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Differences in Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Self-Acceptance as Function of Gender and *Ibasho* (a Person Who Eases the Mind) of Japanese Undergraduates

Hiroshi Toyota

Nara University of Education, Japan

Abstract

The present study examined the differences in the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and self-acceptance as a function of gender and *ibasho* (*ibasyo*), a Japanese concept of 'home' or 'refuge'. Here, the *ibasho* represents the person who eases one's mind. The participants were 244 Japanese undergraduates who were asked to complete the Japanese version of the Emotional Intelligence Skills and Competence Questionnaire (J-ESCQ; Toyota, Morita, & Takšić, 2007), a question related to *ibasho* (Who is the person that eases the mind) and self-acceptance scales (Itatsu, 1989). Positive correlations between all sub-abilities in EI: (perceiving and understanding emotion (PU), expressing and labeling emotion (EL), managing and regulating emotion (MR), and self-acceptance) were found in females whereas in males, the only positive correlation was found between MR and self-acceptance. For participants who report that 'lover' is a person who eases their mind, PU has a negative correlation with self-acceptance. Both EL and MR have a strong correlation with self-acceptance in all types of groups. These results indicate that the effect of each sub-ability in EI on self-acceptance is determined by gender and the presence of the person who provides a sense of *ibasho* and also suggest that these determinants should be considered to clarify individual differences in adaptation.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, J-ESCQ, *ibasho*, self-acceptance

Emotional intelligence (EI) has been an interesting topic in psychology and a great deal of research has been conducted (Law, Wong, & Song, 2004; Toyota, 2009). In particular, since Goleman (1995) suggested that EI was a strong predictor of performance, a number of research projects have examined the relationship between EI and any kind of performance. Recently, Joseph and Newman (2010) specified a cascading model of the relationship between EI and job performance, in

✉ Hiroshi Toyota, Department of Psychology, Nara University of Education, Nara 630-8528, Japan. E-mail: htoyota@nara-edu.ac.jp

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which the following sequence is described. Namely, emotion perception casually precedes emotion understanding, which in turn precedes emotion regulation and job performance. This model was confirmed to be valid via meta-analysis of several pieces of research.

According to Salovey and Mayer (1990), EI is "the subset of social intelligence that involves 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" (p. 189). This definition of EI was followed by many other proposals (e.g. Davies, Stankov, & Robert, 1998; Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999) which, although not identical, contained only minor differences (Toyota, 2009). The common elements of all of the definitions were as follows: an ability to understand one's own or others' emotion or feeling; the ability to express one's own emotion or feeling, and the ability to regulate or control one's own emotion or feeling (Toyota, 2009). Takšić (1998) followed the definitions of Salovey and Mayer (1990) and developed the Emotional Skills & Competence Questionnaire (ESCQ). The ESCQ thus has three subscales corresponding to the following three sub-abilities: the ability to perceive and understand emotion (PU), the ability to express and label emotion (EL), and the ability to manage and regulate emotion (MR). On the basis of the ESCQ developed by Takšić (1998), Toyota et al. (2007) have developed the Japanese version of ESCQ. The present study used J-ESCQ as the measure for assessing EI.

Although the relationship between EI and job performance as mentioned above has been clarified, the relationship between EI and adaptation has not been examined so much. Especially in Japan, few studies have examined the relation. For example, Toyota et al. (2007) examined the relationship between EI and self-esteem as one of the positive aspects of adaptation. They showed a positive correlation between EI and self-esteem. Toyota (2009), using the scale of loneliness as an index of negative aspect of adaptation, indicated that EI, especially MR, determined the level of loneliness.

