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Research Paper

EFL Learners' Construction of L2 Ego and Its Relationship With Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract

The present study mainly aimed at determining the association between emotional intelligence (EI) and L2 ego components. In so doing, initially, to develop a measure to evaluate L2 ego, a sample of 9 university teachers was interviewed, and a pool of 126 English-major undergraduate students responded to the questionnaire designed by the researchers. The result of intercoder reliability proved satisfactory, and structural equation modeling (SEM) confirmed support for the factor structure of the measures. The final validated questionnaire included 3 factors and 16 items. The results of SEM showed that there was a moderate positive relationship between L2 ego and EI. The statistical analyses indicated that among L2 ego components, personality traits and cognitive styles made significant contributions to explaining EI. In the end, the interplay between L2 ego components, ego boundaries, and emotions is discussed, and the potentially helpful implications are offered for EFL learners and teachers.

Keywords: Cognitive Styles; Emotional Intelligence (EI); L2 Ego; Personality Traits.

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, a considerable amount of literature has underscored the theme of identity and ego in the learning and teaching of the English language (Dastgoshadeh & Ghafarsamar, 2013; Dörnyei, 2005; Norton, 1997). Likewise, some researchers have shown a growing interest in the role of language ego, as a major barrier to second language acquisition (SLA) (Choi et al., 2020; Ehrman 1993; Razmjoo & Neissi, 2010). To be more specific, the concept of language ego was, initially, proposed by Guiora, Brannon, and Dull (1972) to give an explanation for the identity an individual creates concerning the language he or she speaks. Meanwhile, Ehrman (1999) put emphasis on the significance of language ego in conducting research on learners who have thin (permeable) and thick (not as permeable) ego boundaries. Brown (2014) declares, "the openness, vulnerability and ambiguity tolerance of those with thin ego boundaries create different pathways to success from those with hard-driving, systematic, perfectionist thick ego boundaries" (p. 159). Wang (2020) pinpointed that a positive L2 ego can accelerate learning English and a negative language ego, particularly inhibition, can slow down learning English. Despite its theoretical importance and potential appeal, there has been much debate on the construct of ego, its measurement, and its effectiveness in the field of education. Indeed, as the L2 ego calls the attention of professionals in SLA, there is a need for a thorough interpretation of this concept and its potential.

In addition, previous studies have demonstrated solid evidence of the role that different kinds of intelligence play in enhancing second language learning (Modarresi & Jeddy, 2018; Petrides & Mavroveli, 2018). Generally, intelligence refers to "one's mental capacity with a heightened emphasis on reasoning, problem-solving, and abstract thinking" (Pishghadam et al., 2020, p. 176). The existing literature shows that there has been a shift of focus on intelligence, starting from psychometric intelligence (Galton, 1879) to EI (Bar-On, 1988) and then to sensory intelligence (SI) (Lombard, 2007). As explained by Galton (1879), psychometric intelligence was mainly concerned with cognitive abilities leading to achievement in education, demonstrating that those who possess a high level of intelligence quotient



(IQ) most likely had better performance in the classroom. Although Goleman (1995) maintained that emotional quotient (EQ) is of greater value than IQ because it influences cognitive faculties and conducts one's behaviors, the empirical research into EL suggests that the concept has multiple interpretations, entailing a wide range of non-cognitive abilities and skills that could develop one's ability in the learning process. Later, it was most probably since the work of Lombard (2007) that the role of senses was incorporated into the study of intelligence who developed the notion of Sensory Quotient (SQ), referring to the direct focus on basic sensory wiring of our brain, dominates IQ and EQ. More recently, Pishghadam et al. (2020) introduced the concept of emo-sensory intelligence (ESI), defined as the mental awareness of emotions elicited by sensory inputs, to make a compromise between SQ and EQ.

