# Investigating the Interplay between Iranian EFL Learners' Emotional Intelligence, Listening Comprehension, and Language Achievement

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**Abstract**

The present study aimed to determine the relationships between Iranian male and female EFL learners' emotional intelligence (EI), listening comprehension, and language achievement. Moreover, it sought to determine the possible differences between these learners in terms of their listening comprehension, language achievement, and EI. Some 400 intermediate-level English learners were selected (i.e., 200 male & 200 female) from among 753 English learners of a private language institute in Rasht (Iran) based on their performances on a proficiency test. Second, the researchers administered the EI questionnaire (Bar-On, 1997), listening comprehension test (Richards & Trew, 2011), and achievement test of the study to the participants. Finally, they analyzed the obtained data with the help of the Pearson product-moment correlation test and independent-samples t-test. The researchers used SPSS software to perform the data analysis. Based on the results, there were significant positive correlations between EI, listening comprehension, and language achievement. Moreover, the female learners surpassed the male learners in terms of EI and language achievement. Lastly, no significant difference was found between the male and female learners' listening comprehension. The results of the study may provide EFL teacher educators, syllabus designers, and teachers with guiding principles regarding the various learner factors in foreign language contexts.

*Keywords*: Emotional Intelligence, Gender, Individual Learner Factors, Language Achievement, Listening Comprehension

## 1. Introduction

A close scrutiny of the pertinent literature (e.g., Abdolrezapour, 2016; Alsalhi, 2020; Adnan, Marlina, & Shawfani, 2020; Blanton, 2018; Humaidah, 2021; Liu, 2020; Primuriski, Adnan, & Narius, 2020; Supriyadi & Lustyantie, 2019; Wulandari, Harahap, & Hati, 2019; Zarei, Bagheri & Sadighi, 2021) accentuates the fact that *individual learner factors* have attracted considerable attention in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). As Dörnyei (2005) pointed out, these factors encompass the "enduring personal characteristics that are assumed to apply to everybody and on which people differ by degree" (p. 4). A careful perusal of the above-mentioned definition underlines the fact that the learner factors encompass a wide variety of cognitive and affective personal characteristics such as *personality, motivation, attitudes, cognitive styles, learning styles*, and *learning strategies* which might sway the SLA process happening in the context of classroom (Dörnyei, 2005).

The examination of relevant learner factor studies highlights the fact that *EI* (e.g., Afshar & Rahimi, 2016; Balasubramanian, & Al-Mahrooqi, 2016; Chan & Siu, 2016; Derakhshan, Eslami, & Ghandhari, 2021; Engin, 2017). Goleman, 1998; Soodmand Afshar & Rahimi 2016).) has been a recurring factor in instructed SLA. Goleman (1998) averred that EI constitutes a kind of intelligence enabling individuals to manage their diverse emotions that are aroused during the process of task

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performance. According to this definition, this mode of intelligence prioritizes emotions in lieu of cognitive processes. Jan, Anwar, and Warraich, (2017) contended that EI plays a consequential role in the personal lives of people owing to the fact that it capacitates them to gain control over their behavior by superintending their negative and positive emotions. They pointed out that people's ability to regulate their behavior empowers them to exhibit a behavior that is congruent with the requirements of each specific situation. In light of the above-mentioned characterization of EI, Mérida-López and Extremera (2017) argued that this mode of intelligence sways human learning. In the field of SLA, EI might be related to the learners' language achievement and their acquisition of language skills such as the listening skill (Chan & Siu, 2016).

In the last decade, SLA researchers have mostly focused on certain research areas, but they have ignored other equally important areas. More specifically, a number of pertinent studies (e.g., Majidi Dehkordi & Shirani Bidabadi, 2015) have been searching for the association between EFL English learners' EI and learning strategies. Furthermore, certain empirical studies (e.g., Ahmadi Safa, 2013; Derakhshan, Eslami & Ghandhari, 2021; Rafieyan, Sharafi-Nejad, Damavand, Eng & Mohamed, 2014; Rahimi Domakani, Mirzaei, & Zeraatpisheh, 2014; Shirazi & Nadoushani, 2016) have addressed the correlation between the learners' pragmatic knowledge and their EI. Moreover, some of the relevant research in this area (e.g., Esmaeeli, Khalili Sabet, & Shahabi, 2018) has focused on the link between English learners' EI and their speaking skill. In addition, a few studies (Rahimi, Sadighi, & Hosseiny Fard, 2011) have tried to determine the degree to which the learners' reading comprehension is swayed by their EI. Finally, some of the relevant empirical studies (e.g., Rouhani, 2004) have explored the relationship between the English learners' EI and their affective factors, namely anxiety and empathy among others.