Both the positive aspect, e.g. self-esteem, and the negative aspects of adaptation, e.g. loneliness, seem to be determined by self-acceptance. Itatsu (1994) found a close relation between self-acceptance and interpersonal relations. Namely, the participants who accepted their own self had friendly attitudes toward others. As attitude to others is a critical aspect of adaptation, the more a participant accepted their own self, the higher level of adaptation he or she has. Therefore, self-acceptance is worth being examined to clarify the critical aspects of adaptation. As Toyota et al. (2007) showed, there is a positive relation between EI and self-esteem. This relation may be mediated by self-acceptance. Because the participants with higher EI could control their emotion in a situation of strong stress, they could accept their own self. As for the participants with lower EI, they could not control their emotion in such a situation and they often had difficulty in accepting their own self. So the positive relation between EI and self-acceptance could be

predicted. Some recent research (Toyota, 2005; Toyota & Kishida, 2006) found gender differences in interpersonal adaptation. Toyota et al. (2007) also observed gender differences in the correlations between total EI score and neuroticism (-.35 for male and -.17 for female) and between MR score and conscientiousness (.16 for male and .35 for female). Considering these gender differences, the effect size of EI on self-acceptance would depend on gender. The first purpose of the present study is to examine the differences in the effect of EI on self-acceptance between male and female undergraduates.

Previous studies (Epstein & Feist, 1988; Fey, 1957; Phillips, 1951) examined the relation between self-acceptance and other-acceptance (acceptance of others), and showed a close relation between the two types of acceptance. Although no research directly examined the other-acceptance in Japan, Toyota (2009) investigated the effect of *Iiasho* similar to the concept of other-acceptance, on loneliness. According to Toyota (2008), *ibasho* is an idiosyncratic word in the Japanese culture, and is defined as the person who eases your mind (PEM), or the person one feels comfortable with, such as "myself", "mother", "father", "brother", "sister", "friend" and so on. Toyota (2008) showed that participants who selected "myself" as PEM had a higher level of loneliness than those who selected "mother" or "friend". Since the earliest research by Kato (1977), research on PEM stressed the contrast between "myself" and "others". Namely, it is critical whether someone depends on others or not. Recent studies (Okamura & Toyota, 2002; Toyota & Okamura, 2001, 2002) have indicated that the participants who selected "myself" as PEM ("myself" groups) were inferior in two interpersonal emotions (the level of confidence in others and subjective distance between myself and others) than those who selected "mother" or "friend". These studies suggested the importance of PEM for the adaptation and the possibility that PEM had an effect on self-acceptance in Japanese students. The present study compares self-acceptance among PEM groups. Since self-acceptance, as mentioned before, was correlated with other-acceptance (e.g., Epstein & Feist, 1988), it is predicted that participants in "mother", "friend" and "lover" groups would have higher scores of self-acceptance than those in "myself" group. The second purpose of the present study was to examine this prediction.

Toyota (2008) showed that the effects of EI on the level of loneliness were varied among the three groups. Namely, the loneliness in "myself" group was strongly influenced by EI, in contrast to the "mother" or "friend" groups. Toyota (2009) also showed the differences in the effect of sub-abilities (PU, EL, MR) in EI on loneliness across each *ibasho* (PEM) group. Considering these differences among PEM groups, the effect size of EI on self-acceptance would be varied among PEM groups ("myself", "mother", "friend" and "lover"). MR is the most critical for self-acceptance among sub-abilities in EI, because one has to control or regulate some unpleasant, stressful, or sad events that caused the feeling of not-accepting their own self. If so, it is predicted that MR has a significant effect on

self-acceptance in all PEM groups. However, it is also predicted that the effects of EL and PU would depend on type of PEM groups. The third purpose of the present study is to examine these predictions.

Method

Participants

The participants were 244 Japanese undergraduates, 96 of whom were males, 148 were females. The mean age was 18.7 ($SD=0.64$), ranging from 18.0 to 21.8 years old, and belonging to 2 different universities located in Kansai area of Japan.

Instruments

The present study used the following three instruments.

Japanese version of the Emotional Skills and Competence Questionnaire (J-ESCQ) - the original version of this scale was developed by Takšić (1998) using Croatian participants and is based on the framework of the emotional intelligence model (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The original version includes 45 items divided into three subscales mentioned above (1) PU (e.g., *I notice when somebody feels down.*), (2) EL (e.g., *I am able to express my emotions well.*), and (3) MR (e.g., *I try to keep up a good mood.*). The original version of the ESCQ indicated that the coefficient alphas of the subscales were satisfactory to enable the confirmation of the reliability of the ESCQ (Takšić, 2002). Toyota et al. (2007) developed the J-ESCQ, consisting of 8 items per subscale (24 items). The alphas for the three subscales (PU, EL and MR) were .91, .88, and .65, respectively. The present study used J-ESCQ as a tool for measuring the level of EI. Participants rated each item on a 5-point rating scale (never, seldom, occasionally, usually, and always), indicating how often they feel or think about the statement expressed in each item.

