

Junchao_Junchao_The Critical assessment

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A Critical assessment of the article ‘Trait emotional intelligence and second language performance: a case study of Chinese EFL learners’

Introduction

Inspired by Canadian linguist Swain (2011), emotions or affective factors have received increasing attention in applied linguistics studies over the last decade (Dewaele and Li, 2020). Researchers like Dewaele (2015) and Prior (2019) began to explore different facets of emotions in language learning and teaching, which broadened the study of language from various ‘epistemological’ perspectives (Dewaele and Li, 2020, p. 35). In this unique ‘affective turn’ (Pavlenko, 2013, p. 5), alternative theories, research approaches and methods from psychology and other disciplines began to empower linguists to understand the intricacies of language learning and teaching. Titled ‘Trait emotional intelligence and second language performance : a case study of Chinese EFL learners’ (Chen and Zhang, 2022), the examined article is a typical example of such combinations as it borrowed the concept from psychology: ‘Trait emotional intelligence’ (Trait EI) and aimed to identify its influence on individuals’ second language achievement. This is the reason why I chose this article to critique in the first place since it allows me to explore how scholars approach language learning from an interdisciplinary perspective. The current report will critically assess Chen and Zhang’s study from three aspects: a) theoretical framework; b) methodology; c) discussions and key findings.  1

The theoretical framework of the examined article

Before looking at the details of the article, it is vital to examine the title as a well-crafted title can efficiently guide readers to the research area (Grant, 2013). The title of this article was a commendable example in terms of its conciseness and simplicity. Not only did it present the primary focus (i.e., the influence of Trait EI on L2 achievement) straightforwardly but also clearly indicated the chosen research approach (i.e., the case study). With such a concise title, the authors elaborated their research in a well-organized way. An informative introduction to the study was first presented, followed

by a thorough review of the relevant literature from influential peer-reviewed journals in both psychology and applied linguistics (e.g., *American Psychologist*; *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*).

As an interdisciplinary study, the theoretical framework of Chen and Zhang's research is twofold. On the one hand, it was built on psychologists' assumption that Emotion Intelligence (EI), as an 'indicator' of individuals' emotions and interpersonal ability is crucial to their success (Goleman, 1995). On the other hand, it related to linguists' perceptions that second language learners would experience various emotions like anxiety and enjoyment during the learning process which may either hinder or advance the learning outcomes (Dewaele et al., 2019; Piasecka, 2016). In the literature review, the authors explained the two aspects thoroughly and successfully pinpointed the appropriate theoretical foundations and constructs for the research. First, by reviewing key publications from Petrides, the director of the London Psychometric Laboratory, the authors identified the distinctions between Ability EI and Trait EI, which helped them justify the reasons for choosing Trait EI as the research focus. As argued by Chen and Zhang (2022), compared with Ability EI which focused on individuals' cognitive emotional ability under certain circumstances, Trait EI acknowledged 'the inherent subjectivity of emotional experience' (Petrides, 2017, p.2) and aimed to assess individuals' 'typical performance'. Therefore, from a psychological aspect, Trait EI seemed to be a more reliable and objective construct.

Apart from examining the psychology literature, the authors tried to rationalize their study by discussing previous studies of Trait EI in applied linguistics. As indicated in the article, although an increasing number of researchers have explored the role of Trait EI in second language learning, most of them only probed into one aspect of language skills and did not further analyze the predictive effect of Trait EI on individuals' achievement (e.g., Abdolrezapour and Tavakoli, 2012; Khooei, 2014; Li, 2019). Moreover, the previous studies often oversimplified the role of Trait EI in L2 learning and rarely investigated the different facets of Trait EI like well-being and self-control. Based on the above arguments, two research gaps, which are the lack of causal

relationship exploration and limited investigation of EI's 'multifaced nature', were effectively identified by the authors.

Overall, with a holistic literature review on Trait EI in both psychology and applied linguistics, the authors contextualized the theoretical framework of the study, making it sensible to the readers. Readers can clearly understand what Trait EI was and why it was chosen for the study. More importantly, the literature review successfully pinpointed the research gaps and formed the upcoming research questions, providing a logical transition from theory to empirical investigation.

