

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN ESL LEARNERS' EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE SKILLS IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AT BAHAWALPURDr. Sumaira Qanwal¹, Dr. Riaz Hussain², Dr. Shahid Nawaz^{*3}**Original Article**

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Abstract

The present paper aims to explore the differences between male and female second language learners' emotional intelligence (EI) skills in university education. The study was carried out among 250 ESL learners at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur. The participants included 66 male and 184 female L2 learners enrolled in BS program at six different departments of the university. The research tools include two self-report questionnaires, i.e. Petrides' (2009) Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (Short Form), and Austin et al.'s (2004) Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Scale (SREIS) which aimed to measure the level of participants' trait and ability emotional intelligence skills respectively. The data collected through the questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively by using SPSS (Statistical Packages for social sciences). The analysis of the data revealed that there is no difference in males' and females' overall trait EI mean scores and ability EI mean scores. The same is the case with the majority of the subskills of EI which show no considerable differences between both genders, except for the two skills: emotion management and mood regulation. In case of emotion management, males have shown a slightly higher capacity of self-control than females, while in case of mood regulation, females have shown slightly better capability of being optimistic and regulating moods. The findings of the present study are significant to predict ESL university learners' success in the second language. Furthermore, knowing the differences in subscales of EI between the two genders may also be helpful in directing an appropriate, explicit EI instruction to both genders which may lead to better EI skills and hence, may result in better ESL learning.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence Skills, Trait EI, Ability EI, subskills of EI, Gender differences

1. Introduction

Emotional intelligence (henceforth mentioned as EI), a commonly known concept these days, initially emerged in the last half of 20th century. The term 'Emotional Quotient (EQ)' was introduced by Goleman (1995) in comparison to the already existing term in Psychology, i.e. 'Intelligent Quotient (IQ)'. According to Goleman (1995), where IQ represents the inborn mental capabilities of an individual, EQ refers to the affective and emotional aspects of a person's psychological abilities. With the advent of this new concept in education, it was explored that "people with the highest level of intelligence (IQ) outperformed those with average IQs just 20 percent of the time, while people with average IQs outperformed those with high IQs 70 percent of the time" (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009, p. 7-8).

Previous studies have indicated that our brains have storage of our past experiences, histories of interpersonal relationships and memories of certain past events. This storage serves

as trigger to our emotions which appear in the form of various kind of reactions to events, people and happenings in our present (Cooper, 1997). Papalia (2004) states that everyone has the capacity to be subjected to emotions, but how often one will experience an emotion, what triggers will stimulate him most, in what form or shape his emotions will appear, and the way he will react to these emotions varies. Similarly, Robbins (2001) observes that we may find people who never react emotionally to anything. We will always see them in calm and composed state without any clue to what they actually are feeling in a particular situation. On the other hand, there are also some people who will always be found under an emotional stance as if boarding a vehicle of emotions either in one form or another. So, a diversity exists in the level or extent of emotions people may feel and the degree to which they can control these emotions. In the nutshell, we may say that individual differences are found in emotional intelligence.

One of the major factors which has been a subject of research in recent times is the differences in EI in terms of Gender. This subject attains a great importance in university settings. How strong male and female students are in their twofold skill of emotions (the first being appropriate expression of self-emotions and the second relating to requisite understanding of others' emotions) is what determines their psychological and academic success at university. This is what predicts how easily and effectively male and female students will be able to achieve their academic goals.

Keeping the aforementioned aspects in view, the researchers thought to explore differences of EI among university students in terms of gender. The following research questions determine the direction of the present study:

Research Questions

1. Do gender differences exist in the level of emotional intelligence skills of university students in Bahawalpur?
2. What kind of differences (if any) exist between male and female university students' major EI skills in Bahawalpur?
3. What kind of differences (if any) exist between male and female university students' sub-skills of EI in Bahawalpur?

Before we start investigating our research problem, it is apt to detail the research which has already been conducted to identify gender differences in terms of EI skills in general. The coming section includes the said discussion.

2. Literature Review

A bulk of literature has revealed that EI is directly linked with the learning achievement in general and language proficiency in particular. A few of these studies have reported that language achievement is prominently enhanced with better EI skills, while the others have analysed that language achievement is linked with the factors which are reckoned as the constituents of EI such as motivation, anxiety-control, extroversion, sociability etc. For example, Qanwal, Nawaz and Sabir (2022) have reported the positive effects of the learners' use of social, metacognitive and affective strategies, which are actually a part of an individual's emotional self, on their language learning achievement. Similarly, Qanwal and Ghani (2019) have shed light upon the extroversion/introversion personality dimension as predictor of achievement in second language writing skills.