Ibasho Choice Index (ICI) - Ibasho (the person who eases one's mind) of each participant was assessed by the ICI. This index was developed by Toyota and Okamura (2002) and used in previous studies (Toyota, 2008, 2009). ICI includes the question, "*Who is the person that eases your mind?*" and 8 alternatives of choice, namely *myself, mother, father, grandfather or grandmother, brother or sister, friend, lover and others*. Participants were asked to choose one of the 8 alternatives as the answer to the previous question.

Self-Acceptance Scale Short Version (SASSV) - this scale was developed by Itatsu (1989), and then adapted to undergraduates (Itatsu, 1994). This scale consisted of 25 items with a 7-point rating scale, (ranging from 1 = *disagree* to 7 = *agree*), indicating how participants feel or think about the statement expressed in each item (e.g. *I like myself, I am sensitive*). Itatsu (1994) evidenced significant

correlations of self-acceptance with interpersonal attitude (Kato & Takagi, 1980). This correlation was regarded as an indicator of the concurrent validity of the scale.

Procedure

Participants in two different classes completed the previously mentioned scales in the author's classes. Participants were distributed the sheets of paper containing ICI, J-ESCQ and SASSV separately. They were asked to answer each scale following the author's instructions. Two orders of answering the three scales (ICI, J-ESCQ and SASSV; ICI, SASSV and J-ESCQ) were assigned to each of the 2 classes.

Results

Effects of EI on Self-Acceptance in Males and Females

Descriptive data for males and females are shown in Table 1.

A multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the effects of EI on self-acceptance in male and female participants, respectively. Table 2 shows the result in males indicating that only MR has a significant effect on self-acceptance and explains 15% of self-acceptance variance. Whereas for females PU, EL and MR have significant effects on self-acceptance, and these three sub-abilities in EI explains 35% of self-acceptance variance.

Table 1. *Descriptive Data for Males and Females on Measures of Self-acceptance of EI*

			Male	Female
Independent Variable	Self-Acceptance	<i>M</i>	81.26	80.73
		<i>SD</i>	8.46	8.88
	PU	<i>M</i>	25.34	25.89
		<i>SD</i>	5.22	4.62
	EL	<i>M</i>	26.02	25.19
		<i>SD</i>	4.94	5.60
	MR	<i>M</i>	28.12	28.07
		<i>SD</i>	4.70	4.03

Note. PU – Perceiving and Understanding Emotion;
 EL – Expressing and Labeling Emotion;
 MR – Managing and Regulating Emotion

Table 2. *Multiple Regression Analysis on Self-Acceptance by EI sub-scales (PU, EL, and MR) as a Function of Gender*

Independent Variable	Self-Acceptance			
	Male		Female	
	<i>r</i>	β	<i>r</i>	β
PU	.10		.13	-.23**
EL	.25		.41	.29***
MR	.39	.39**	.53	.49***
R ²	.15		.35	
F	17.22***		25.76***	

Note. PU – Perceiving and Understanding Emotion; EL – Expressing and Labeling Emotion; MR – Managing and Regulating Emotion.

** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The Relationship between PEM, EI and Self-Acceptance

As Toyota (2008, 2009) indicated, the participants' choices of each of 8 alternatives in ICI were counted. Table 3 indicates the number of each choice. As participants frequently chose "myself", "mother", "friend" and "lover" options, the following analyses were conducted to these four groups. Table 4 shows the means and standard deviations for J-ESCQ (PU, EL and MR) and self-acceptance scores for each group. 2 (Gender; male and female) X 4 (PEM; "myself", "mother", "friend" and "lover") analyses of variances were conducted for each index (PU, EL, MR and self-acceptance). For all of the three sub-abilities in EI (PU, EL and MR), the main effect of gender, that of PEM and the interaction of gender and PEM were not significant. However, only for self-acceptance, the main effect of PEM was significant ($F(3, 200)=3.95, p < .01$). Multiple comparisons using Scheffe's method were performed to this main effect, indicating that the self-acceptance score in "mother" group was higher than those in "myself" and "lover" groups ($p < .05$). But, the difference in this score between the latter two groups was not significant and the differences in the score between "friend" group and the other three groups were not significant.