Methodology of the examined article

In the new *Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Applied Linguistics* (McKinley and Rose, 2019), Marsden (2019) called for researchers' attention to 'methodological transparency' in applied linguistics. According to Marsden (2019, p.15), methodological transparency means ensuring complete transparency in the whole research process, enabling reviewers and readers to understand precisely 'what the researchers did to elicit, analyse, and understand their data'. A good level of methodological transparency will certainly improve the 'accessibility, visibility, rigour, scrutiny....systematicity research' (ibid), which is vital to all empirical studies. Therefore, the methodology employed by Chen and Zhang (2022) will also be examined under such a criterion.

The methodology in the article consisted of three parts: 1) Participants; 2) Instruments; and 3) Data collection and analysis. In the first section, the authors presented sound demographic information of the 72 participants (e.g., age and gender distribution) but when it came to their current English proficiency level, the descriptions seemed to be vague and not transparent to all readers, especially to non-Chinese audiences. The authors indicated that all participants have passed the 'National Entrance Test of English for MA/MS candidates' and therefore, could be regarded as intermediate to advanced users of English according to the 'examination syllabus' (Chen and Zhang, 2022, p. 735). Nevertheless, readers outside mainland China will

have limited knowledge of the test and thus cannot completely understand participants' English level. The more appropriate way would be to explain details about this national test and then compare it with the well-known 'CEFR' - 'Common European Framework of Reference for Languages' (Council of Europe, 2001). With the help of CEFR, the loose description 'intermediate to advanced' can be replaced with a more precise classification (e.g., B2 to C1), making the research more transparent and sensible to global audiences.

In terms of the research instruments, the authors justified the reasons for choosing the short version of the Trait EI questionnaire (TEIQue-SF) rather than the original full version. Unlike the full version which contained 153 items, the short form had only 30 items and therefore, was easier for participants to fill in and more efficiently for researchers to collect the data. More importantly, the short form showed good reliability as Cronbach's α was consistently above .70 in many studies (Dewaele and Li, 2020). Under such circumstances, the TEIQue-SF chosen by the authors can be seen as an appropriate and trustworthy instrument to evaluate individuals' Trait EI level and the four facets (i.e., well-being; emotionality; self-control; sociability).



By contrast, the explanations of using a particular English proficiency test were not as convincing as that of the Trait EI questionnaire. As is shown in the article, Chen and Zhang employed a self-designed English test as the research instrument to assess participants' second language performance, which served as the dependent variable in the study. While there was nothing wrong with using a self-designed English test for the sake of flexibility and convenience, the real problem was that Chen and Zhang did not elaborate on the details of this test, which have undermined the transparency of the research. For instance, while the authors mentioned that the test was made up of four parts: listening (25%), reading (35%), writing (20%), and speaking (20%), the specific grading criteria were not included. One possible solution would be explaining how the test was developed and how could the test be considered as reliable compared with other widely used tests like the International English Language Testing System

(IELTS). If possible, the authors can attach a sample paper in the appendix so that readers can better understand how participants' English levels were assessed.

In the data collection and analysis, the authors showed good 'methodological transparency'. Ethical issues were carefully considered, and consent was obtained from both the students and the university. The practice of conducting a 'pilot study' was highlighted, ensuring the quality of research instruments in the formal study. Moreover, specific data analysis methods were presented. By using programme R, the correlational analysis and the linear regression analysis were conducted to explore the relationship between EFL learners' Trait EI and their L2 performance.

