was utilized. The following table is the ANOVA table of regression. The quantities of F-values and the magnitudes of the respective p-values (p<0.05) indicated that the considered models were significant (see Table 5).

TABLE 5
THE ANOVA TABLE OF REGRESSION

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1492.657	1	1492.657	11.576	.001[b]
	Residual	12637.053	98	128.950		
	Total	14129.710	99			
2	Regression	2560.937	2	1280.468	10.736	.000[c]
	Residual	11568.773	97	119.266		
	Total	14129.710	99			
3	Regression	3054.394	3	1018.131	8.825	.000[d]
	Residual	11075.316	96	115.368		
	Total	14129.710	99			
4	Regression	3627.346	4	906.837	8.203	.000[e]
	Residual	10502.364	95	110.551		
	Total	14129.710	99			
5	Regression	4090.700	5	818.140	7.661	.000[f]
	Residual	10039.010	94	106.798		
	Total	14129.710	99			

a. Dependent Variable: risk-taking
b. Predictors: (Constant), optimism
c. Predictors: (Constant), optimism, self-regard
d. Predictors: (Constant), optimism, self-regard, self-actualization
e. Predictors: (Constant), optimism, self-regard, self-actualization, flexibility
f. Predictors: (Constant), optimism, self-regard, self-actualization, flexibility, emotional self- awareness

As Table 6 displays, among the different components of EQ, five (i.e., Optimism, Self-regard, Self-actualization, Flexibility and Emotional Self-awareness) were found to be good predictors of the dependent variable (risk-taking). Among the five, Optimism and Flexibility were the positive predictors, whereas Self-regard, Self-actualization and Emotional Self-awareness were the negative predictors of the students' risk-taking.

TABLE 6.
THE RESULTS OF REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR STUDENTS' EQ COMPONENTS AND RISK-TAKING

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	55.321	7.711		7.174	.000
	optimism	.862	.253	.325	3.402	.001
2	(Constant)	60.619	7.624		7.951	.000
	optimism	1.528	.330	.576	4.630	.000
	selfregard	-.789	.264	-.372	-2.993	.004
3	(Constant)	72.818	9.540		7.633	.000
	optimism	1.712	.336	.646	5.087	.000
	selfregard	-.698	.263	-.329	-2.652	.009
	selfactualization	-.616	.298	-.214	-2.068	.041
4	(Constant)	67.540	9.622		7.019	.000
	optimism	1.557	.336	.587	4.630	.000
	selfregard	-.771	.260	-.364	-2.971	.004
	selfactualization	-.744	.297	-.258	-2.506	.014
	flexibility	.605	.266	.231	2.277	.025
5	(Constant)	66.479	9.471		7.019	.000
	optimism	1.690	.337	.637	5.019	.000
	selfregard	-.632	.264	-.298	-2.399	.018
	selfactualization	-.536	.308	-.186	-1.739	.085
	flexibility	.757	.271	.289	2.791	.006
	emotionalselfawareness	-.659	.316	-.262	-2.083	.040

a. Dependent Variable: risk-taking

Table 7 demonstrates the model summary statistics. The results showed that the model containing the five components of EQ, Optimism, Self-regard, Self-actualization, Flexibility and Emotional Self-awareness could predict 25 percent of the students' risk-taking. The R value was 0.53 which indicated the correlation coefficient between the students' risk-taking and the five components. Additionally, it showed the effect size of the analysis which was a large magnitude (Larson-Hall, 2010). Its square value was 0.29 and its adjusted square was 0.25. It showed that about 25% of the variation in the students' risk-taking could be explained by taking their Optimism, Self-regard, Self-actualization, Flexibility and Emotional Self-awareness into account. Based on the quantity of the adjusted R square (Larson-Hall, 2010), it can be inferred that the five components of EQ, Optimism, Self-regard, Self-actualization, Flexibility and Emotional Self-awareness could justify the variance of the students' risk-taking expectations to a large extent (see Table

7).