Notwithstanding, there exists little research on the relationship between foreign English learners' EI on the one hand and language achievement and listening comprehension on the other. More specifically, the SLA researchers have disregarded the possibility that the learners' overall language competence and ability to process and comprehend the aural second language input may be swayed by their EI in diverse academic settings in both EFL and ESL learning contexts. Furthermore, these studies have not investigated the degree to which the learners' gender sways their EI, language achievement, and listening comprehension. This issue highlights the fact that there is a need for more empirical studies regarding a) the probable relationships between the male and female English learners' EI and their language achievement and development of second language listening skill; and b) the differences between the male and female learners' EI, listening comprehension, and language achievement. The present study strived to deal with the above-mentioned issues in the Iranian EFL context. More specifically, the study tried to answer the following research questions:

**Research Question One**: Is there a significant relationship between male and female EFL learners' emotional intelligence and their listening ability?

**Research Question Two**: Is there a significant relationship between male and female EFL learners' emotional intelligence and their language achievement?

**Research Question Three**: Are there any significant differences between male and female EFL learners' emotional intelligence, listening ability, and language achievement?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. EI

Mérida-López, and Extremera (2017) expounded on the major factors in EI. The five overarching sub-components are *self-awareness, social skill, empathy, motivation*, and *self-regulation*. Costa and Faria (2015) noted that self-awareness characterizes the individuals' cognizance of their innate capabilities and their aroused emotions in diverse contexts along with their ability to appraise the degree to which these abilities and feelings affect their peers and other people in the pertinent contexts. Li, Raja, and Sazalie (2015) pointed out that social skill refers to the individuals' flair for developing and maintaining friendly and supportive relationships with other people in academic and occupational settings. Zhang, Li, Zhao, Xing, Chen, Tian, and Tang (2016) stated that empathy

comprises people's ability to perceive other individuals' emotions in decision-making situations. Moreover, as they explained, motivation encompasses the individuals' awareness of the variables which are likely to exert a profound influence on their behavior in various contexts. Lastly, as they concluded, self-regulation refers to the extent to which people are able to repress upsetting emotions and thoughts which tend to have a negative impact on the efficacy of their performance in different situational contexts.

Considering the above-mentioned discussions of EI and its sub-constructs, Barlozek (2015) distinguished between EI as *an ability* and as *a trait*. As she explained, the former model characterizes this construct in terms of the individuals' observable abilities to regulate their emotions in order to exert control over their behaviors and to make conscious decisions in pertinent situational contexts. On the other hand, she pointed out that the trait model delineates this construct as a trait of personality. More specifically, it refers to the individual's conceptions of their emotional capability. Dewaele (2018) averred that the trait model is more compatible with Goleman's (1998) original characterization of this construct due mainly to the fact that it operationalizes emotional intelligence as a purely affective construct that is not governed by the individual's cognitive capacity.

*2.2. Language Achievement*

Language achievement is the English learners' mastery of diverse aspects of the target language which has been accumulated based on their classroom instruction (Deringöl, 2019).). Thus, language achievement means the learners' knowledge of the various forms (e.g., vocabulary & grammar) and skills (e.g., reading comprehension) of the second language. Payant and Kim (2019) drew a distinction between the learners' *general achievement* and their *diagnostic achievement*.