However, as far as the gender factor in EI is concerned, contrary evidences are found in the previous research, pertaining to whether gender determines differences in participants' overall scores on EI.

In this context, we will first discuss the studies which report no differences in the overall EI skills of males and females. But, they point out that gender differences do exist in the level of a few

sub-scales of EI. If one gender is more skilled in one dimension of EI, the other may have an advantage on some different aspect of EI. Although, a general agreement is found in regard to which aspects of EI are more prominent in males and which ones in females, it is, nonetheless, important to note that contradictions are also found in the results different researchers have brought.

To report the first example here, we may refer to Bar-On (1997), one of the distinguished theorists of EI, who conducted a study on 3831 North Americans, finding no differences in gender and overall EI scores, but he found minor differences between men and women on a few sub-scales of EI. In this study, females were found to score higher in interpersonal ability as compared to males, while the latter possessed stronger intrapersonal skills. Generally, Baron's model expounds that females build stronger interpersonal relationships, show more empathy and are more concerned about social responsibility. On the other hand, males are more sensitive to self-regard, are more self-assured, can better control stress, are more pliable, can better solve problems, and are more hopeful than females. This clarifies that because of men's weaker interpersonal skills, psychopathy is spotted much more frequently in males than in females; and also because females possess lower stress tolerance, they are more prone to anxiety-related disorders than males (American Psychological Association cited in Bar-On, 2006).

The second example is that of Daniel Goleman, another eminent figure to found the theory of EI. Goleman (1998) affirms that no differences exist in general level of emotional intelligence. Referring to the biological differences between men and women, he admits that while males and females are likely to have varying attributes of strengths and weakness in different aspects of EI, their collective scores of EI are equivalent. He claims that males have higher level of optimism than females. However, he says that no difference is found between the level of self-awareness of both genders.

The third study to refer here is a research by Shahmohammadi and Hassanzadeh (2011) who also tried to explore differences of EI in terms of gender. Their findings showed significant differences between EI skills of male and females ESL learners. However, their research findings stood in contradiction to the results of Bar-On's (1997) study. In their study, girls were found to have more intrapersonal intelligence while boys were observed to possess more interpersonal intelligence.

Ahangari and Taghizadeh (2012) used Bar-On's emotional intelligence test to analyze gender differences in EI of 152 college students who were learning English as a foreign language. The results of the study showed that gender differences exist only in a few sub-scales of EI, that is, stress management and self-actualization. In these factors, males were found to secure higher score than females. However, in the total EI and the majority of its subscales, no differences were found between males and females.

Similar to Ahangari and Taghizadeh's (2012) findings, Genc, Kulusakh and Aydin's (2016) study demonstrated that there is no difference of EI with respect to gender except for one perspective, i.e. optimism and general mood. They report that women have more capacity to empathize, are more aware of social responsibilities, can perceive their own feelings, have higher self-regard and are more conscious of their self-esteem and self-actualization as compared to men. On the other hand, males have more capacity of tolerance, self-control and stress management skills. They are more optimistic than women. In short, according to Genc *et al.* (2016), gender partakes in determining only one aspect of EI, i.e. general mood.

Where the aforementioned studies claimed that males and females differ in only some of the aspects of EI, some other studies, for example, Mayer and Geher (1996), Mayer, Caruso and Salovey (1999), and Mandell and Pherwani (2003) have demonstrated that gender differences exist in overall EI skills too. These studies report that females possess higher overall EI skills than males in both personal and professional settings. Similarly, Shakib and Barani's (2011) study implied that EQ is at more elevated levels among women than men. In the same vein, Chaudhry *et*

al. (2013) investigated the effect of gender on university students' EI in Pakistan. Their study concluded that females have higher level of Emotional intelligence skills than males.

On the contrary, another Pakistani study, conducted in academic settings by Farooq, Riaz and Javid (2007), concluded that although females have higher level of EI subskills, i.e. interpersonal, intrapersonal, adaptability, stress management and general mood, in overall EI, males possess a higher level of trait EI than females.

