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Short Research Report

Theory of Constructed Emotion: Emotional vocabulary and emotional intelligence

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The present work aims to study the relationship between perceived emotional intelligence, and general and emotional vocabulary. Undergraduate Psychology (N = 99) and Design (N = 44) students completed a number of tests about emotional intelligence (TMMS-21), general vocabulary (BAIRES-A), and emotional vocabulary respectively. The predictive effect of emotional vocabulary differed across different factors of emotional intelligence (positive in attention to feelings and negative in emotion repair), while a positive association was found in psychology students with more years completed at university. Psychology students had higher emotional vocabulary than Design students. Emotional vocabulary had limited influence on emotional intelligence, contrary to the theory of Constructed Emotion.

keywords: emotional vocabulary, emotional concepts, emotional skills, emotional intelligence

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Introduction

The model of perceived emotional intelligence stems from the work of Salovey et al. (1995). Their model proposes that emotional intelligence is composed of three aspects: Attention to feelings, the perception that people have of their level of attention to emotions; Emotional clarity, that is, how people believe they understand, perceive and discriminate their feelings; and Mood repair, people's perception of their capacity to

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regulate negative emotional states. There is a large body of work that associates emotional intelligence with positive psychosocial indicators in university students (e.g. MacCann et al., 2020).

The theory of Constructed Emotion is a novel theory on the development of emotional skills. In opposition to theories that assert the existence of innate basic emotions, the theory of Constructed Emotion emphasizes top-down modulation and individual/cultural variation in emotions. Emotions are construed as conceptual categories, coherent internal models, and simulations that make it possible to assign meaning to external and internal perceptions (Hoemann, et al., 2020). From this perspective, an emotion is a concept that is generated from a sample of perceptual experiences (Feldman Barrett, 2017). Words enable the establishment of regularities in the sensorial input, and the development of concepts, to create shared realities (Feldman Barrett, 2017). Language is essential for learning abstract conceptual categories, such as emotions, and for everyday conceptual acts of understanding one's emotional state.

The theory of Constructed Emotion opens the possibility of conducting research on emotional intelligence focusing on the knowledge of emotional vocabulary (Olderbak et al., 2019). It expands the concept of emotional intelligence beyond the identification and regulation of one's own and others' emotions, with the focus on the construction of emotional knowledge. Vocabulary knowledge, and in particular emotional vocabulary, is related to interest, experience, and formal education (Vine et al., 2020). Since vocabulary is acquired through formal and informal experience, it would be expected for psychology students to have a vocabulary rich in words related to their profession (Vine et al., 2020). Thus, the objective of this paper was to analyse the relationship between emotional vocabulary and emotional intelligence in undergraduate Psychology and Design students, considering general vocabulary as a control measure. It was hypothesized that emotional vocabulary increases as students advance in Psychology major, is positively related to emotional intelligence and is higher in Psychology students than in Design students.

Method

The sample consisted of 99 Psychology (*age M*=22.8, *SD=3.76*, males=57) and 44 Design (*age M=24.3, SD=3.72*, females=33) undergraduate students. All were students attending public and private universities in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Students were administered the following tests:

TMMS-21 (Calero, 2013) - a self-report instrument that assesses self-perceived emotional skills across three dimensions: Attention, Clarity and Repair (21 items, 7 for each dimension, with a Likert-scale with five options).

Emotional Vocabulary Test (Delgado et al., 2017) - an index of emotional vocabulary (40 emotional words and 5 options representing basic emotions with one correct answer). The score is the number of correct answers.

BAIRES- A (Cortada de Kohan, 2004) - a test of general vocabulary (34 items multiple choice with one correct answer). The score is the number of correct answers.

Results

Correlational analysis revealed a significant positive correction between Clarity, Attention, Repair, emotional intelligence, year at university, general vocabulary, and emotional vocabulary in Psychology students, and between emotional vocabulary and general vocabulary (Rho=.61, p<.01). Correlations between emotional vocabulary and Clarity, Attention, Repair, and total emotional intelligence were not significant. Emotional vocabulary (Rho=.29, p=.03) and general vocabulary (Rho=.33, p.<0.02) were significantly correlated with the number of university years. The Design students results showed only positive associations between emotional vocabulary and general vocabulary (Rho=.47, p<.01).

Linear regressions were performed with the dimensions of emotional intelligence in students of both majors estimated by the method of least squares. We constructed models with Attention, Clarity, and Repair as dependent variables and emotional vocabulary, general vocabulary, type of university degree, and the number of university years as predictor variables. With Attention as dependent variable, the model was significant F(4,137)=2.8, p=.03, R=.28 with a significant positive effect of emotional vocabulary (ß=.04; IC95=.01-0.08; t=2.47; p=.02) but Clarity was not significant *F*(4,137)= .89, p=4,701, R=.16. With Repair as dependent variable, the model was significant F(4,137)=5.16, p<0.01, R=0.36, with a significant effect for emotional vocabulary (β=-.06; IC95=.01-.08; t=2.47; p=.02) and the number of university years (β=.16; IC95=.12-.48; t=3.25; p< .01), These calculations demonstrated that Repair was positively related to university years and negatively to emotional vocabulary. The Mann-Whitney U statistic was used to find out if there were differences in the scores obtained in Clarity, Attention, Repair, emotional intelligence, general vocabulary and emotional vocabulary between Psychology students and Design students. After correcting for the p-value, we detected a small but significant effect-sized difference in emotional vocabulary (d=.25), indicating that a greater emotional vocabulary for Psychology students (U=.1620, p=.04).

Discussion

Emotional vocabulary was not significantly related to the emotional intelligence dimensions. In a multiple-regression analysis, Emotional vocabulary predicted Repair negatively and Attention positively. The number of university years was a significant positive parameter for Repair, whereas the type of university degree did not significantly predict any other model. The Psychology students' years in college could be conducive to general vocabulary and emotional vocabulary growth; but for the Design students, no significant relationship emerged between emotional vocabulary, university year, and perceived emotional skills.

General vocabulary was strongly related to emotional vocabulary in Psychology students and Design students, but there was no significant difference between them, in contrast to the differences in emotional vocabulary. Therefore, these results suggest that Psychology students manifest a greater development of emotional vocabulary, indicating that the type of university degree influences the level of emotional vocabulary as observed by Vine et al. (2020), who suggested that psychologists are expected to have a vocabulary rich in psychology-related words. It is also important to note that, in the relationship between emotional vocabulary and emotional intelligence, the correlations between Clarity and emotional vocabulary

were both nonsignificant and close to zero. This contrasts with the relationship between emotional intelligence and emotional vocabulary proposed by Mavrou (2021), but agrees with the conclusion of Boden et al. (2013) that emotion differentiation and emotion Clarity are different constructs.

Participants possessing a smaller repertoire of emotional words perceived themselves as having greater Repair, contrasting with the theory of Constructed Emotion proposal that possessing a higher number of emotional concepts enhances emotional skills. The latter perception could also be the result of a self-report bias: perhaps students possessing more emotional concepts, imagining a greater complexity in Repair, are more aware of the difficulties in self-regulation, thus expressing a lower self-perception of this competence. A limitation of self-reported measurements of emotional intelligence compared to performance tests may involve biases that do not accurately reflect emotional-processing abilities.

Given the small sample size of the participants in the study, particularly the Design students in comparison to Psychology students, there may be limited statistical power when comparing these two groups. Hence, it is prudent to interpret the findings of the study as preliminary and studies with more robust samples are carried out. Furthermore, considering the influence of cultural factors on emotional intelligence, future research could also examine the relationship between emotional knowledge and effective emotion management.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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