A large number of published studies show that EI has received much attention in the research literature (e.g., Brackett & Katulak, 2007; Zhale, Ghonsooly, & Pishghadam, 2018; Mavrou & Dewaele, 2020). Accordingly, a substantial amount of literature has been focused on the possible effects of ego on SLA in the literature (Kaly & Heesacker, 2003; Schwartz et al., 2000). For example, Winnicott (2007) declared that the ego of the students can assist them in taking the risks necessary in the act of acquiring new knowledge and skills. Indeed, L2 learners who can overcome unconscious ego defences are more willing to engage in challenging tasks (Bainbridge & Del Negro, 2020). Nevertheless, relatively little research has been carried out on the relationship between EL and language ego in the educational setting (Chio & Son, 2017). It seems that the debate requires further investigation in order to throw light on our understanding of the nature of language ego and to reflect on the relationship of ego development with a variety of interacting factors in relevance to foreign language learning such as willingness to communicate, enjoyment, engagement, and grit. Despite the importance of language ego, teachers and learners are not well aware of the nature of language ego and possible affective factors such as EI that affect it. Whereas in the last two decades, scholars have drawn attention to the importance of the ego processes of students (Goldstein, 2003; Harklau, 2000), the role of teachers' perspectives in identifying the factors that shape L2 ego has been underrated (see Reeves, 2009). For this reason, the present study delved into the components that constitute the L2 ego from the teachers' perspectives. It is most plausible that various factors emerge when the teachers use their experience, and their analytic and creative minds to reflect on the L2 ego that is deemed to influence success or failure in learning a new language. Indeed, consistent with the emergence of constructivist and transformational views of teacher education (Crooks, 2013), teacher professional identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) can continue to play crucial roles in discovering the factors involved in EFL learners' construction of L2 ego. Although the relationship between meaning-making, ego formation, and transformative learning has already been developed (Illeris, 2014), the present study offers some important insights into L2 teaching because the attention to L2 ego, including thin and thick ego boundaries, would provide teachers with a valuable source of information to identify and address the ego that their students develop based on which they can create the most favorable emotional atmosphere in the class for them to actively participate and engage in completing the learning tasks. Indeed, developing a positive ego would help students manage their emotions, foster their perseverance, and elevate their levels of engagement because cognition without emotion would not lead to successful progress. To the best knowledge of the researchers, there is a paucity of research in the Iranian context to identify the indicators and constructs of ego in a second language environment from the teachers' perspectives. While language ego mainly focuses on personality and cognitive factors and EI is built upon emotions, this study would create a strong connection between cognition and emotion, putting the two concepts together in order to cast some light on the psychological aspects of EFL learners.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language Ego

Although the notion of language identity has been extensively studied in various fields, such as traditional psychoanalytic school and educational studies (Ehrman, 1998), there is a relatively small body of literature that is concerned with language ego in the field of SLA (Brown, 2014; Guiora, 1994; Schwartz et al., 2000). In their seminal work, Guiora, Brannon, and Dull (1972) suggested the notion of language ego to refer to the identity an individual develops with respect to the language he or she speaks. Whereas adequate considerations emerged from the analytical and qualitative description of language ego (Schwartz et al., 2000), some scholars explored the idea of second language learners developing an L2 ego and called for novel approaches to ego (e.g., Peirce, 1995; Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001). For Pierce (1995), learners experience some degree of ego conflict while facing individuals from other cultural groups. In the same vein, Philips (1991) commented that due to the stressful atmosphere of second language learning, a positive

language ego would assist students to alleviate anxiety and overcome inhibition. In this regard, Tavakkoli et al. (2014) examined the effect of ego types on EFL learners' language proficiency, and they concluded that the achieved ego types were more successful in learning the language than those with foreclosed and diffused ego types. By the same token, Wang (2020) explicated the association between the L1 ego and the L2 ego, and he concluded that at the early stages of learning, Learners' L2 ego may pose many threats to their native language ego, and learners may resist participating in the L2 communication. Quite recently, in their study on bilingual adults, Choi et al. (2020) examined how affective variables including ego-resilience, motivation, and linguistic confidence predict problem-solving skills and found that ego-resilience and linguistic confidence made the strongest contributions to the performance of language-based problem-solving skills. Much of the related literature on language ego addressed the association of ego development with cognitive factors and personality traits whereas there are other important factors in relation to language ego such as environmental factors (Winnicott, 2007).

Furthermore, to our best knowledge, previous studies have failed to design an inventory for measuring L2 ego in the context of second language learning. Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel, and Geisinger (1995) developed a questionnaire on the identity process based on which identity types are categorized into four different groups: diffused, foreclosed, moratorium, and achieved. Razmjoo and Neissi (2010) utilized this questionnaire and found that the association between identity type and language proficiency including its subconstructs entailing grammar, vocabulary, and reading were positive and significant. In the Iranian context, Dastgoshadeh and Ghafarsamar (2013) developed a new framework for language teacher identity to determine the underlying traits of L2 identities of EFL teachers; however, it was mainly about the identity process and commitment rather than the L2 ego. However, previous studies in the Iranian context have failed to demonstrate any convincing evidence of the role of the L2 ego in the EFL environment; therefore, a major concern is a lack of measurement clarity regarding L2 ego influencing theory and research in this regard that leads to the question of what facets constitute L2 ego.