Some researchers postulate that there are certain factors which might be responsible for the appearance of gender differences in EI. For example, Brackett and Mayer (2003) have postulated that the gender differences in EI might be the outcome of the measurement choices made. They discovered that women showed higher emotional intelligence when MSCIT, a performance based measure, was used to calculate participants' EI scores. On the other hand, when self-report scales for example EQI and Self report emotional intelligence test (SREIT) were used to measure EI, they couldn't find any difference of EI in terms of gender. Another perceived idea is that gender differences in EI exist only when EI is understood purely as a mental ability instead of taking it as a mixed ability of feeling and thought. Viewing the other side of the picture, it is also likely that gender differences which might actually exist are overlooked because of males' overestimation of their ability and its natural impact on self-report measure of EI. Hence, no final word can be produced regarding the existence of gender differences in EI. Rather more research in this area is required to explore the true nature of this relationship.

Besides, previous literature also mirrors a few studies which did not find any differences between males and females with respect to the level of EI skills.

To begin with, a research by Kataya and Awasthi (2005) examined the EI of 150 Indian secondary school students. These students were found to have a good level of EI skills in general. Although, the level of females' EI skills was slightly higher than that of males, the difference was observed to be statistically insignificant. The researchers concluded with the statement that gender differences in EI do not actually exist. In the same vein, Nesari, Karimi and Filinezhad (2011) found no differences in the EI of male and female postgraduates in Iran. Likewise, Ghasemi, Behjat and Kargar's (2013) study exposed that there is no difference in the level of EI skills of males and females. In a course on writing skills, both male and female Iranian EFL learners progressed with the same level and pace.

Looking at the previous literature on gender differences, it becomes evident that so far, a very few studies (only two studies as per the researchers' information) have been carried out in Pakistani context on the subject. The first study was conducted by Farooq, Riaz and Javid (2007) which concluded that males have higher level of EI skills. The second research was held by Chaudhry *et al.* (2013) who concluded that females are more emotionally intelligent than males, giving us, thus, opposing results. In this context, the researchers felt the need to extend the volume of studies exploring the phenomena of gender differences in EI in academic context of their own region, i.e. Bahawalpur, a city in southern Punjab, Pakistan, and thus reach some concluding results regarding the role of gender in EI skills.

3. Research Methodology

The present paper follows a purely quantitative approach to data collection and analysis. Besides, the study adopts descriptive-cum-exploratory research design to investigate the differences between Emotional intelligence skills of male and female university students. 250 university BS students studying English as a second language at six different departments (Department of English Linguistics, Department of computer sciences, Department of Management Sciences, Department of Economics, Department of Pharmaceutical medicine, Department of Homeopathic medicine) at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur constituted the research sample through random sampling procedure which resulted in 26% males and 74% females. The sample of 1:3 male and female students is representative of the whole population of

BS students at the university. Two questionnaires aimed at measuring students' EI skills (one for measuring trait EI skills and the other for measuring ability EI skills) were administered among 250 participants of the present study. For measuring trait EI, Petrides' (2009) Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Short Form, consisting of 41 items, was used, while for measuring ability EI, Austin et al.'s (2004) modified version of Schutte et al.'s (1998) EI measure, i.e. Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Scale (SREIS), consisting of 30 items, was administered.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

The data collected through both of the questionnaires were submitted to SPSS and various statistical tests were run, such as mean and standard deviation for EI scores were calculated through cross tabulations for male and females group of students separately. Then, independent sample t-tests were applied to identify the significance of difference between EI scores of male and female students. The coming sections present the stepwise results of the analysis.

4.1. Gender Differences in Major EI Skills

Table 1(a): Gender differences in major EI skills (mean score)

Descriptive Statistics				
Gender		Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	Trait Emotional Intelligence	97.98	25.132	66
	Ability Emotional Intelligence	114.20	18.871	66
	Global Emotional Intelligence Score	212.18	30.641	66
Female	Trait Emotional Intelligence	96.43	30.762	184
	Ability Emotional Intelligence	117.82	20.002	184
	Global Emotional Intelligence Score	214.25	39.002	184

The data in table 1(a) displays that in terms of gender, both male and female participants have similar level of trait EI, ability EI and global EI. The mean trait EI score for males is 7.98 while for females, it is 96.43. Similarly, in ability EI, males' mean score is 114.20, while for females it is 117.82. Likewise, for global EI, both males and females have similar mean score values, i.e. 212.18 and 214.25 respectively. Hence, it becomes clear that no significant differences exist in the level of EI between males and females. The statistics are reproduced in graphical form also (see figure 1).

