The Relationship Between Verbal Ability and Levels of Emotional Awareness

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ABSTRACT

The Levels of Emotional Awareness Scale (LEAS; Lane, Quinlan, Schwartz, Walker & Zeitlan, 1990) is an open-ended written test that measures understanding of emotion words. Verbal Ability is the broader aptitude to use spoken and written words to communicate (CREDO Reference, n.d.). Because both involve cognitive abilities related to words, a moderate positive correlation would be expected between them. In this study, 869 undergraduate students completed the LEAS and a short measure of Verbal Ability, the Reading Test (Thurstone, 1934). The correlation between these was positive, but small. This unexpectedly small correlation may have been due to two factors. First, this study used undergraduate students, who are above average in Verbal Ability. This would lead to restriction of range and a reduction in the overall correlation. Second, LEAS scores may also suffer from restriction of range. The LEAS may not accurately measure the abilities of people with high levels of Emotional Awareness, because common emotion words (e.g., sad, happy) receive the same scores as less common emotion words (e.g., morose, ecstatic).

INTRODUCTION

The Levels of Emotional Awareness Scale (LEAS; Lane, Quinlan, Schwartz, Walker & Zeitlan, 1990) is an open-ended written test intended to assess Emotional Awareness, the extent to which an individual is able to recognize and describe emotions in themselves and others (Lane, Kevley, DuBois, Shamasundara, & Schwartz, 1995). Another cognitive ability related to using words is Verbal Ability. Verbal Ability has been defined as the aptitude to use words, spoken or written, to communicate (CREDO Reference, n.d.). The purpose of our research is to examine the relationship between Verbal Ability and the LEAS.

The LEAS asks participants to describe their feelings and those of another person in each of 20 emotionally evocative scenarios. Responses that use more specific emotion words and a wider variety of emotion words receive higher scores.

The LEAS has been shown to be a valid and reliable measure of Emotional Awareness. The scale has demonstrated good construct and discriminant validity in relation to other psychological tests (Lane et al., 1990), including two cognitive-developmental measures: the Washington University Sentence Completion Test of Ego Development (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970; Loevinger, Wessler, & Redmore, 1970) and the Parental Descriptions Scale (Blatt, 1974; Blatt, Wein, Chevron, & Quinlan, 1979). The LEAS has been shown to have high inter-rater reliability with an intra-class correlation of 0.84 (Lane, Reiman, Axelrod, Yun, Holmes, & Schwartz, 1998) and internal consistency measured by Cronbach's alpha was .81 (Lane et al., 1990).

Research has found a significant relationship between Verbal Ability and LEAS scores. The LEAS correlates positively with the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale vocabulary subtest ($r(89) = .36$, $p < .001$; Lane et al., 1998) and the Shipley Institute of Living scale of Verbal Ability ($r(43) = 0.19$, $p > .05$; Ciarrochi, Caputi, & Mayer, 2003). The purpose of this study is to replicate previous findings that show a correlation between Verbal Ability and the LEAS.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 869 (315 male and 554 female) undergraduate students participated and received course credit. Ages ranged from 18 to 65 (mean 20.63, SD 5.17). Participants identified themselves as 60.9% White, 7.6% Black, 10.7% Hispanic, 12.2% Asian, .7% Native, and 7.8% other.

Measures

The LEAS is a 20-item open-ended test of Emotional Awareness. Each item presents an emotionally evocative scenario involving oneself and another person. Each scenario is intended to evoke one of four emotions (anger, sadness, fear, happiness). Following each scenario participants are asked to respond to two questions, "How would you feel?" and "How would the other person feel?" Responses for each scenario are given a score between 0 and 5; 0 being the least emotionally aware and 5 being the most emotionally aware (Lane, 1990). Scores are assigned based upon the rules in the LEAS scoring manual and glossary (Lane, 1991).

The Reading-I Test (Thurstone, 1938) is a timed test of Verbal Ability. From the twenty-four items on the original test only ten were used in this study: 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21, and 22. The items require interpretation of proverbs. Participants are asked to circle two of four statements which are nearest to the meaning of the given proverb. Participants had a total of 4 minutes to complete the ten items.

Statistical Analysis

To examine the relationship between Verbal Ability and the LEAS, we correlated the Reading Test and the *LEAS.*

RESULTS

There was a small positive correlation between Verbal Ability and LEAS scores ($r(867) = .15$, $p < .001$).

CONCLUSIONS

The results replicated the findings of previous research that there is a positive relationship between Verbal Ability and total LEAS scores. The correlation we found was smaller than the correlations found in previous research (.36, Lane et al., 1998; .19, Ciarrochi, Caputi, & Mayer, 2003). This small correlation may have been due to three factors. First, the use of university students may have resulted in restriction of range on the Verbal Ability measure, because university students generally have above average verbal skills. Second, there may also have been restriction of range on the measure of Emotional Awareness, if the university students had high scores in this area.

CONCLUSIONS CONTD.

Because the LEAS gives the same scores to common emotion words (such as happy and sad) as complicated emotion words (such as morose and ecstatic), the LEAS may understate the skills of those with the highest levels of Emotional Awareness. Finally, the correlation between Emotional Awareness and Verbal Ability may have been lower in this study than in previous research because we used only 10-items to measure Verbal Ability. Perhaps if a longer, higher quality, and more reliable measure of Verbal Ability was used (such as the WAIS, which was used by Lane et al. in their study), then a higher correlation would have been found.

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