2.2 Emotional Intelligence

Historically, research investigating EI traces back to the 1970s and 1980s (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Although the related literature has witnessed a great conflict over the distinction between EI and IQ, Goleman (1998) has proposed that EI can be as powerful as IQ, and in comparison to IQ, EI can be taught and improved. Whereas the related literature indicates that EI has a significant relationship with various aspects of L2 performance (Abdolrezaei, 2017), according to Dewaele (2018), research into the role of EI in SLA is "quite scarce" (p. 472). Just recently, Li, Huang, and Li (2021) examined the predictive role of the classroom environment and trait EI in L2 enjoyment and anxiety and figured out that trait EI and classroom environment significantly predicted L2 enjoyment and anxiety. To be more specific, according to Schmiedek and Li (2015), intelligence has a multifaceted nature, and it is necessary to transcend cognitive abilities (Cherniss, 2004). Likewise, Petrides and Mavroveli (2018) found that there was a statistically significant relationship between EI and cognitive, affective, and metacognitive factors. Furthermore, Gil-Orlarte, Palomera and Brackett (2006) found that the association between learners' EI and their educational success was positive. By the same token, Brackett and Salovey (2007) designed an emotional literacy program to improve learners' emotion-related skills, and they found that the program could promote abstract reasoning and reflective learning. Unlike most of the previous cross-sectional studies that focused on the linkage between EI and several other variables without being specifically considered for language learners, Costa and Faria (2015), in their longitudinal research, figured out that EI could significantly predict students' academic achievement. More recently, Li and Li (2018) examined whether ego-resilience could moderate the association between EI and nursing performance and concluded that ego development enhances EI. Although the related literature has demonstrated the importance of cognitive and affective factors with respect to EI (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2016), Petrides and Mavroveli (2018) call for factors such as socioeconomic status in conducting research into EI. In addition, whereas important cross-sectional studies suggest an association between EI and other language-related factors in an L2 environment (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020), the related literature has not addressed the linkage between L2 ego and EI in an EFL situation.

In the Iranian context, in their experimental study, Fahim and Pishghadam (2007) demonstrated a positive association between learners' academic success and subconstructs of EI including stress management, intrapersonal, and general mood competencies. Additionally, placing critical thinking within the framework of EI, Ghanizadeh and Moafian (2010) confirmed that EI performs a facilitative role in increasing EFL learners' critical thinking ability. Rahimi

Domakani, Mirzaei, and Zeraatpisheh (2014) concluded that there was a positive association between the students' pragmatic performance and EI dimensions. Furthermore, Abdolrezaipoor (2016) observed a positive relationship between L2 learners' trait EI and their oral fluency. Recently, rooted in emotioncy (Pishghadam, 2015) and sense-induced emotions (Pishghadam, Jajarmi, & Shayesteh, 2016), Pishghadam et al. (2020) developed and validated an inventory on ESI and the results of sophisticated statistics generated six models for the senses including the scale that evaluates recognition, labeling, monitoring, and management. Just recently, Gholami, Pishghadam, and Shayesteh (2021) validated the emosensory competence questionnaire and found that cognitive topics are negative predictors of L2 speaking ability. The researchers of the present study opted for the theoretical underpinning developed by Berzonsky (1990) for identity development including three dimensions: the environmental dimension, personality dimension, and cognitive dimension. The amalgamation of these factors helps students to adopt approaches that remove the barriers posed by external events (Berzonsky, 1990).

2.3 Purpose of the Study

Indeed, an attempt to discover the factors that shape the different constructs of ego for EFL students sheds light on the different aspects of SLA entailing students' cognitive and affective orientations of learning practices. Digging deep into language ego, as the very egoistic nature of SLA (Ehrman, 1996), could yield valuable information on the positive language ego that facilitates learning and the negative language ego that impedes learning, and teachers, by drawing on their "context sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs" (Borg, 2003, p. 81), can provide substantial help in this regard. Teachers, in fact, can perform a constructive role in identifying and clarifying the important factors contributing to ego development since they have face-to-face interaction with the learners in a classroom context. Taken together, the researchers aimed to construct a measure to evaluate the L2 ego. In this regard, they, initially, tried to identify the factors and indicators that shape the L2 ego for Iranian EFL learners. Finally, the study hypothesized that the components of L2 ego are related to EI for EFL learners in the Iranian context. Overall, the following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. What factors mainly shape the L2 ego from the perspectives of university teachers?
2. Does the questionnaire of L2 ego for Iranian EFL Learners meet the psychometric properties of reliability and validity?
3. How much of the variance in EI could be explained by L2 ego components?

3. Method

The current study followed a quantitatively dominant sequential mixed-methods research including a qualitative phase (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). To be more exact, the study began with a qualitative approach, using a semistructured interview, to discover the commonalities elicited from university teachers' responses about the different components and contents of L2 ego. Following this step, the study followed a quantitative approach, employing rigorous statistics, to design and validate the questionnaire of L2 Ego based on factor analysis and SEM statistical methods.

3.1 Participants

At first, to discover the university teachers' views on the different factors and contents of L2 ego, the researchers opted for a criterion-based sampling method to choose the sample for the first phase of the study. In doing so, they set the standards needed to pursue the objectives of the current study and looked for the participants who met those exact requirements (Le Compete & Preissle, 1993). The standard specified for this phase included: (a) Being an English university teacher, (b) Holding a *PhD* degree in the English language, and (c) Having experience in publishing scientific papers on teaching and learning English. Altogether, a pool of nine individuals from different universities including Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, University of Neyshabour, University of Bojnord, Islamic Azad University of Mashhad, and Islamic Azad University of Quchan took part in the interview phase of the study. The sample size seemed to be adequate because, according to Dörnyei (2007), an interview study with a sample size of 6 to 10 might work well. Moreover, after the new questionnaire was developed, 126 participants majoring in English Language Teaching, English Literature, and English Translation who were junior and senior students (females: $n = 74$, 58.70%; males: $n = 52$, 41.30%; Mean age = 21.39, $SD = 1.05$) joined in the final piloting phase based on availability sampling.