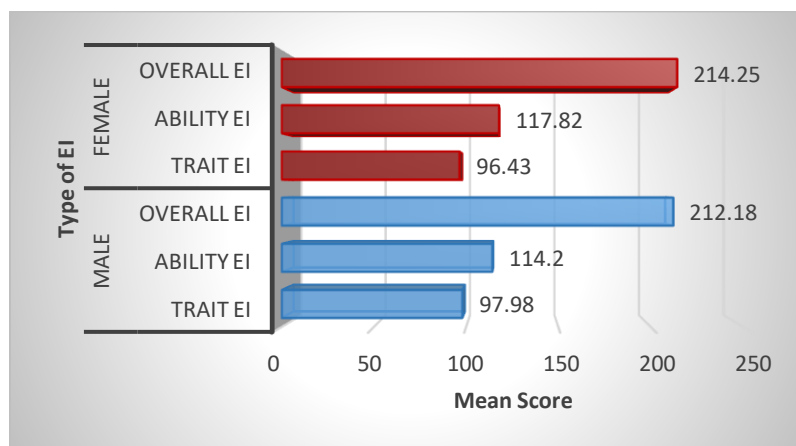


Figure 1: Gender wise comparison

The independent samples t-test statistics present the following results:

Table 1(b): Gender differences in trait EI skills (t-test statistics)

		Independent Samples 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
Trait Emotional Intelligence	Equal variances assumed	5.130	.024	.369	248	.713	1.556	4.217	6.750	9.861	
	Equal variances not assumed			.406	139	.686	1.556	3.836	-6.028	9.139	

The statistics of table 4.28 (b) demonstrate that no significant difference exists between trait EI skills of males and females, for the p-value of t-statistics is .686 which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, the difference is insignificant.

Table 1(c): Gender differences in ability EI skills (t-test statistics)

		Independent Samples 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
Ability Emotional Intelligence	Equal variances assumed	.050	.823	-1.282	248	.201	-3.626	2.828	-9.197	1.944	
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.318	120	.190	-3.626	2.751	-9.073	1.821	

The p-value of t-statistics ($p = .201$) in table 4.28 (c) above indicates that no statistically significant difference is found between ability EI of male and female learners.

Table 1(d): Gender differences in global EI skills (t-test statistics)

		Independent Samples 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	
Global Emotional Intelligence	Equal variances assumed	7.385	.007	-.390	248	.697	-2.071	5.308	-12.525	8.383
	Equal variances not assumed			-.437	145	.663	-2.071	4.743	-11.444	7.303

Gender Differences in Subscales of EI

Besides comparing males and females' scores in major EI skills, their scores on the subscales of EI were also analysed. The results are presented in table below:

Table 2(a): Gender differences in subskills of EI (mean score)

Descriptive Statistics					
Gender	EI Key Skill	EI sub skill	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	Trait EI	Well Being	21.38	5.37	66
		Self-Control	20.05	6.03	66
		Emotionality	24.48	7.03	66
		Sociability	18.79	5.94	66
		Motivation	13.29	4.53	66
	Ability EI	Optimism and Mood Regulation	47.92	8.63	66
		Utilization of Emotion	23.41	4.35	66
		Appraisal of Emotions	42.86	7.96	66
Female	Trait EI	Well Being	21.64	7.41	184
		Self-Control	18.95	6.79	184
		Emotionality	24.64	8.16	184
		Sociability	18.27	6.59	184
		Motivation	12.94	5.34	184
	Ability EI	Optimism and Mood Regulation	49.48	9.27	184
		Utilization of Emotion	24.23	4.80	184
		Appraisal of Emotions	44.11	8.02	184

Table 2(a) reveals that no considerable differences are found in the level of various sub-factors of EI between males and females.

When we discuss the sub factors of trait EI, the above given data shows that males' mean score in well-being is 21.38 while females mean score in this construct is 21.64. So, both scores are about the same. In self-control, males' mean score is 20.05 while females mean score is 18.95 which shows a slight difference. In emotionality, where males' average score is 24.48, females average score is 24.64, which is almost the same. In sociability, males' mean score is found to be 18.79, and females' average score is quite near to this value, that is, 18.27. In motivation, where males secured 13.29 average score, females secured 12.94 scores which is again not considerably different from that of males. The findings are further explained in figure 2.