Table 3. *The Number of Choice for Each Alternatives to Ibasho Question ("Who is the Person that Eases your Mind?")*

	Myself	Mother	Father	Grand-father or -mother	Brother or sister	Friend	Lover	Others	Total
Male	28	10	4	1	6	20	23	4	96
%	29.17	10.42	4.17	1.04	6.25	20.83	23.96	4.17	100
Female	25	61	6	1	14	26	15	0	148
%	16.89	41.22	4.05	0.68	9.46	17.57	10.14	0.00	100
Total	53	71	10	2	20	46	38	4	244
%	21.72	29.10	4.10	0.82	8.20	18.85	15.57	1.64	100

Table 4. Mean Scores and their SDs of Self-Acceptance and EI as a Function of Group

		Type of Group								
		Myself		Mother		Friend		Lover		
		Male N=28	Female N=25	Male N=10	Female N=61	Male N=20	Female N=26	Male N=23	Female N=15	
Self-Acceptance	M	79.00	79.04	84.30	83.30	84.15	80.46	79.96	76.20	
	SD	8.66	7.83	10.02	7.59	7.92	8.93	7.65	11.73	
PU	M	24.75	25.32	24.60	25.44	25.60	26.62	26.91	26.73	
	SD	6.20	3.84	6.60	3.83	4.76	6.33	4.55	5.91	
EI	EL	M	24.89	25.52	24.20	25.34	26.05	25.46	28.13	23.67
		SD	5.52	6.09	6.99	5.40	4.63	5.65	3.99	6.07
MR	M	26.18	27.48	29.70	28.34	28.55	28.85	29.30	26.67	
	SD	4.32	4.46	5.06	3.60	5.08	4.34	5.16	3.46	
Total	M	75.54	78.44	79.10	78.95	80.25	80.69	84.48	76.60	
	SD	13.65	11.99	13.31	10.35	10.43	15.03	8.97	12.74	

Note. PU – Perceiving and Understanding Emotion; EL – Expressing and Labeling Emotion; MR – Managing and Regulating Emotion.

The Relationship between EI and Self-Acceptance as a Function of PEM Group

Table 5 shows the correlations between each subscale of EI and self-acceptance in each group. Although .21 for female in "lover" group is a little low, the other correlations between MR and self-acceptance are high (range from .32 to .70). EI also has strong correlations with self-acceptance, except for males in "mother" group. For the correlation between PU and self-acceptance, the clear differences among PEM groups were observed. Namely, positive correlations were observed in "myself" and "friend" groups, but negative correlation was found in "lover" group.

Table 5. Correlations EI (PU, EL and MR) in Each PEM Group

		Type of Group							
		Myself		Mother		Friend		Lover	
		Male N=28	Female N=25	Male N=10	Female N=61	Male N=20	Female N=26	Male N=23	Female N=15
EI	PU	.35	.24	-.19	.18	.29	.62*	-.36	-.21
	EL	.28	.34	-.17	.43*	.31	.59*	.50*	.44
	MR	.32	.68*	.46	.42*	.36	.70*	.45*	.21
	Total	.38	.50*	-.01	.45*	.46	.68*	.45*	.27

Note. PU – Perceiving and Understanding Emotion; EL – Expressing and Labeling Emotion; MR – Managing and Regulating Emotion.

*p<.05.