As they noted, general achievement refers to their accumulated second language knowledge resulting from their language learning in the context of the classroom. On the contrary, diagnostic achievement is the knowledge of specific categories of second language forms (e.g., words) or certain second language skills. Payant and Kim (2019).) averred that the learners' language achievement has practical implications for both language teachers and syllabus designers. According to them, it enables language teachers to appraise the efficacy of their instructional interventions and to redress them on the basis of their effectiveness. Moreover, the learners' diagnostic language achievement empowers the syllabus designers to carry out a needs analysis prior to the onset of the language courses and to evaluate the efficacy of the courses subsequent to the final achievement tests. They concluded that language achievement constitutes one of the major sources of information on the utility of classroom-based language learning in both EFL and ESL learning contexts.

*2.3. Listening Comprehension*

Listening skill constitutes a major dimension of the target language which might be correlated with the learners' EI (Rukthong & Brunfaut, 2020). The previous empirical studies in the field of instructed SLA (e.g., Afsharrad & Moulavi Nafchi, 2015; Ahmadi Safa & Beheshti, 2018; Badri & Salehi, 2017; Ehteshami & Salehi, 2016; Soodmand Afshar & Hamzavi, 2014) revealed that second or foreign English learners' listening comprehension had been one of the major hurdles of the acquisition of the target language. Emerick (2019) noted that listening comprehension is the most challenging language skill in the context of the classroom. Kim (2017) averred that listening constitutes a difficult skill of the target language due mainly to specific characteristics of the spoken language including the reduced versions of language forms, intervening variables, prosodic features, and rate of speech among others. As he explained, in spoken language native speakers are likely to avoid using the full versions of the second language forms which are mainly used in the instructional materials. The predominance of the reduced language forms in spoken language may exert a detrimental influence on the students' listening ability in the class. Furthermore, as he noted a number of variables such as hesitations and pauses are likely to exacerbate the learners' listening comprehension problems. Moreover, certain prosodic features like stress patterns may negatively affect the learners' comprehension of spoken language due to the fact that stress may not constitute a meaning-distinguishing factor in their mother tongue. Finally, he concluded that the rate of the spoken language may impede the learners' listening comprehension since the learners might not be provided with the

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opportunity to ask the speakers for clarification of their intended meaning in different situational contexts.

Nonetheless, listening fulfills a pivotal role in classroom interaction due mainly to the fact that it is more frequently used in comparison with the other language skills. More specifically, listening comprehension is a prerequisite to oral interaction in a variety of situational contexts (Mulyadi, 2018). Kim (2015) reveals that listening has been defined in various and quite different ways in SLA. He noted that the different definitions of this skill have stemmed from the SLA researchers' divergent perspectives on its nature. Among the different definitions of this skill, Oxford's (1993) definition has proved to be more practical than its other characterizations. Oxford (1993) pointed out that listening comprehension constitutes a multifaceted problem-solving capability that relies on the detection and comprehension of multitudinous units of the target language ranging from individual vocabulary items to extensive pieces of discourse.

*2.4. Gender*

In addition to the above-mentioned issues, Goleman (1998) pointed out that EI might also be affected by the individual's personal characteristics. Personal characteristics comprise the factors such as *age, gender*, and *race* which classify individuals into specific categories (Mulyadi, 2018). In the field of SLA, *gender* has been a recurrent variable in the studies which have focused on English learners' affective factors. Milla, and Gutierrez-Mangado (2019). made an effort to define gender in terms of biology and sociology. As they noted, in biological terms, gender encompasses the multitudinous features which distinguish males from females. On the other hand, in sociological terms, gender refers to the social roles which are associated with masculinity or femininity and underline social organization in different societies. As they pointed out, the individuals' biological gender may exert a considerable influence on their affective characteristics. Consequently, the language leaners' biological gender might be associated with their EI, which is a major affective factor in of SLA, language achievement, and mastery of language skills.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Participants

To reach the objectives of the study, 400 intermediate-level EFL learners including 200 male and 200 female learners were selected as the final participants. They were chosen from among 753 English learners of a private language institute in Rasht (Iran). This was done based on their scores on a proficiency test. Their ages ranged from 16 to 23 and most of them were native speakers of Gilaki, and others were native speakers of Persian. Moreover, the language education period of the selected participants was in the range of 2 to 3 years.