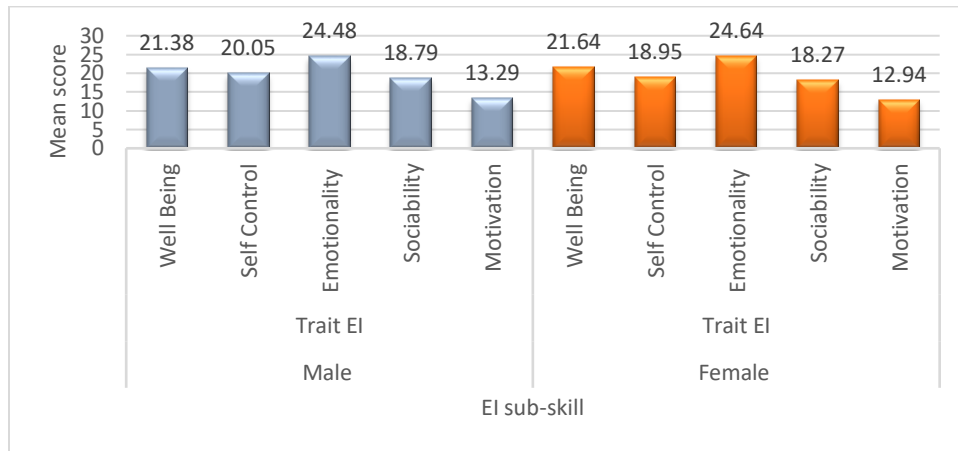


Figure 2: Gender wise comparison of subskills of trait EI

Coming to the gender differences in sub-skills of ability EI, table 2a shows that in optimism/mood regulation, males’ mean score is only slightly lower (47.92) than females (49.48), but the difference is not considerable. In utilization of emotions, males mean score is 23.41, while females’ mean score is 24.23 which again shows almost the same level of ability. Finally, in case of appraisal of emotions, males average score is 42.86 while females’ score is 44.11 which shows a minor level of difference between the two genders in subscales of trait EI.

In the light of these results, we may generally infer that no considerable differences are found between males and females with respect to their abilities in the sub-skills of ability EI. However, in case of self-control, males’ have shown a slightly higher capacity than females. However, females have reported to have a slightly better tendency towards being optimistic and regulating their moods than males. Similarly, females have a slightly higher capacity for appraising emotions than males. The comparison is presented in figurative form also (see figure 3).

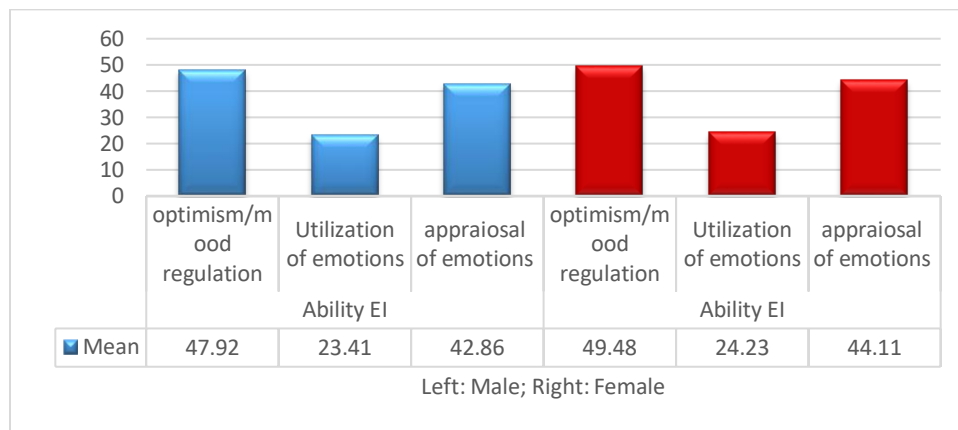


Figure 3: Gender wise comparison of sub-skills of ability EI

However, the aforementioned differences are found to be statistically insignificant as the independent samples statistics of male and female group of participant show that P value of t-statistics in all of the sub-scales of EI is greater than .05, i.e. insignificant (see table 2b).

