The Italian version of the Wong-Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS-I): A second-order factor analysis

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ABSTRACT

The Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) is a 16-item self-report measure of emotional intelligence, based on the revised model by Mayer and Salovey. The scale measures four dimensions: Self-Emotional Appraisal, Others’ Emotion Appraisal, Use Of Emotion, Regulation Of Emotions, loading onto a higher-order emotional intelligence factor. The WLEIS has been translated and validated in several cultural contexts, but to date there is no Italian translation, and no studies investigated its factor structure in the Italian community. This study aimed at translating the WLEIS in Italian, analysing its psychometric properties in Italian adults from the community, and testing the fit between the data and the original model by Wong and Law. We also tested correlations between WLEIS and measures of the Big Five personality factors and attachment. We found that the scale was internally consistent, and the second-order factor solution fit the data well. We also found significant positive correlations with agreeableness, extraversion, and perception of the self and the others, and negative correlation with neuroticism. These results represent a preliminary attempt to study the application of the WLEIS in Italian community settings, with implications for assessment and intervention to enhance the subjective and psychological well-being of individuals.

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1. Introduction

In the last decades, there has been an increasing corpus of research to understand the emotional foundations of human thinking and behaviour (Barsade, Brief, & Spataro, 2003), and several studies have focussed on the concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has been theorized in terms of “a constellation of traits and self-perceived abilities” (Petrides & Furnham, 2001, p. 425). There are two major theoretical models of EI, namely (1) Trait EI and (2) Ability EI. Petrides and Furnham (2000, 2001) identified the difference between Trait EI and Ability EI in the measurement approach.

Trait EI is defined as “a constellation of emotional self-perceptions” (Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki, 2007 as cited in Cooper & Petrides, 2010, p. 449), overlapping with personality traits such as empathy, emotional expression, adaptability, and self-control (Petrides, 2011). Trait EI is concerned with the cross-situational consistency of behaviours, and it can be assessed through self-reports (Petrides & Furnham, 2000). Ability EI has been originally defined as “the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189). Subsequently, Mayer and Salovey (1997) added further specification to such definition, describing EI as the “the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in the self and others” (p. 5). According to Petrides and Furnham (2000), this approach defines EI in terms of an information-processing ability, whereas Ability EI can be assessed through maximum-performance tests. Research showed that measures of ability EI following the model of EI proposed by Mayer and Salovey are significantly linked with dysfunctional attachment styles and relational problems (Bonab & Koohsari, 2011; Cherry, Fletcher, & O’Sullivan, 2013; Gunning, Waugh, Robertson, & Holmes, 2011).

A number of self-report scales have been constructed and validated to assess EI. Among these, the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS; Wong & Law, 2002) is considered as theoretically as a sound and internally consistent self-report measure of EI (Carvalho, Guerrero, Chambel, & González-Rico, 2016; Libbrecht, De Beuckelaer, Lievens, & Rockstuhl, 2014). Wong and Law (2002) developed the WLEIS on the basis of the revised four-dimensional EI model theorized by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and Mayer and Salovey (1997). In this model, EI represents “a set of interrelated skills” (p. 244), including four specifically abilities, namely: (1) “to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion”; (2) “to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought”; (3) “to understand emotion and emotional
knowledge”; (4) “to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 10). The scale is composed of 16 items rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), measuring four dimensions of Trait EI: (1) Self-Emotional Appraisal (SEA), i.e. the ability to process complex emotions and to express emotions; (2) Others’ Emotion Appraisal (OEA), i.e. the ability to understand and process others’ emotions; (3) Use Of Emotion (UEO), i.e. the ability to use emotions and achieve success in personal and working life; (4) Regulation Of Emotions (ROE), i.e. the ability to self-regulate emotions and cope with distress effectively. In their original study, Wong and Law (2002) performed a second-order confirmatory factor analysis, and compared two models: In the first model all the items loaded a single EI dimension, while in the second model the four dimensions with their relevant items loaded a second-order factor. The single-factor model was unsatisfactory, while the second-order model “fitted the data reasonably well”, and the authors concluded that the four factors represent “an underlying multidimensional EI construct” (p. 260). Wong and Law (2002) reported that the scale was internally consistent, with values of Cronbach’s α ranging from 0.83 to 0.90 both at the total scale and the sub-scale level, and average loadings of the 16 items on their respective dimensions of about 0.80. A recent study showed that the WLEIS has metric and configurural invariance across three groups of Chinese students (Li, Saklofske, Bowden, Fung, & Yan, 2012).

Some authors identified the WLEIS as a self-report measure of Trait EI (Pérez, Petrides, & Furnham, 2005), overlapping with personality dimensions (Brannick et al., 2009). In fact, a study comparing the measurement properties of the WLEIS and the Meyer–Salovey–Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) showed that WLEIS scores were more highly correlated with personality scales than the MSCEIT scores (Brannick et al., 2009). In terms of discriminant validity, the authors concluded that “measures of the Big Five personality traits may account for nearly 50% of the variance in overall WLEIS” (p. 167). However, a recent research conducted by LaPalme, Wang, Joseph, Saklofske, and Yan (2016) aimed at assessing measurement equivalence of the WLEIS, showed that the IRT DIF approach suited the WLEIS better than the ideal-point model, which in contrast suits Trait EI measures better. The authors commented that “although the WLEIS is a self-report measure, it purports to measure EI as an ability” (p. 197), suggesting the need for further research on the construct measured by the scale.