### 3.2. Materials and Instruments

3.2.1. Proficiency Test

In this study, the researchers used the *Oxford Placement Test* (Allan, 2004) to select intermediate-level English learners as the participants. This test comprised 60 multiple-choice items in three parts including cloze *test, grammar*, and *vocabulary*. According to the instructions of the test, those students scoring between 30 and 39 belonged to the intermediate proficiency level. Allan (2004) pointed out that the test enjoyed high reliability and validity. Nonetheless, the researchers used Cronbach's alpha measure of internal consistency to determine the reliability. The results revealed that the reliability index (.83) of the test was satisfactory, and it could be used in the Iranian EFL context.

3.2.2. Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire

To measure the male and female English learners' EI, the researchers took advantage of Bar-On's (1997) *Emotional Intelligence Inventory,* originally based on Goleman's (1995) *Adaptation Model.* The initial version of this self-report questionnaire had 133 items. Nonetheless, the researchers used the Farsi version of the questionnaire which was validated by Samouei (2003). This questionnaire

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comprised 90 items, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. It was developed based on 5 major components of EI including *intrapersonal*, *interpersonal*, *stress management*, *adaptability*, and *general mood*. The first component involved *self-actualization*, *emotional self-awareness*, *self-regard*, *independence*, and *assertiveness* subcomponents. The second component comprised the *interpersonal relationship*, *social responsibility*, and *empathy* sub-components. The stress management component encompassed the *stress tolerance* and *impulse control* subcomponents. The adaptability component included *reality testing*, *flexibility,* and *problem-solving* sub-components. The final component encompassed the *optimism* and *happiness* sub-components. In this study, Cronbach's alpha measure of internal consistency was used to examine the reliability of the test.

### 3.2.3. Listening Comprehension Test

In the present study, a researcher-made 30-item listening comprehension test using the audio files of the textbook entitled *Developing Tactics for Listening* (Richards & Trew, 2011) was used to examine the male and female EFL learners' listening comprehension. The researchers used the *Developing Level* of the above-mentioned textbook which comprises numerous listening tasks for intermediate-level English learners. Using Cronbach's alpha measure of internal consistency, the reliability index of this test was .85, thus it could be used in the Iranian EFL context.

### 3.2.4. Achievement Test

For measuring the listening ability, the researchers developed a 30-item general achievement test in three sections including *vocabulary, grammar*, and *reading comprehension* (i.e., 10 items in each section) based on the content of the participants' textbook entitled *Interchange Book 2* (Richards, Hull & Proctor, 2012) which was taught at the intermediate proficiency level. Cronbach's alpha measure of internal consistency was employed to determine the reliability of this test. Based on the results, the reliability index (.84) of the test was satisfactory, and it could be used in the present study. The researchers developed this test based on Payant and Kim's (2019) distinction between general and diagnostic language achievement. More specifically, they developed a general achievement test to examine the participants' accumulated second language knowledge in their classes.

### 3.2.5. Learning Management System

The present study was carried out during the coronavirus pandemic. Consequently, it was not possible to gather the requisite data in the in-person classes. Considering this issue, the researchers used the *Adobe Connect* learning management system to administer the listening comprehension test of the present study. This system was the learning management system of the selected language institute and enabled its users to take advantage of various remote-education features such as web-conferencing, file-sharing, and screen-sharing among others.

### *3.3. Procedure*

First, the management department of the selected language institute in Rasht (Gilan) was contacted, and the manager of the institute was informed about the general aims of the study. The researchers obtained his approval to carry out the study. Second, they administered the Oxford Placement Test (Allan, 2004) to the English learners of the institute using Google Forms in 70 minutes and selected 400 intermediate-level English learners (i.e., 200 males & 200 females) based on their results on this test.

Third, the researchers obtained written informed consent from the selected participants with the help of Google Forms. Fourth, they administered the Persian version of Bar-On's (1997) EI Inventory to the participants using Google Forms. The participants completed the questionnaire in 30 minutes. Fifth, the researchers used Google forms and the Adobe Connect learning management system to administer the listening comprehension test. More specifically, they used Google Forms to provide the English learners with the answer sheet for the listening comprehension test. Furthermore, they used the learning management system to share the audio files of the listening comprehension test of the study. The participants answered the listening comprehension test items in 40 minutes. Finally,

the researchers used Google Forms to give the achievement test of the study. The learners finished this test in 40 minutes. The above-mentioned tests and questionnaires were all distributed, and the needed data were gathered in two weeks (i.e., 2 instruments per week). The researchers used SPSS 20 to analyze the data.