3.2 Instruments

The first instrument used to identify the teachers' opinions about factors contributing to EFL learners' L2 ego included four interview open-ended questions (see Appendix A) based on which they participated in face-to-face interview sessions, through which the researchers were engaged in the process of asking questions from and listening to the interviewees (Dörnyei, 2007). As for the content validity of the interview questions, the researchers carried out a pilot study through which 4 nonparticipating participants were required to provide feedback on the interview questions. Further revisions were made based on their comments on the wording of the questions.

The second instrument used to measure students' new language ego was the questionnaire of L2 Ego for Iranian EFL learners developed and validated especially for the aim of this study. In so doing, the results that emerged from the content analysis of the interviews, along with the previous related literature, supplied the contents of the questionnaire items. The questionnaire included a 5-Likert scale with strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, and strongly agree.

The last instrument used to measure the EI of EFL learners was the Emotional Intelligence Scale which evaluates EI based on self-report responses to 33 items with six components including the appraisal of emotion in the self, appraisal of emotion in others, emotional expression, emotional regulation of the self, emotional regulation of others, and utilization of emotions in problem-solving (Schutte et al., 1998). The questionnaire has a five-point rating scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) so that the one who chooses strongly agree has the greatest level of EI. The reliability index of the scale, as determined by Cronbach's alpha, is .83.

3.3 Procedure

The relevant data for the interviews with university teachers were collected during 4 weeks from September 2019 to October 2019. Each of the interviews was a bit different in length because the researchers tried to ask questions from each participant to the extent that his or her responses give no more new information (Dörnyei, 2007). The contents of the questions entailed the respondents' familiarity with the identity and ego, factors affecting thick/thin ego boundaries, the relation between ego development and other cognitive, affective and intellectual factors, and finally the interplay between ego development and emotional factors. The researchers already arranged the appointments with the participants, informing them about the purpose of the study.

The present study followed a clear procedure entailing three steps to provide support for the psychometric properties of the questionnaire. Initially, the question items were constructed, using the information collected from the interviews and the previous related literature on the issue. Second, as the initial piloting, two individuals, who specialized in testing and assessment, were asked to pinpoint the problems with the content and clarity of the items. Third, obtaining feedback from them, the researchers conducted the final piloting phase in which the questionnaire of L2 ego was administered to 126 students from November 2019 to January 2020. Finally, the data gathered from the validated questionnaire was used to determine how much of the variable in EI can be explained by L2 ego components.

3.4 Data Analysis

To analyze the relevant data for the first objective of the study concerning the factors shaping L2 ego, the researchers opted for a theme-based procedure (Dörnyei, 2007) to classify the answers obtained from the interviewees. The inter-rater agreement and inter-rater reliability for coded transcripts were also taken care of. It is worth mentioning that the intercoder agreement necessitates the two coders agreeing to a discussion (Garrison et al., 2006). Moreover, to assure the intercoder reliability, both coders need to choose the same code for the same unit of text (Krippendorff, 2004). The reliability of the questionnaire, along with its subconstructs, was estimated by Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. The construct validity of the underlying constructs of the questionnaire was explored using Factor Analysis. Thereafter, goodness-of-fit indices determined the validity of the measurement model (Kline, 2011). Finally, to determine the association between EI and L2 ego components, the researchers performed multiple regression.

4. Results

4.1 Results Emerging From the Content Analysis of the Interviews With the Teachers

To find the answer to the first research question of the study regarding the main factors that shape the L2 ego from the teachers' perspectives, the researchers constructed semistructured open-ended questions, employing theme-based categorization, to analyze data (Dörnyei, 2007). Some of the statements made by the teachers along with the researchers' brief explanations are reported below:

Teachers mentioned that important factors are related to the L2 ego which occupies a major role in the successful learning of a second language. Meanwhile, they noted that some factors create barriers to learning such as anxiety, shyness, and distress. One of them said:

Some students are uncomfortable in the classroom, and they find communication with their teachers hard because of extreme shyness, and among other things, the second language environment creates greater stress for them.

Moreover, teachers believed that students who are more adaptive and active are more willing to do challenging tasks and have higher self-efficacy. To them, language ego can be both a facilitator and a barrier for students, and adaptive students can lower the inhibitions that may impede success. Another teacher mentioned:

Students who take wise risks and are willing to interact with the teacher inside and outside the classroom use language more effectively. To my mind, the creation of a friendly context can provide students with opportunities to express their voices freely and enhance their L2 ego.