TABLE 7
R SQUARE TABLE FOR OPTIMISM, FLEXIBILITY, SELF-ACTUALIZATION, SELF-REGARD AND EMOTIONAL SELF-AWARENESS AS THE PREDICTORS OF
STUDENTS' RISK-TAKING

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.325[a]	.106	.097	11.35559
2	.426[b]	.181	.164	10.92088
3	.465[c]	.216	.192	10.74094
4	.507[d]	.257	.225	10.51433
5	.538[e]	.290	.252	10.33431

a. Predictors: (Constant), optimism
b. Predictors: (Constant), optimism, selfregard
c. Predictors: (Constant), optimism, selfregard, selfactualization
d. Predictors: (Constant), optimism, selfregard, selfactualization, flexibility
e. Predictors: (Constant), optimism, selfregard, selfactualization, flexibility, emotionalselfawareness
f. Dependent Variable: risktaking

V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the current paper was to discover the conjectured relationship between risk-taking and EQ, along with investigating the predictive power of EQ subscales for the amount of Risk-taking and whether age moderates the association or not. In this section, the research questions are addressed and responses are provided. The first research question was whether Risk-taking and EQ were related or not. The results proved no significant correlation between the students' Risk-taking and EQ. The yielded results confirmed the findings obtained by Masnabadi (2014) who found no relationship between EQ, sociability and risk-taking of 170 psychology university students. Based on the findings of the present study which confirm the findings of the only (to the best of researchers' knowledge) similar study it could be stated that there was no significant relation between the amount of risk-taking and EQ of the students. So it could be stated that whether an individual is a person of high EI or low one, they are likely to take risks in different fields with an equal probability.

The second research question sought the predictive relationship of subscales of the EQ for Risk-taking. The regression analysis also indicated that five subscales of EQ, namely, Optimism, Self-Regard, Self-Actualization, Flexibility, Emotional Self Awareness accounted for 25 % of the variation in risk taking among the students. The results of the data analysis revealed that a significant positive relationship is at work for two of the subscales of EQ, namely Optimism and Flexibility; based on this finding it could be argued that those students with more optimism about the possible welcomed consequences of their actions, are more likely to take risks through the stages of language learning. Also, it could be argued that students who are flexible shall try new situations more than others. Thus, those who have a high Optimism and Flexibility take credence in their own abilities and move toward success; such a path is necessarily full of risks. They adjust more readily to new experiences which certainly involve taking risks. Along with optimism and flexibility which were discussed, self-regard, self-actualization and also emotional self-awareness have been found to have links with risk taking. It seems rational to argue that a person, who knows his emotions and can take control of them, takes risks more wisely and responsibly. The same argument could be done for self-actualization and self-regard.

To the best knowledge of the researchers, no study has addressed such research questions in language classes in which risk taking is a highly affective factor. As Gledhill & Morgan argued that "Language learners, then, engage in the act of taking risks simply by learning a second language because they are changing established linguistic patterns for other unfamiliar ones, which involves a game of "having a go" (2000, n. p).

VI. CONCLUSION

Inasmuch as the fact that risk-taking and EI are affective variables, it was conceivable to find out a link between the two and as an educated guess, researchers of the current study presumed that EQ can serve as a predictor for risk-taking. Thus, the aim of the study was to discover the possible interrelationship between them; yet, the results of the data analysis undertaken showed no significant relationship between risk-taking and EQ. Fortunately, the results showed a positive correlation between "Optimism" (a component of EQ) and "Flexibility" with risk taking which shows that those individuals who are optimistic about the consequences of an action and more flexible in trying new situations are more prone to take risks. While three components of emotional self-regard, self-actualization and emotional self-awareness had negative significant link with risk-taking suggesting that learners who know their emotions well, take risks more wisely and conservatively.

The findings of the study might imply that enhancing students' EQ particularly the optimism and flexibility components of it, may increase risk-taking which in turn increases class participation and learning. A course (or a workshop) on EQ for students is recommended. As a final comment, an expected result of such a change in EQ might

be reducing the pressure on students while participating in class activities to take part more, bereft of any concern about possible unwelcome events.

It should be noted that the limitations in the present study are as follows: the participants were mostly EFL learners in language institutes and the number of them did not exceed 100. The study can be conducted for EFL university students or even students of other subject matters. To the researchers' best knowledge, pertaining to the association between risk-taking and EQ, this is the first attempt to empirically explore the relationship between EFL learners' EQ and their risk-taking; therefore, replication of the present study -in which 5 EQ components (out of 15) were found to be linked to risk taking- with more participants in a broader context seems to be a rational investment.

To put an end, as it is seen, emotions play a crucial role in the life and overall success of individuals; therefore, knowing them well and trying to control them is as crucial. Risk-taking is an affective factor which seems to lend itself well to be controlled by emotions, provided that researchers delve into the idea more.

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