## 4. Results

The preliminary analysis of the data showed that they met all the requirements of the *parametric* tests since they were collected independently, interval, and normally distributed. Based on these findings, the researchers used the Pearson product-moment correlation test and independent-samples t-test to answer the research questions.

The first question examined the relationships between male and female EFL learners' EI and their listening ability. Thus, the Pearson product-moment correlation test was run to determine the relationship between the above-mentioned variables. Table 1 provides the results of this test.

Table 1: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between Male EFL Learners' EI and Listening Comprehension

|  |  | EI | Listening Comprehension |
|---|---|---|---|
| EI | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .840 |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) |  | .000 |
|  | N | 200 | 200 |
| Listening Comprehension | Pearson Correlation | .840 | 1 |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |  |
|  | N | 200 | 200 |

According to Table 1, male participants' EI correlated significantly and positively (Pallant, 2007) with their listening skill (r=.840, n = 200, p < .05).

Furthermore, the researchers utilized the Pearson product-moment correlation test to examine the association between the female learners' EI and listening comprehension, the results of which are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation between Female Participants' EI and Listening Comprehension

|  |  | EI | Listening Comprehension |
|---|---|---|---|
| EI | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .866 |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) |  | .000 |
|  | N | 200 | 200 |
| Listening Comprehension | Pearson Correlation | .866 | 1 |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |  |
|  | N | 200 | 200 |

According to Table 2, female participants' EI correlated significantly and positively with their listening skill (r=. 866, n= 200, p < .05).

The second research question of the study investigated the relationship between male and female EFL learners' EI and their language achievement. To analyze the data, the Pearson product-moment correlation test was run, the results of which for the male learners are shown below:

Table 3: Correlation between Male EFL Learners' EI and Language Achievement

|  |  | EI | Language Achievement |
|---|---|---|---|
| **EI** | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .850 |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) |  | .000 |
|  | N | 200 | 200 |
| **Language Achievement** | Pearson Correlation | .850 | 1 |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |  |
|  | N | 200 | 200 |

According to Table 3, male participants' EI correlated significantly and positively with their language achievement (r=. 850, n= 200, p < .05). Moreover, the researchers utilized the Pearson product-moment correlation test to determine the association between female English learners' EI and language achievement. Table 4 shows the results of this test:

Table 4: Correlation between Female EFL Learners' EI and Language Achievement

|  |  | EI | Language Achievement |
|---|---|---|---|
| **EI** | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .867 |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) |  | .000 |
|  | N | 200 | 200 |
| **Language Achievement** | Pearson Correlation | .867 | 1 |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |  |
|  | N | 200 | 200 |

As shown in Table 4, female participants' EI correlated positively and significantly with their language achievement (r=. 867, n= 200, p < .05). Finally, the third research question of the study made an attempt to determine the possible differences between male and female EFL learners with regard to EI, listening comprehension, and language achievement. To reach this aim, three independent-sample t-tests were run in order to determine the differences between male and female English learners in terms of the above-mentioned variables. First, the researchers compared the male and female English learners' EI, the results of which are provided in Table 5.

Table 5: Comparison between Male and Female EFL Learners' Performances on the EI Questionnaire

| E I | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male Learners | 200 | 295.54 | 57.909 | 4.095 |
| Female Learners | 200 | 320.11 | 77.657 | 5.491 |

Table 5 shows that the female EFL learners performed better on the EI questionnaire (M=320.11), compared with the male EFL learners (M=295.54). To be sure of the significant difference, the researchers used an independent-samples t-test to analyze the data. The results of this test are presented in Table 6.