It seems that teachers can create a context to help students enhance their new identity while speaking in a second language. The classroom context can become inspiring and motivating for them. The results that emerged from the teachers' responses indicated that engaged students generally show disinhibited behavior, but disengaged students typically show inhibited behaviors. The teachers pinpointed that students with thick ego boundaries pay more attention to accuracy but they do not dare to generate a sentence until they are sure of its accuracy, and students with thin ego boundaries have a tendency to speak fluently. Yet, the dynamic nature of language ego can assist students to modify their inhibited behavior. Finally, teachers noted that some students would like to find the answers to the questions themselves while doing challenging tasks, and they do not hesitate to engage in problem-solving activities, deploying learning strategies that work best for them.

Following this, the researchers, using thematic analysis, elicited the common themes that emerged from the responses. To assure the intercoder reliability, having coded the data, the researcher provided the second author with the data to code. Thereafter, the second person coded the responses by eliciting the commonalities and she also formulated rather similar findings with minor differences. Following the guidelines provided by Campbell et al. (2013), the number of coding agreements was divided by the number of agreements and disagreements combined, and they achieved 76 percent interrater reliability. There were 34 common themes that at least one of the coders invoked a code, and of these, there were 26 cases in which both of the two coders invoked the code. Therefore, the level of inter-coder reliability was 76 percent ($26/34=.76$). However, after negotiating discrepancies, the study reached 80 percent inter-coder reliability ($21/26=.80$). The factors from the highest to lowest were as follows: 1) taking risks, 2) inhibition, 3) learning strategies, 4) trying out new structures, 5) analyzing language, 6) openness, 7) social interaction, 8) adapting to new things, 9) absorbing language, 10) self-assessment, 11) communicating with peers, 12) flexibility, 13) bad stress, 14) interest in challenging tasks, 15) commitment, 16) anxiety, 17) trust, 18) class atmosphere, 19) motivation intensity, 20) reflection, and 21) shyness.

4.2 Psychometric Properties of the Questionnaire

To measure the internal consistency of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha was used, and to determine the construct validity of the questionnaire, EFA and SEM were run. In so doing, the reliability of the whole items, including 19 items, was estimated as 0.80. Moreover, the reliability of each of the three underlying factors was also examined as follows: Factor One: 0.86, Factor Two: 0.82, and Factor Three: 0.74. To measure the construct validity of the questionnaire, first of all, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure was checked which was .70 so that it was acceptable. Moreover, the value of Barlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($p = .0005 < .05$), which was acceptable; therefore,

factor analysis was appropriate. During the final piloting of the study, the questionnaire, containing 25 items, was administered to 126 students. Following this, factor analysis was conducted to determine the underlying traits of the questionnaire.

Four factors were extracted from principal component analysis which had eigenvalues more than 1.0 and accounted for 61.16% of the variance. Nineteen items enjoyed loadings of 0.30 or greater on any factor. It means that items 23, 11, 15, and 24 were removed from the questionnaire because their loadings were less than 0.30 on any factor. Furthermore, items 12 and 19 were confronted with the problem of multicollinearity ($r > 0.90$). For this reason, they were also excluded from the questionnaire so the number of items was reduced to 19. Thereafter, the researchers opted for the Scree test to discover the number of factors for rotation. The Scree test illustrated a 3-factor solution to remain for factor rotation. Following this, the factor rotation was run to represent the underlying factor structure.

Table 1. *Components of L2 Ego*

	Component		
	1	2	3
Item 1	.783		
Item 12	.755		
Item 19	.713		
Item 4	.674		
Item 5	.690		
Item 10	.562		
Item 14	.543		
Item 8	.345		
Item 16		.800	
Item 6		.772	
Item 11		.731	
Item 2		.736	
Item 13		.654	
Item 7		.446	
Item 15			.711
Item 9			.659
Item 17			.581
Item 18			.403
Item 3			.321

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

As shown in Table 1, the first factor included 8 items, the second factor included 6 items, and the third factor included 5 items. The whole items, after factor rotation, included 19 items. As the final step of the construct validation process, the results of Amos 20 displayed a reasonable fit to the data. Some modifications were carried out on the model because some measurement models did not indicate adequate model-fit data (see Figure 1). Altogether, three items were removed including 2 items from factor one, and 1 item from factor three because of low loadings. Indeed, after modifications were made, the goodness-of-fit of the model enhanced significantly. χ^2/df was 2.78, smaller than the cutoff point of 3; RMSEA was .074, smaller than .08; and GFI, CFI, and TLI were .92, .92, and .91, respectively, which were more than the cutoff point of .90, following the guidelines provided by Tseng and Schmitt (2008).

As shown in Figure 1, the association between the factors and the items was satisfactory because it was more than .30 and less than .90. As for the association for factors, personality traits and environmental factors had an acceptable correlation of .64; personality traits and cognitive styles had the satisfactory correlation of .51; cognitive styles and environmental factors had the acceptable correlation of .57. Therefore, each pair of these three factors was dependent on each other. Consequently, the final questionnaire comprised three factors and 16 items. Pondering the content of the items, the researchers named these new factors as follows: Factor one: Personality traits, Factor two: Cognitive styles, and Factor three: Environmental factors (see Appendix B).