Table (2b): Gender differences in well-being (t-test statistics)

		Independent Samples 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
Well Being	Equal variances assumed	12.829	.000	-.259	248	.796	-.257	.994	-2.216	1.701	
	Equal variances not assumed			-.300	157	.765	-.257	.857	-1.951	1.437	
Self-Control	Equal variances assumed	1.540	.216	1.155	248	.249	1.094	.947	-.771	2.960	
	Equal variances not assumed			1.222	128	.224	1.094	.896	-.678	2.867	
Emotionality	Equal variances assumed	2.786	.096	-.134	248	.894	-.151	1.131	-2.379	2.077	
	Equal variances not assumed			-.143	132	.886	-.151	1.054	-2.237	1.935	
Sociability	Equal variances assumed	.857	.356	.565	248	.572	.522	.922	-1.295	2.338	
	Equal variances not assumed			.594	126	.554	.522	.878	-1.216	2.259	
Motivation	Equal variances assumed	3.126	.078	.471	248	.638	.348	.738	-1.105	1.801	
	Equal variances not assumed			.509	134	.612	.348	.683	-1.003	1.698	
Optimism and Mood Regulation	Equal variances assumed	.265	.607	-1.193	248	.234	-1.559	1.307	-4.134	1.015	
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.234	122	.220	-1.559	1.264	-4.061	.942	
Utilization of Emotion	Equal variances assumed	.229	.633	-1.225	248	.222	-.825	.673	-2.151	.502	
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.283	125	.202	-.825	.643	-2.096	.447	
Appraisal of Emotions	Equal variances assumed	.093	.760	-1.082	248	.280	-1.242	1.148	-3.503	1.018	
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.086	115	.280	-1.242	1.144	-3.508	1.023	

In the above given table, the p-value of t-statistics (.765, .249, .894, .572, .638, .234, .222, .280 respectively) reveal that no significant differences are found in males' and females' ability in well-being, self-control, emotionality, sociability, motivation, optimism, utilization of emotions and appraisal of emotions.

5. Conclusions, Discussion and Recommendations

The study concludes that there is no difference in males' and females' trait EI mean scores, ability EI mean scores and global EI mean scores. This suggests that males and females have equal capacities of identifying their own psychological, emotional and behavioural predispositions; they both are equally capable of expressing themselves, appraising their own and others' emotions, monitoring their own and others' emotions, and managing interpersonal relationships. The results support Bar-On's (1997), Goleman's (1998), Ahangari and Taghizadeh's (2012), and Gencet *al.*'s (2016) studies which claim that differences do not exist in overall EI skills of males and females. The findings partially confirm the results of studies like Kataya and Awasthi (2005), Nesariet *al.* (2011) and Ghasemi et al. (2013) which indicated that no differences exist between males and females in terms of their cumulative EI skills.

However, the findings show a controversy when compared to studies like Mayer and Geher (1996), Mayer *et al.* (1999), Mandell and Pherwani (2003), Shakib and Barani's (2011) and Chaudhry *et al.* (2013) which claim that gender differences exist in overall EI skills. According to them, females possess higher level of EI skills than males.

The results pose a contradiction to Farooq *et al.*'s (2017) study too, which denoted that differences are found in males' and females' overall EI skills. To them, males have better overall EI skills than females.

In case of subskills of EI, generally, we find no considerable differences between both genders. However, regarding emotion management, males have shown a slightly higher capacity of self-control than females which stands in line with Bar-On's (1997) finding that males have better self-control than females. On the other hand, females have shown slightly better capability of being optimistic and regulating moods which contradicts the results of Goleman's (1998) study which states that males have higher level of optimism than females. The findings contradict Bar-On's study also which says that males are more hopeful than females. Nonetheless, the results stand in line with Ahangari and Taghizadeh's (2012), and Gencet *al.*'s (2016) findings which expose that males have better self-control and stress management skills. The study further shows that females also have somewhat better skills in appraising emotions than males. This confirms the results of studies like Bar-On (1997) which explored stronger interpersonal skills like empathy and social responsibility among females than males. However, these findings contradict Shahmohammadi and Hassanzadeh's (2011) claims that females have weaker interpersonal skills than males.

In the present study, though gender differences in self-control and optimism are statistically found insignificant, the differences in the mean scores of males and females in these two subscales of EI are quite obvious and worth consideration. Therefore, instruction on emotional intelligence skills needs to be given to all of the learners irrespective of their gender. As males are found better in self-control and females are found to be more optimistic, teachers can try to make both genders learn and inculcate these skills by making them exchange their emotional experiences in the classroom, and thus, may facilitate better learning.

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