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Table 6: Independent-Samples t-test results of Gender Differences on the EI Questionnaire

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Equal variances assumed | 83.447 | .626 | -3.587 | 398 | .000 | -24.570 | 6.850 | -38.036 | -11.104 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | -3.587 | 368.04 | .000 | -24.570 | 6.850 | -38.040 | -11.100 |

According to Table 6, female participants' EI differed significantly from the male participants' EI (p=.000). Second, the researchers compared the male and female English learners' listening comprehension. Table 7 provides the statistics for this question:

Table 7: Comparing the performances of Male and Female EFL Learners' on the Listening Test

| Listening Comprehension | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male EFL Learners | 200 | 16.82 | 4.793 | .339 |
| Female EFL Learners | 200 | 17.56 | 4.737 | .335 |

According to Table 7, the female EFL learners performed better on the listening comprehension test (M=17.56) than male EFL learners (M=16.82). Nonetheless, an independent-samples t-test was utilized to check whether the difference is significant or not. The results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Independent-Samples t-test Results Comparing Male and Female EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Equal variances assumed | .194 | .660 | -1.553 | 398 | .121 | -.740 | .477 | -1.677 | .197 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | -1.553 | 397.94 | .121 | -.740 | .477 | -1.677 | .197 |

According to Table 8, female participants' listening skill did not differ significantly from the male participants' listening skill (p=.121). Lastly, the researchers compared the male and female English learners' language achievement. Table 9 provides the statistics related to this sub-question.

Table 9: Comparison of the  Language Achievement of Male and Female EFL Learners

| Language Achievement | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male EFL Learners | 200 | 17.63 | 5.003 | .354 |
| Female EFL Learners | 200 | 19.74 | 5.954 | .421 |

According to Table 9, the female EFL learners (M=19.74) outperformed male EFL learners (M=17.63) on the language achievement test. To check better, the researchers used an independent-samples t-test to see if this difference is significant. . The results are shown in Table 10 below.

Table 10: Independent-Samples t-test Results for Language Achievement Test

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower | Upper |
| Equal variances assumed | 25.465 | .608 | -3.828 | 398 | .000 | -2.105 | .550 | -3.186 | -1.024 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | -3.828 | 386.51 | .000 | -2.105 | .550 | -3.186 | -1.024 |

According to Table 10, female participants' language achievement differed significantly from the male participants' language achievement (p=.000).

## 5. Discussion

Looking for the relationship between male and female English learners' EI and listening comprehension, the researchers came up with a significant positive correlation between the above-mentioned variables. In general, these results corroborate those of the studies by Rahimi, Sadighi, and Hosseiny Fard (2011) and Esmaeeli, Khalili Sabet, and Shahabi (2018). They have underlined the existence of positive correlations between English learners' EI and their speaking skill and reading skill. In other words, these studies have shown that higher levels of EI are correlated with higher levels of language skill development.

According to Costa and Faria (2015), the characterization of EI as an ability highlights the fact that all individuals (i.e., males and females) are capable to exert conscious control on their emotions for adapting themselves to the requirements of the pertinent situational contexts. As they explained, individuals possessing higher levels of EI develop a capacity to regulate their aroused emotions in a certain way which expedites their cognitive processing. They concluded that the individuals' increased rate of information processing facilitates their development of diverse skills including language skills. Likewise, Li, Raja, and Sazalie (2015) pointed out that the people who are more emotionally intelligent in comparison with other individuals are able to harness their negative feelings in difficult situations and nullify their impact on their performance. They stated that these individuals gain ascendency over their peers due mainly to the fact that they are able to overcome the disadvantages of negative emotions by turning them into a psychological advantage which ameliorates their cognitive processing in different circumstances.

Considering the above-mentioned discussion of the EI, in the present study, male and female EFL learners' EI was positively correlated with their listening skill since their EI empowered them to regulate their negative emotions in the context of the classroom which stemmed partially from their language learning anxiety. Moreover, their EI provided them with the opportunity to capitalize on their aroused emotions in order to facilitate the processing of the auditory sensory information of the target language to develop an acceptable level of listening skill in their classes.

Examining the relationships between male and female EFL learners' EI and their language achievement, the researchers found significant positive correlations between the said attributes. These results partially substantiate the arguments of previous literature including  Ahmadi Safa (2013), Rafieyan, Sharafi-Nejad, Damavand, Eng and Mohamed (2014), Rahimi Domakani, Mirzaei, and Zeraatpisheh (2014), Shirazi and Nadoushani (2016), and Derakhshan, Eslami and Ghandhari (2021). They all reported the existence of positive relationships between English learners' EI and their pragmatic knowledge of the target language which constitutes a section of language achievement.