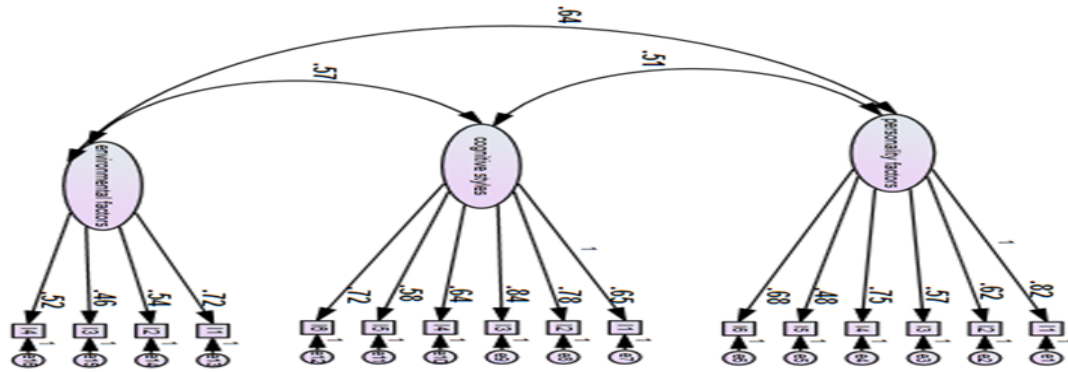


Figure 1. Measurement Model for L2 Ego

4.3 The Association Between EI and L2 Ego Components

As for the third research question of the study regarding how much of the variance in EI could be explained by L2 ego components including personality traits, cognitive styles, and environmental factors, the researchers opted for multiple regression. Initially, the assumption of multicollinearity was checked.

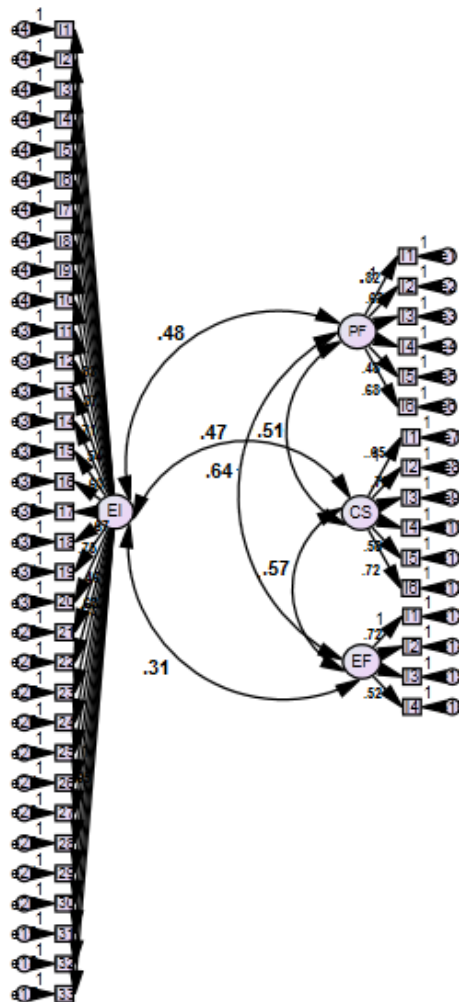


Figure 2. Schematic Representation of Relationships Among Personality Traits, Cognitive Styles, Emotional Factors, and EI

As displayed in Figure 2, the independent variables including personality traits, cognitive styles, and environmental factors indicated at least some relationship with the dependent variable, i.e., EI (above .3 preferably). As for the association for factors, personality traits and EI had an acceptable correlation of .48; cognitive styles and EI had an acceptable correlation of .47, and environmental factors and EI had an acceptable correlation of .31. Moreover, each independent variable displayed a tolerance value of less than .10; therefore, the assumption of multi-collinearity was not violated. The VIF value was also acceptable because it was less than the cut-off of 10. Finally, outliers were also checked by inspecting the Mahalanobis distances. Considering the number of independent variables which were three in this study, the data displayed no violation since the critical value was less than 16.27; here it was 10.77 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

Following this, the researchers checked the r-squared value which displayed how much of the variance in the scores on EI was explained by the model, that is, the components of personality traits, cognitive styles, and environmental factors, and the value was .305. Presented as a percentage (i.e., multiplying by 100), the value indicated that the model, entailing scores on the three components, explained 30 percent of the variance in the scores of EI. Then, an ANOVA test was run to examine the statistical difference in the results. The results of the ANOVA test confirmed that the model made statistical significance ($F = 25.15$, $Sig = .00$, which was less than .05). Finally, to determine which variable(s) were related to EI, the researchers checked the beta value in the Coefficients box of the output.

Table 2. *Multiple Regression Analyses for EL*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
		<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>		
1	(Constant)	90.73	4.19		21.88	.00
	Personality Traits	.67	.20	.30	3.26	.00
	Cognitive Styles	.58	.21	.26	2.74	.00
	Environmental Factors	.37	.29	.10	1.26	.20

As shown in Table 2, the largest beta coefficient was .30, belonging to personality traits. Put another way, this variable made the most substantial contribution to explaining EI, holding all other variables constant. The Beta value was also significant for cognitive styles but not for environmental factors because the Sig value for this variable was .20 which was more than .05; therefore, it made no significant contribution to explaining EI.

