THE IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON LANGUAGE LEARNING ACHIEVEMENTS IN UNIVERSITY EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract:

Language learning is not merely a cognitive endeavour but a complex interplay of emotions, perceptions, and social dynamics. This article explores the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and language learning outcomes in university English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. The study investigates the potential moderating influences of gender, field of study, and language background on this relationship. The research uses the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-I) to assess emotional intelligence levels and correlates them with English language learning achievements. The study finds that, on a broad scale, emotional intelligence does not have a statistically significant impact on language learning achievements, suggesting that language proficiency is influenced by various cognitive and non-cognitive factors. However, the results suggest that the influence of emotional intelligence on language learning may be subtler and context-dependent. Specific components of EI, such as intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, may have nuanced effects on distinct language skills. This study enhances our understanding of the complex interplay between emotional intelligence and language learning outcomes among university EFL students, debunking simplistic assumptions about the direct impact of EI on language proficiency.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, language learning achievement, university EFL students

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1. Introduction

In the realm of language education, the significance of emotional intelligence (EI) has garnered increasing attention. EI encompasses a broad spectrum of abilities, including the capacity to perceive, comprehend, regulate emotions, and navigate intricate social interactions. It has been hypothesized that EI plays a pivotal role in shaping students' language learning achievements. This study endeavours to unravel the intricate dynamics between EI and language learning outcomes in university EFL students, paying careful attention to the moderating influences of gender, field of study, and language background.

2. Literature Review

Before delving into the concept of "emotional intelligence," it's essential to understand the broader term of "intelligence." Early scholars, such as Binet and Simon (1916), emphasized the pivotal role of judgment as a fundamental faculty of intelligence, crucial for practical life. Without judgment, a person may be deemed an imbecile (Binet & Simon, 1916). Binet and Simon introduced the "intelligence quotient (IQ)" test as a means to differentiate students by their relative intelligence, making it popular for categorizing students and potential employees (Stein & Book, 2006).

However, it's widely recognized that traditional IQ tests measure only limited aspects of human intelligence, which is inherently complex. Gardner's theory posits that individuals possess various forms and degrees of intelligence, forming a unique combination. This diversity in intelligence types is reflected in how students approach learning by drawing upon these different forms (Gardner, 1983).

One of these intelligence forms is "emotional intelligence." Various definitions of emotional intelligence exist. Salovey and Mayer (1993) defined it as the ability to comprehend one's and others' emotions, using this information to manage thoughts and emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1993). Goleman (1995) expanded on this, characterizing emotional intelligence as the capacity to motivate oneself, control impulses, regulate feelings, cope with stress, and exhibit empathy and hope. Goleman's book, "Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ," published in 1995, played a significant role in popularizing this concept (Goleman, 1995).

Reuven Bar-On (1996) introduced the Bar-On Emotional Intelligence Model, encompassing five sub-skills: interpersonal relations, personal awareness, adaptation to the environment, general mood, and stress management. He posited that emotional intelligence consists of non-cognitive skills, competencies, and capabilities that affect an individual's ability to succeed in various environmental demands and pressures (Bar-On, 1996). The most widely used measurement of emotional intelligence is the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-I), developed by Reuven Bar-On (Bar-On, 1997), and this instrument was utilized in the current study.

Emotional intelligence holds significant importance in the field of education. Walker (2001) conducted research to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic success among 1205 college students in the United States, using Bar-On's EQ-I and students' grade point averages. The study found a significant connection between emotional intelligence and academic success (Walker, 2001). Similarly, Duman (2003) investigated the integration of emotional intelligence components in foreign language teaching and learning. The research revealed that addressing students' emotional challenges enhances the effectiveness of English learning and teaching (Duman, 2003). Emotional intelligence has gained recognition in educational contexts for its multifaceted contributions. It extends beyond traditional cognitive factors, impacting students' overall educational experience. It has been associated with improved social skills, enhanced self-regulation, and potentially, academic excellence. Moreover, EI is instrumental in creating a conducive and emotionally nurturing learning environment, essential for effective language acquisition (Bar-On, 1997).

3. Material and Methods

This study aims to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence levels among university EFL students and their English language learning achievements. The section begins by presenting the research questions that guided the study, followed by descriptions of the study setting, participant characteristics, data collection instrument, and the analytical procedures applied. The study sought answers to the following research questions:

1) Do university EFL students with higher emotional intelligence perform differently in terms of their language learning achievements in English compared to those with lower emotional intelligence?
2) Is there a gender-based difference in emotional intelligence among university EFL students with varying emotional intelligence levels?
3) Does the field of study of university EFL students affect their emotional intelligence levels and language learning achievements?
4) Are there differences in emotional intelligence levels and language learning achievements between Turkish-speaking and non-Turkish-speaking university EFL students with varying emotional intelligence levels?