 Mérida-López and Extremera (2017) pointed out that all male and female individuals who enjoy high levels of EI are cognizant of their innate abilities and are able to evaluate the effectiveness of their performance in diverse circumstances. As he noted, these individuals conduct a preliminary appraisal of their pertinent abilities, develop plans on the basis of their initial evaluation, implement their formulated plans, and appraise the results of their endeavors in the pertinent situational contexts. Similarly, Zhang, Li, Zhao, Xing, Chen, Tian, and Tang (2016) noted that higher levels of EI sway individuals' opinions of their self-efficacy. More specifically, as they pointed out, emotionally intelligent individuals tend to have positive perspectives on their abilities to perform their tasks and achieve their objectives. They concluded that EI might be associated with improved performance in both academic and occupational contexts.

On the basis of the above-mentioned, it is safe to say that the participants' EI and language achievement were positively related due largely to the fact that the learners' EI prompted them to evaluate their knowledge of the language they are learning, determine their weaknesses in its various aspects, develop and implement plans to overcome their specified weaknesses, and appraise their ultimate performance in the context of the classroom. Furthermore, the learners' EI ameliorated their self-appraisal, changed their mistaken perceptions of language learning, and motivated them to carry out the language learning tasks in a satisfactory way.

The next aim of the study was to search for the significant differences between male and female EFL learners' EI, listening comprehension, and language achievement. The obtained results indicated that the female learners showed higher EI than the male learners, underscoring the results of the studies by Joseph and Newman (2010), Christov-Moore, Simpson, Coudé, Grigaityte, Iacoboni, and Ferrari (2014), and Thompson and Voyer (2014).

Kret and De Gelder (2012) averred that the individuals' EI encompasses their social cognition. According to them, social cognition refers to the individuals' flair for the perception of their peers' emotions and behavior in various contexts. They explained that females tend to be more sensitive to their peers' emotions in comparison with males. That is, females are more competent than males in terms of understanding their peers' feelings and modifying their behavior based on their perceptions of the relevant emotions. Moreover, Thompson and Voyer (2014) stated that, in general, females feel greater empathy with their peers in diverse contextual situations in comparison with males. They explained that empathy refers to the degree to which a person has the capacity to understand other individuals' feelings and constitutes a major sub-component of EI. As they concluded, females' greater empathy results in their higher level of EI in comparison with males during their normal course of life.

For one thing, the female English learners might have shown greater EI than the male English learners since their higher level of social cognition empowered them to modify their behavior on the basis of their peers' feelings. Moreover, these learners showed greater empathy with their peers and established supportive relationships with them.

Moreover, the obtained results showed that there was not a significant difference between the male and female learners' listening ability, approving of the results of the studies by Ansyari and Rahmi (2016) and Poorebrahim and Shadman (2022) which have reported insignificant differences between male and female English learners' listening comprehension. Milla and Gutierrez-Mangado (2019) pointed out that slight differences exist between certain parts of males' and females' brains which are involved in the process of listening comprehension. Nonetheless, as he explained, these differences do not have a major impact on the males' and females' listening ability. According to him, the differences in the learners' language skills are likely to stem from contextual factors including the learning materials and the adopted approach to language instruction along with their individual differences such as their cognitive styles, learning styles, and personality factors among others.

Considering the above-mentioned issue, the lack of significant difference between male and female English learners' listening comprehension stemmed from the fact that they had developed roughly equal cognitive skills and were able to process the auditory input of the target language in an effective way.

Finally, it was indicated that female English learners' language achievement was greater than that of male learners. In general, these results lend support to studies conducted by Murphy (2010) and Gtowka (2014) which have shown that female English learners reach higher levels of language achievement than male English learners. Supriyadi, Mayuni, and Lustyantie (2019) reasoned that, in general, female English learners are more cautious about using accurate second language forms in comparison with male learners. As he explained, most female learners regard errors as indications of their low level of intellectual ability and make an effort to develop a native-like interlanguage by learning and using different vocabulary items and grammatical structures.