Discussion

The first purpose of the present study was to examine gender differences in the effect of EI on self-acceptance. For males, only MR predicted the level of self-acceptance, whereas for females, all of the three sub-abilities (PU, EL and MR) predicted it. As previous studies (Toyota, 2005; Toyota et al., 2007; Toyota & Kishida, 2006) showed the gender differences in interpersonal adaptation, the present study also indicated the gender difference in the effect of EI on self-acceptance. As Toyota et al. (2007) suggested, further research in interpersonal adaptation should take gender into consideration.

The second purpose of the present study was to examine the differences of self-acceptance among PEM groups. As predicted, participants in "mother" and "friend" groups had higher scores of self-acceptance than those in "myself" group. However, the score in "lover" group was as low as in "myself" group. It is inconsistent with the prediction. Previous studies (Kato, 1977; Toyota, Oga, & Okamura, 2007; Toyota & Okamura, 2001, 2002) stressed the contrast between "myself" and "others". But "others" includes many types of groups, such as "mother", "friend", "lover" and so on. Although Toyota (2009) showed the difference in the effect of EI on loneliness between "mother" and "friend" groups, the present study found the difference between "lover" and the other two groups ("mother" and "friend"). Since lover may be the most intimate and ego-involved person during later adolescence (Toyota & Kishida, 2006), it is reasonable to detect the difference between "lover" and the others.

The third purpose of the present study was to compare the effect of sub-abilities of EI on self-acceptance among PEM groups. Consistent with the prediction, MR have strong effects on self-acceptance in all of PEM groups. Toyota (2009) showed the importance of MR on loneliness, and indicated that the ability to regulate or control emotion about some events had a function to restrain the level of loneliness. Also, Toyota, Morita & Takšić (2007) showed the positive relations between MR and self-esteem. Considering these studies, the present result indicates the possibility that efficacy of regulating or controlling emotion leads to improvement of self-acceptance. Namely, the participants with higher MR have a higher level of self-esteem, which in turn may lead to a higher level of self-acceptance. Not only MR but also EL has significant effects on self-acceptance in all of PEM groups. This result is consistent with Toyota (2009) showing the effects of EL on loneliness and self-esteem, and suggests that the ability to express and label emotions has also an important function to improve the level of self-acceptance. As expression of emotion leads to a reduction of loneliness (Toyota, 2009) improvement of self-acceptance may be partially caused by the reduction of loneliness.

Interestingly, the effect of PU on self-acceptance varies with PEM groups. Namely, the strong relations between PU and self-acceptance were observed in

"myself" and "friend" groups. However, a weak or negative correlation was found in "mother" and "lover" groups. Especially for "lover" group, PU has a negative effect on self-acceptance. Although the participants in "lover" group depend on others as those in "mother" and "friend" groups, there may be differences in the level or degree of dependence. Comparing with the level of dependence to which participants in "mother" or "friend" groups depend on the "mother" or a particular "friend", each participant in "lover" group may depend on a particular "lover" more deeply. So, perceiving and understanding emotion of a particular "lover" often elicits a negative emotion, which leads to a decline of self-acceptance.

The present study leads to the suggestion that it is critical to enhance the level of MR and EL for improving self-acceptance. A precise educational system should be provided to enhance the level of MR and EL. Toyota and Shimazu (2006) showed the positive relationships between the perceived experiences of contingency and MR ($r=.34$), or EL ($r=.24$), and indicated that the perceived experiences of contingency enhanced the level of MR and EL, which in turn led to the improvement of self-acceptance. According to Toyota (2009), contingent experience is one of the most successful predictors. Considering Toyota and Shimazu (2006), to enhance the level of MR and EL we should provide the opportunity to feel the contingency in the activity to the participants in educational program. During the program, participants should express their own emotion to others and control their own emotion to communicate with others. These activities related to EL and MR would facilitate their own self-acceptance. Considering the gender difference found in the present study, in further investigation it is necessary to establish a flexible utilization of such an educational program depending on the individual differences.

Finally, the present study used self-acceptance as an index of adaptation. Toyota (2008, 2009) used loneliness as an index of the negative aspect of adaptation. Toyota (2009) also used self-esteem as an index of the positive aspect of adaptation. The present study used the self-acceptance as the core index related to both type of aspects, negative and positive aspects of adaptation. In further research a new index of adaptation should be considered.

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