The research was conducted at two universities: Cyprus International University and Cyprus Social Sciences University. Cyprus International University is an international private university with a preparatory program requirement for most departments. Cyprus Social Sciences University, a Turkish private university, mandates a preparatory program for specific language teaching departments.

Table 1: The Number of Participants According to Their Qualifications

	Male	Female	Turkish Speakers	Non-Turkish Speakers	Physical Sciences	Social Sciences
The group with higher emotional intelligence level	33	21	41	6	13	41
The group with lower emotional intelligence level	29	16	44	8	13	32
Total	62	37	85	14	26	73

Table 1 summarizes participant characteristics, including gender, linguistic background, and field of study. Of the 99 students, 62 were male, and 37 were female. Among them, 85 were Turkish students, and 14 were non-Turkish students. Additionally, 26 students pursued physical sciences, while 73 were in social sciences. Participants were categorized into two groups based on their emotional intelligence levels: those with higher emotional intelligence (54) and those with lower emotional intelligence (45).

The study employed the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-I) to assess university EFL students' emotional intelligence levels and their language learning achievements in English. The EQ-I was chosen for its reliability and alignment with the emotional intelligence model by Reuven Bar-On (1997). The inventory consists of 99 items divided into five sub-skills: Intrapersonal EQ, Interpersonal EQ, Stress Management EQ, Adaptability EQ, and General Mood. It provides a total score for emotional intelligence.

Developed by Reuven Bar-On in 1997, the EQ-I is a well-established tool for measuring emotional intelligence, with extensive validation on a global scale. The inventory was initially composed of 133 items but was later simplified to 99 items. It uses a five-point Likert scale to assess emotional intelligence across various dimensions (Bar-On, 2002).

The EQ-I was administered in both universities, following the receipt of permissions and providing students with guidelines. Participants were asked to provide basic information such as names, student numbers, gender, age, linguistic background, department, and English proficiency level before beginning the assessment.

Both Turkish and English versions of the EQ-I were administered to university EFL students at Cyprus International University and Cyprus Social Sciences University. After completing the EQ-I, the responses were analyzed, and participants were divided into groups based on their emotional intelligence levels. Furthermore, English proficiency exam results and end-term English language learning achievement scores for university EFL students from both universities were collected.

Data were entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel (2016). The analysis included the use of T-tests, specifically Graphpad calculator, to assess whether differences existed between university EFL students' emotional intelligence levels and their language learning achievements based on various factors such as gender, linguistic background, and field of study.

4. Results and Discussion

Participants were thoughtfully categorized into two groups: those with higher EI and those with lower EI. To our surprise, the results demonstrate that, on the whole, emotional intelligence does not wield a statistically significant influence on language learning achievements. The mean language achievement score for the higher EI group stood at 65.15, while the lower EI group garnered a mean score of 65.11.

Table 2: The Learners' Achievement Test Results of the with Regard to Their EIQs

	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	t	p	Significance level
Group with Higher EIQ	54	65.15	19.38	0.0098	0.9922	P>.05
Group with Lower EIQ	45	65.11	17.88			

$\overline{X}$: Mean of the responses, SD: Standard deviation, t: t-test value, p: level of significance at p<0.05

A meticulous examination of gender-based distinctions reveals that language learning achievements did not significantly diverge between male and female participants. Female students with higher EI achieved a mean language score of 65.31, while their male counterparts with lower EI attained an average of 65.00.

Table 3: The Achievement Test Results of the University
EFL Learners with Lower EIQ According to Their Gender

	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	t	p	Significance level
Female	16	65.31	16.04	0.05	0.95	P>.05
Male	29	65.00	19.10			

$\overline{X}$: Mean of the responses, SD: Standard deviation, t: t-test value, p: level of significance at p<0.05

Table 4: The Achievement Test Results of the University
EFL Learners with Higher EIQ According to Their Gender

	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	t	p	Significance level
Female	21	61.90	24.11	0.98	0.3312	P>.05
Male	33	67.21	15.72			

$\overline{X}$: Mean of the responses, SD: Standard deviation, t: t-test value, p: level of significance at p<0.05

The study further stratified participants based on their fields of study: physical sciences and social sciences. Intriguingly, no statistically significant variation in language learning achievements emerged between these two realms. For students pursuing physical sciences with lower EI, the mean language achievement score tallied at 70.46, while their peers in social sciences with lower EI scored an average of 62.94.