5. Discussion

Beginning with a thumbnail sketch of the mainstream of contemporary theories of language ego, and underscoring the involvement of personality, cognitive, and contextual elements in the field (Modarresi, 2021), the researchers maintained that the previous literature on language ego has particularly emphasized personality attributes. Consequently, they tried to put forward a progressive view toward the concept of the L2 ego that encompasses a wider range of factors. Indeed, this study formulated three objectives: to explore teachers' perspectives on factors contributing to L2 ego, to design a questionnaire measuring L2 ego and to determine the association between EI and L2 ego components. To this end, the current study demonstrated that different factors contribute to shaping the L2 ego which was categorized into 21 factors based on the responses that emerged from EFL university teachers. Finally, the results of multiple regression showed that personality traits made the most substantial contribution to explaining EI.

Taking the first objective of the study into account, based on the factors that emerged from teachers' perspectives on the L2 ego, learners can create an in-between ego to find their pathways to success. It seems that cognitive styles such as learning strategies, doing challenging tasks, problem-solving techniques, and trying out new things are more compatible with thick ego boundaries, and having systematic ego boundaries could enable learners to increase their ambiguity tolerance and involve themselves in doing difficult and novel tasks. More involvement arouses positive emotions and less involvement provokes negative emotions in doing the task (Modarresi, 2019). Moreover, the findings of the interviews revealed that learners are more willing to develop a language ego that helps them communicate better with their teachers. Likewise, Hsu's (2009) study showed that Japanese students preferred foreign teachers to Japanese counterparts since they were more pleasant and articulate, whereas equally expecting the foreign teachers to be knowledgeable and respectful.

Concerning the second objective of the study, the obtained results unraveled the underlying traits of the L2 ego in the Iranian context. To be more specific, as of the items comprising L2 ego factors, items loadings on factor one,

including 6 items, deal with students' level of wise risk-taking in the classroom conversation, their tendency to reduce bad stress or distress, coping with inhibition factors, flexibility in receiving feedback for their error critically, adapting themselves to the new culture and new learning environment and materials, and trying to ascribe their failure to such internal factors as lack of endeavor and feel responsible for their failure. Hence, the researchers came up with personality traits as the label for factor one. Items loadings on factor two, entailing 6 items, mainly deal with the ability to do the challenging tasks, learning by doing an experiment and experiential learning that are associated with problem-solving techniques in comparison to doing exercises that are associated with repetition and memorization, learning styles that are nonlinear and fluency-oriented, manifesting thin ego boundary in comparison to learning styles that are linear and accuracy-oriented, representing thick ego boundary. This shows that there are students who are willing to try out new structures and have no fear of being wrong and in favor of learning how to learn paradigms to become independent. Therefore, the researchers came up with cognitive styles as the label for factor two. Items loadings on factor three, consisting of 4 items, are mainly concerned with the classroom atmosphere, the social interaction with the teacher and the peers, the face-to-face interaction versus the distance learning as students who have thick egos prefer not to communicate with others, and the ability of the students to perform well outside the classroom using the new language. Therefore, the researchers came up with the environmental factors as the label for factor three. Inter alia, the obtained results revealed that both internal and external factors are determining L2 ego development and some negative language ego such as inhibition and stress can be regarded as internal threats to one's ego, and this is consistent with the contemporary research works undertaken in language education, highlighting the importance of both internal and external factors from a socio-psychological perspective (e.g., Choi et al., 2020; Tavakkoli et al., 2014).

Regarding the third objective of the study, the present study revealed that personality traits and cognitive styles made significant contributions to explaining EI, highlighting the personality and cognitive dimensions of ego development, as pinpointed by the theoretical underpinning proposed by Berzonsky (1990). Likewise, in his study on a group of Korean students, Hiver (2013) revealed that personality attributes contribute to the development of ego and positive self-image. Indeed, the study confirms that personality attributes and cognitive styles are more associated with EI which is in agreement with the study carried out by Petrides and Mavroveli (2018) who concluded that EI is positively correlated to affective and cognitive factors conducive to learning. The results of the study are also aligned with the existing literature on the linkage between language ego and intelligence such as the work by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009) who proposed an L2 motivational self-system to describe adequately L2 learners' ego enhancement. Finally, taking Iran's emotional, collectivist culture into consideration (Hofstede, 2001), which mainly focuses on emotional values, the present study also found a significant relationship between L2 ego components and EI.