Results and discussions of the examined article

Before showing the results of correlation and regression analysis, the authors first illustrated the descriptive statistics of the two variables (e.g., mean, median and standard deviation), contributing to the 'methodological transparency' of the study. As indicated by Baffoe-Djan and Smith (2019, p.398), descriptive analysis was 'intricately linked to the nature of the people' in the research and played a vital role in the subsequent inferential analysis (i.e., correlation and regression analysis). Since researchers can rarely have access to the entire population, a particular sample method is often employed so that the situation of the whole population can be inferred through the sample. Therefore, it is critical for the researchers to first decide whether the collected sample is representative, which is often done by examining the 'normality of distribution' (Baffoe-Djan and Smith 2019, p.401). Under such circumstances, the authors reported the skewness (-.64 ~ .90) and kurtosis values (-.94 ~ .22) of the data, ensuring that the sample is normally disturbed.

As for the inferential analysis, the Pearson correlation analysis was adopted. The authors not only discussed the significant results but carefully considered the non-significant outcomes with a p-value above the threshold (i.e., .05). As indicated by Visentin, Cleary and Hunt (2020, p.919), reporting non-significant results was a matter of 'earnestness' and researchers ignored it at their peril. In Chen and Zhang's research,

while participants' Trait EI level was significantly correlated with their overall L2 achievement, only listening and speaking performance showed similar correlations. Under such circumstances, the authors argued that the non-significant outcomes may be caused by the small sample size. Moreover, by comparing previous studies in which Trait EI was correlated with L2 reading and writing performance (Abdolrezaipoor and Tavakoli, 2012; Shao, Yu, and Ji, 2013), Chen and Zhang pointed out that the learning materials may have an impact on students' Trait EI level. In previous studies, experiments with intense emotional content were employed to enhance students' Trait EI and train their language skills while in Chen and Zhang's research, the study was non-experiment and descriptive. Therefore, the correlation may largely arise from the experimental settings.

Analytical discussion

In the regression analysis, there seemed to be an obvious typographical error where the term 'variance inflation factor' was misspelt as 'variance information factor' (Chen and Zhang, p.738). Variance inflation factor (VIF) is a key criterion to assess the multicollinearity in the regression model. If the VIF is larger than 10, there might be a multicollinearity problem, which can make the regression model unreliable and invalid (Martin and Bridgmon, 2012, p.414). Apart from this minor mistake, the overall analysis and discussion were informative and insightful. Not only did the authors present the data through different types of visual aids like graphs and tables, but more importantly they identified the underlying structure behind the data. By applying the backward stepwise method, the article revealed that Trait EI can predict a 5% variance in participants' overall L2 performance. Furthermore, the authors analyzed thoroughly the interactive effects between well-being and self-control; self-control and emotionality on speaking performance, indicating that the effect of Trait EI was not linear but intertwined. Self-control may first have a negative impact on well-being and then undermine EFL learners' speaking performance.

6

Background reading

7

Conclusion

In conclusion, Chen and Zhang's (2022) article effectively combined psychology and applied linguistics. The complicated influence of Trait EI on EFL learners'

language achievement was revealed. While methodological transparency could be improved, the study's comprehensive literature review and insightful analysis contribute valuable understandings of the complex relationship between Trait EI and second language performance.

Word count: 2034

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Junchao_Junchao_The Critical assessment

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

70/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

This is an excellent answer which is well presented and clearly defined.

You have displayed a good coverage of the main research focus.

You provide a well-structured argument relating to the research article and the mark recognises work at a high level.

You also demonstrate an effective grasp of the literature and your emerging voice.

You might want to consider:

1. Elaborating on key research methods by further referencing key texts.

2. Referring to the data analysis in more detail.

PAGE 1



Comment 1

Good - a well-structured response.

PAGE 2



Comment 2

Have you considered the work of Lisa Feldman Barrett



Comment 3

Interesting focus.



Comment 4

style.

PAGE 3

PAGE 4



Comment 5

Use to examine definitions.

PAGE 5

PAGE 6

QM

Analytical discussion

Useful analytical comment, critical evaluation and independent discussion.



Comment 6

good attention to detail.

QM

Background reading

Evidence of wide reading



Comment 7

Good detailed dicussion. Did the context of the study have a major impact on the results?

PAGE 7



Comment 8

How - give summary ?

PAGE 8



Comment 9

Useful background reading.

PAGE 9

PAGE 10