Table 5: The Achievement Test Results of the University
EFL Learners With Lower EIQ According to Fields of Study

	N	$\overline{\text{X}}$	SD	t	p	Significance level
Physical Sciences	13	70.46	15.50	1.28	0.2044	P>.05
Social Sciences	32	62.94	18.55			

$\overline{\text{X}}$: Mean of the responses, SD: Standard deviation, t: t-test value, p: level of significance at p<0.05

Table 6: The Achievement Test Results of the University
EFL Learners with Higher EIQ According to Fields of Study

	N	$\overline{\text{X}}$	SD	t	p	Significance level
Physical Sciences	13	68.85	14.34	0.78	0.4349	P>.05
Social Sciences	41	63.98	20.73			

$\overline{\text{X}}$: Mean of the responses, SD: Standard deviation, t: t-test value, p: level of significance at p<0.05

An additional dimension scrutinized was the students' language background, distinguishing between Turkish and non-Turkish speakers. Remarkably, no significant discrepancy in language learning achievements manifested between these two cohorts. Non-Turkish speakers with lower EI boasted a mean language achievement score of 75.75, while Turkish speakers with lower EI notched an average of 62.81.

Table 7: The Achievement Test Results of the University EFL Learners with
Lower EIQ According to Whether They Are Turkish and Non-Turkish Speakers

	N	$\overline{\text{X}}$	SD	t	p	Significance level
Non-Turkish	8	75.75	11.49	1.91	0.0627	P>.05
Turkish	37	62.81	18.29			

$\overline{\text{X}}$: Mean of the responses, SD: Standard deviation, t: t-test value, p: level of significance at p<0.05

Table 8: The Achievement Test Results of the University EFL Learners with
Higher EIQ According to Whether They Are Turkish and Non-Turkish Speakers

	N	$\overline{\text{X}}$	SD	t	p	Significance level
Non-Turkish	6	72.50	10.93	0.98	0.3289	P>.05
Turkish	48	64.23	20.07			

$\overline{\text{X}}$: Mean of the responses, SD: Standard deviation, t: t-test value, p: level of significance at p<0.05

The study's results have yielded nuanced insights into the relationship between emotional intelligence and language learning achievements among university EFL students. Contrary to some expectations, it is found that, on the whole, emotional intelligence does not wield a statistically significant influence on language learning achievements. This suggests that language proficiency is influenced by a multitude of factors, both cognitive and non-cognitive.

However, the findings do not imply that EI is irrelevant to language learning. Upon closer examination, it is discovered that the influence of EI may be more subtle and context-dependent. For instance, while overall EI did not correlate strongly with

language proficiency, specific components of EI, such as intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, may have more nuanced effects on distinct language skills.

5. Recommendations

Prior research has ventured into the correlation between EI and language learning achievements, yielding a mosaic of findings. While some studies have suggested a positive association, others have yielded inconclusive results. Notably, these studies often overlooked critical contextual variables, such as the diverse fields of study and language backgrounds of the students. This study aims to fill this void by conducting a more comprehensive investigation. Hence, further studies could investigate the potential moderating effects of cultural and individual factors on the correlation between emotional intelligence and language learning achievements. Additionally, exploring the effectiveness of targeted interventions or training programs aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence in language learners would provide valuable insights for educational practitioners and policymakers.

6. Conclusion

This study contributes significantly to our comprehension of the intricate interplay between emotional intelligence and language learning achievements among university EFL students. It dismantles simplistic assertions by revealing that emotional intelligence, when viewed holistically, does not wield a statistically significant influence on language proficiency.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)
Gizem Arslan Değirmenci, born on February 16, 1996, in Antakya/Hatay, is a dedicated educator currently pursuing a Ph.D. in English Language Teaching. She holds a Master's in English Language Teaching from Cyprus International University and has been actively involved in academia and research. Gizem's professional journey includes roles as an instructor at Ankara Social Sciences University Cyprus Campus, where she

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Mehmet Ali Yavuz is an accomplished academic with a rich background in English Language Teaching and linguistics. He earned his Doctorate in Foreign Language Teaching (English Language Teaching) from Dokuz Eylül University in 1995, following a Master's in English Language Teaching from Leeds University in 1974 and a Bachelor's from Istanbul Teacher Training Institute in 1969. He has made significant contributions to the field, with publications such as "Data-driven learning of academic lexical bundles below the C1 level" and "English Language Learners' Comprehension and Production of Implicatures." His research extends to the realization of speech acts, the effects of teacher immediacy behaviors, and learner autonomy. His research interests encompass English Language Teaching, Linguistics, and Applied Linguistics. Throughout his illustrious career, Mehmet Ali Yavuz has held various academic positions, including Directorship at Diyarbakır and Izmir Education Institutes. He served as the Director of the Foreign Languages School at Dokuz Eylül University and later as the Dean of the Faculty of Education at Cyprus International University. Additionally, he assumed leadership roles as the Head of Department of English Language Teaching at Cyprus International University.

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