Taken together, the intellectual and emotional development of the L2 ego would enable students to control their negative emotions and provoke their positive emotions because cognition without emotion would not promote learning development. As Goleman (1995) suggested, the concept of emotional illiteracy places mind and heart in proximity in the classroom. This is in line with Swain's (2013) understanding that we have failed to take into account the role of emotions in the process of second language learning. Research on identity over the past few decades demonstrates that it is not country-specific since the researchers have come up with similar patterns in some other countries (see Oyserman & Markus, 2006). This confirms the fact that there is a shared discourse in this respect and such research has external validity. Secondly, the findings can account for the fact that not only internal factors but also external factors are significant with reference to language ego in the context of Iran. Internal factors are manifested in two major constructs, namely personality traits and cognitive styles, and external factors are represented in a major construct entailing the EFL environment. These findings highlight the potential usefulness of both thin and thick ego boundaries in creating a new language ego because a balanced language ego would enable EFL learners to promote their learning development.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study fully embrace the wider perspective of EFL learners' new language ego: their aspirations, inhibitions, and emotions. The attention devoted to the students' development of language ego in their first language settings, especially in family and at school is of great value since students extend their ego while learning a second language. Although it has been documented that measuring language ego factors is a demanding task in second language education (Brown, 2014), this study illustrates that focusing on the mental, emotional, and social lives of the students could uncover the intricacy of socio-psychological issues in SLA. This research has provided a deeper insight

into such theories as Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory that focuses on the balance between cognition and emotion whereas, as remarked by Swain (2013), the western world has focused more on the cognitive side in reference to this theory. This study also strengthens the idea that like previous cross-cultural investigations (Wang, 2020), the present study revealed that among the very possible reasons for language ego, factors such as risk-taking and inhibition predominate. The researchers of the present study, having gathered and scrutinized the relevant information to design and validate the questionnaire, came to the conclusion that all of these variables are determining in learning a new language. Finally, as for the environmental factors, the attention to virtual classes as one of the items for environmental factors deserves more reflection since it can contribute to the creation of a new language ego fostering both speech community and discourse community, taking unpredictable situations such as the spread of pandemic diseases like Coronavirus into consideration.

The study presents a number of implications for EFL learners and teachers in an L2 environment. EFL learners are suggested to benefit from their personality traits and try out new words and structures in the class and participate actively to expand their mental capacity with a focus on problem-solving and abstract thinking and in such ways, they can improve their EI. They are recommended to take wise risks and if they are more reticent, they can write what they want to say and utter their writings. For example, students who have thick egos can become more sociable by participating in English classes that require them to speak in front of others, and in this way, they can decline their shyness, build more confidence and increase their mental capacity. Moreover, teacher as the key influential factors in any educational setting can make use of the shared discourse they have with the students since commonalities with the students would create rapport and mutual comprehension and generating a positive student-teacher relationship help the teachers to work more easily with the students on the second language tasks. In this way, they can help students to foster their positive personality traits and eradicate the negative ones with reference to second language learning and enable learners to regulate their emotions.

Although the present study offers some interesting insights, it has several limitations along with some recommendations for future research. First, care should be taken in terms of the external generalizability of the findings since the sample is not representative of all English-major students at the university level. Second, this study can be extended by examining the relationship of L2 ego and EI with other variables, such as willingness to communicate or learning motivation. Finally, as for the association between L2 ego and EI, a fruitful area for further research can examine the extent to which these variables can contribute to the development of language proficiency so that now the door is open for carrying out in-depth research concerning the role of L2 ego in SLA in order to construct a full picture of ego enhancement about learning a new language.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Semistructured Interview Questions

Dear colleague, I greatly appreciate the time you take to share your experience in this interview. Actually, I am going to undertake a research regarding the factors that shape language ego for Iranian EFL learners. As an English teacher and according to your idea:

1. What do you personally think of the concept of language ego in second language acquisition? What about ego boundary that depicts learners in a continuum from thick to thin personality style.
2. In general, which of the following factors are more important in L2 ego development? Firstly, the personality factors such as self-esteem, anxiety, openness within the language learners themselves or the cognitive styles such as learning strategies and problem-solving? Please extend your idea.
3. What other factors contribute to L2 ego development and enhancement? Please exemplify if there is any real and tangible example of a learner in your mind.
4. Do you ever ask your learners about the bipolarity factors such as why are they either adaptable or unadaptable? Or the alienation between me and the teacher, between the critical me and the performing me? What did they claim?

Appendix B. L2 Ego Components

Personality traits

1. I would like to take the risk of being wrong while speaking in L2.
2. I am willing to participate in the class discussion without distress.
3. I can cope with the inhibition and anxiety of learning a new language.
4. I am open to the critics levelled at me by the teachers.
5. I can adapt myself to new culture or environment.
6. I myself am responsible for my failure in learning a new language.

Cognitive styles

1. I find little difficulty in dealing with challenging tasks.
2. I favor learning through experience than through exercise.
3. I like to try out new words and structures that I am not completely sure of.
4. I would like to analyze the many details of language.
5. I favor learning through problem-solving than through memorization.
6. I prefer to assess myself and learn independently.

Environmental factors

1. The class atmosphere stimulates me to engage in learning English.
2. I prefer virtual classes to regular classes.
3. I feel almost no difficulty in communicating with the teacher.
4. I can find ways to continue language outside the classroom.



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