Culturally-mediated codification of emotional responses, display rules, and use of emotion-related information require the cross-cultural validation of measure of EI (Austin, Saklofske, & Egan, 2005). However, research supports the cross-cultural generalizability of the WLEIS. Fukuda, Saklofske, Tamaoka, and Lim (2012) showed that the Korean version of the WLEIS was consistent with the original four-factor model, providing evidence to the internal consistency of the scale in non-Western cultural contexts. Libbrecht et al. (2014) examined invariance of the WLEIS scores across two different countries, namely Singapore (n = 505) and Belgium (n = 339). The authors found that the measurement structure of the WLEIS was invariant across the two cultural contexts. In the same vein, previous studies found that the WLEIS is an internally consistent scale to assess EI in populations from Barbados (Devonish & Greenidge, 2010), Canada (Kaushal & Kwantes, 2006), China (Law, Wong, & Song, 2004; Wong & Law, 2002), Greece (Kafetsios & Zampetakis, 2008), Israel (Zysberg & Rubanov, 2010), Japan (Fukuda et al., 2011), Korea (Kim, Cable, Kim, & Wang, 2009), Nigeria (Salami, 2009), Taiwan (Wang & Huang, 2009), Turkey (Güleyüz, Güney, Aydın, & Aşan, 2008), United Kingdom (Lindebaum & Cartwright, 2010), and United States (Joseph & Newman, 2010; Whitman, Van Rooy, Viswesvaran, & Kraus, 2009).

A corpus of recent research in the field of EI shows the successful application of measures of EI in the Italian context. D’Amico and Curci (2010) investigated EI in a community sample of Italian adults, providing evidence that the model theorized by Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2002) could be successfully used to assess Ability EI in the Italian community. Di Fabio and Saklofske (2014a, 2014b) performed two studies on EI in samples of Italian high school students. In the first study, they found that self-reported emotional intelligence added significant variance beyond the variance deriving from measures of intelligence and personality in predicting core self-evaluation, resilience and life satisfaction. In the second study, results confirmed the hypotheses that both self-reported Ability and Trait EI, assessed through the Bar-On Emotional Intelligence Inventory and the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, respectively, contributed more highly to career decision-making self-efficacy, career indecision and indecisiveness, than personality traits. Andrei, Smith, Surcinielli, Baldaro, and Saklofske (2016) investigated the factor structures and psychometric properties of the Italian version of the full-length Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire. Results showed the association between EI scores and affect-related aspects of personality. Other research (Di Fabio, 2013; Di Fabio, Saklofske, & Tremblay, 2016; Franco & Tappatà, 2009) highlighted the relations between self-report measures of EI, self-other perception, and wellbeing, as observed in samples of individuals from the Italian community and college students. Similar findings were reported in subsequent research conducted on samples of Italian young adults and high school students (see Di Fabio, Kenny, & Minor, 2014).

Despite the increasing corpus of research in the field of EI in the Italian context, to the best of our knowledge to date there is no Italian translation of the WLEIS available, and no studies have investigated the internal consistency of the scale in the Italian community. However, there are at least three major reasons to support the translation and validation of the WLEIS in the Italian context: (1) Although the comparability of psychological measures across different cultures represents a major challenge in psychological measurement, particularly in the field of emotions, the scale has been successfully translated and validated across several different cultural contexts; showing very good internal consistency and psychometric properties (Li et al., 2012), and some authors argued that research is needed to assess the internal consistency of the WLEIS in different contexts (Fukuda et al., 2012); (2) The Italian translation of the WLEIS will allow researchers in the field of EI to investigate the differences between the construct measured by the WLEIS and other important measures of EI that have been validated previously in the Italian context, supporting a better understanding of the construct in Italian populations; (3) Because previous research in the Italian context showed that both Ability and Trait EI measures are significant predictors of important psychological dimensions (Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2014a, 2014b), the validation of the WLEIS will provide researchers in the field of EI in the Italian contexts with an internally consistent measure of EI, with significant implications for the improvement of assessment and intervention.

The present study was designed to translate the WLEIS in Italian language (WLEIS-I), to analyse its internal consistency and the factor structure in a sample of Italian adults from the community, and to investigate whether such measure of EI is consistent with the original model theorized by Wong and Law (2002). We also aimed at exploring the concurrent validity of the WLEIS by testing correlations between WLEIS scores and the Big Five factors of personality (measured by the Zuckerman–Kuhlman–Aluja Personality Questionnaire; Aluja, Kuhlman, & Zuckerman, 2010), and self and other perception (measured by the 9 Attachment Profile; Candilera, 2007).

2. Material and methods

2.1. Participants

Participants were recruited from February 2016 to November 2016 at universities, public parks, shops, markets, banks, and post offices in three Italian regions that are highly representative of the demographic background of Italy: Piemonte (north), Lazio (mid), and Puglia (south). The sample included 476 subjects aged 18 to 58 (M = 30.5, SD = 9.2), who voluntarily participated to the study. They were all
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