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The mediating role of social skills and sensation seeking in the relationship between trait emotional intelligence and school adjustment in adolescents



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ABSTRACT

Drawing upon a sample of 400 female high school students in Tehran, Iran, the present study examines the mediating role of social skills and sensation seeking in the relationship between trait emotional intelligence and school adjustment in adolescent girls. Statistical analysis revealed positive correlations between trait emotional intelligence and school adjustment; trait emotional intelligence and social skills; and social skills and school adjustment. The study also revealed a negative correlation between trait emotional intelligence and sensation seeking, as well as sensation seeking and school adjustment. In addition, the data provided a good fit to the hypothesized model of the mediating role of social skills and sensation seeking in the relationship between trait emotional intelligence and school adjustment.

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Research on trait emotional intelligence (trait EI) has expanded significantly in the past years. Trait EI refers to a constellation of emotional self-perceptions located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies (Petrides & Furnham, 2003). It reflects the ability to experience, attend to, identify, understand and utilise personal emotions and those of others (Petrides & Furnham, 2003; Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki, 2007). Many studies have focused on the relationship between trait emotional intelligence and different dimensions of adjustment. In general, the research to date as reflected in the previous publications has demonstrated that successful adjustment is dependent on an integrated performance of emotional competencies (Chan, 2005).

In this line, the construct of social skills is an important factor in school adjustment and has a potential impact on the relationship between emotional intelligence and school adjustment. Studies have shown a positive correlation between social skills and school adjustment (e. g. Aslefattahi & Najarpoorostadi, 2014). In addition, acquiring social skills, such as cooperation, adjustment, relationship, and making friends has been shown to empower individuals to find their way into peer groups, and set the foundation for their lives (Ahmadi, Hatami, & Asadzadeh, 2013). Therefore, an examination of the relationship between social skills and school adjustment is of significance.

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Trait EI is negatively associated with depression, anxiety, anger and disruptive behavior (Martins, Ramalho, & Morin, 2010), and positively associated with adaptive coping styles, peer relations, and socio-emotional competency (Frederickson, Petrides, & Simmonds, 2012). Gugliandolo et al. found that global trait EI scores are negatively correlated with both internalizing and externalizing disorders (Gugliandolo, Costa, Cuzzocrea, Larcana, & Petrides, 2015). Lynn-Lansman et al. determined that sensation seeking is one of the major factors in causing maladaptive behaviors such as aggression, delinquency, and drug abuse, especially in adolescents (Lynne-Landsman, Graber, Nichols, & Botvin, 2011).

The goal of the present study is to examine the mediating role of social skills and sensation seeking in the relationship between the construct of trait emotional intelligence and the social, affective and academic aspects of school adjustment. The aim of the current work is to provide a framework to identify students who need to be taught about each of these constructs, and provide them with assistance.

A path diagram illustrating the mediation model is presented in Fig. 1.

1. Methods

1.1. Participants and procedure

In this study, a sample of 400 female students was selected randomly from 3 municipal districts of Tehran using a multistage sampling method. A list of private, public, and public exemplary schools¹ in the identified districts was obtained, and in each district 4 all girls high schools (one private, two public, and one public exemplary school) were randomly selected. Questionnaires were distributed in the schools located in the north, south, and west of Tehran. Participants' information including age, grade level, field of study (mathematics, experimental sciences, or humanities), and type of school (private, public, or public exemplary) was obtained. The obtained data was analyzed using AMOS and SPSS.

1.2. Measurement

1.2.1. Trait emotional intelligence

1.2.1.1. The Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Short Form (TEIQue-SF). This is a 30-item questionnaire, developed by Petrides (2009), consisting of 4 subscales: well-being, self-control, emotionality, and sociability.

In the present study, a detailed analysis of the items of the TEIQue-SF was performed by calculating the correlations between each item and the total score, and the alpha score if the item was removed. Based on the results of this analysis only 2 of the 4 subscales: “social skills and understanding”, and “evaluation and control of emotions in oneself and in others”, with alpha coefficients of 0.79 and 0.59 respectively, were used in the hypothesized model of the study. The results of evaluation of the technical characteristics of the TEIQue-SF revealed that in the model specification stage – as the first step in the structural equation modeling – the latent factor of trait emotional intelligence should be measured using the aforementioned indicators (social skills plus understanding, and evaluation and control of emotions in oneself and in others). In the present study, the results of the confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the 2-factor model of the TEIQue-SF provided an acceptable fit to the data.

1.2.2. School adjustment

1.2.2.1. The Adjustment Inventory for School Students (AISS). This scale is developed by Sinha and Singh (1993), with the goal of measuring three aspects of students' adjustment: affective, social, and academic. This inventory includes 60 items.

In the present study a detailed analysis of the technical characteristics of the AISS was performed by calculating the correlations between each item and the total score, and the alpha score if the item was removed. This analysis indicated that

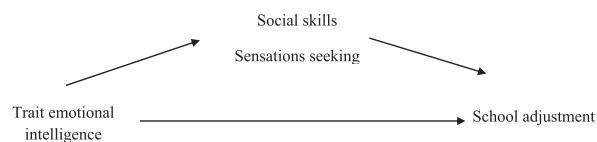


Fig. 1. Patch diagram illustrating the mediation model.

¹ Public exemplary schools accept students via an entrance exam and have branches across the country.

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