Given these, it can be argued that female English learners' language achievement was higher than the male learners' achievement since they were warier of using erroneous second language forms and strived to use the target language in a native-like way by learning and using diverse forms of the target language.

## 6. Conclusion and Implications

This study made an endeavor to find the probable relationships between male and female English learners' EI and their listening ability and language achievement. Furthermore, it investigated the differences between these learners' EI, listening comprehension, and language achievement. The results highlighted the existence of significant positive correlations between the above-mentioned variables. Furthermore, on the basis of the results, female learners showed greater EI and reached a higher level of language achievement in comparison with male learners. Nonetheless, the male learners' listening skill was as effective as the female learners' listening skill.

The following tentative conclusions can be made on the basis of the results. Firstly, it can be argued that there is a need to redress and revitalize the teacher education courses in foreign language learning contexts including the EFL context of Iran. The close scrutiny of these courses indicates that most of them have been developed to familiarize prospective teachers with efficient teaching strategies and techniques which expedite the learning of diverse language skills and aspects. Notwithstanding, these courses do not provide the language teachers with information on the learner factors including EI and gender. That is, they do not make the language teachers cognizant of the fact that learner differences might greatly sway the language learning process happening in the context of the classroom. Consequently, there is a need to provide both the pre-service and in-service language teachers with a module in the teacher education courses in which they can obtain adequate information on the learner factors (Wulandari, Harahap, & Hati, 2019). For instance, these courses can raise the teachers' awareness of the consequential role of EI in improving the language skills of the learners (e.g., listening) and their language achievement. Likewise, the relevant courses can draw the teachers' attention to the existing differences between boy and girl learners' EI and can prompt them to formulate and implement specific strategies to deal with the impact of these differences on their learners' acquisition of the various aspects of the target language (Rukthong & Brunfaut, 2020).

Second, the EFL syllabus designers should revise the existing teacher manuals in order to provide the language teachers (especially the teachers who have not majored in language-related fields) with sufficient information on learner factors such as EI and gender among others. A perusal of the teacher manuals underlines the fact that they focus on practical considerations in the context of the classroom and disregard the theoretical discussions of language teaching and learning. Therefore, it is suggested that EFL syllabus designers include sufficient information on the learner factors including the affective factors in the pertinent manuals to empower the teachers to facilitate and expedite their learners' acquisition of the target language (Rukthong & Brunfaut, 2020). For instance, the manuals can make the teachers cognizant of the sub-components of EI and the underlying differences between male and female learners regarding this effective factor. The teachers' understanding of these differences may empower them to provide their learners with equal opportunities to learn the target language.

Finally, language teachers need to take advantage of the results of the relevant research studies including the present study in order to obtain accurate and useful information on learner factors including EI and gender. A large number of language teachers are obsessed with the use of efficient language instruction strategies and utilize various pedagogical techniques in disregarding the learner factors which influence the effectiveness of their practices. Therefore, it can be stated that EFL teachers need to take into account the differences among their learners in order to expedite their language acquisition (Payant & Kim, 2019). For instance, teachers can draw their learners' attention to the fact that their self-awareness, empathy, self-regulation, social skills, and motivation fulfill consequential roles in their development of language skills including the listening skill.

Like any other study, this study also suffers from a number of limitations and delimitations since it did not involve learners from different age groups and language backgrounds. Moreover, it focused on the English learners in the language institute settings. Future studies need to deal with these limitations and delimitations. More specifically, these studies have to involve larger samples from various age groups and language backgrounds. Furthermore, they should examine the relationships between the learners' EI and other language skills (e.g., reading) and aspects (e.g., vocabulary) that were not examined in this study. Moreover, these studies can focus on the relationships between the other learner factors such as motivation, attitudes, personality factors, and learner beliefs and different language skills. In addition, future studies should take advantage of qualitative and mixed-methods research designs in order to delve deeply into language learners' EI in both second and foreign-language learning contexts. Finally, future studies have to be conducted in other language-learning settings including universities and schools.

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