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The Link Between Social Interaction with Adults and Adolescent Conflict Coping Strategy in School Context

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The Link between Social Interaction with Adults and Adolescent Conflict Coping Strategy in School Context

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Abstract

Based on social learning theory, this study aimed at providing a better understanding of the influence of social interaction on adolescents' conflict coping strategy. This study used the data from the Taiwan Educational Panel Survey (N=8717) to test the unique contribution of religious involvement, parent-child interaction, teacher-student interaction on adolescents' conflict coping strategy when they encountered an interpersonal offense in school. Findings showed that religious involvement, being physically hurt by father, being understood by father, and positive teacher-student interaction could increase the possibility of positive conflict coping strategy. And being verbally hurt by mother and negative teacher-student interaction would decrease the possibility of positive conflict coping strategy. Based on these results, implications for research and practice were discussed.

Keywords: conflict coping strategy; school context; adolescence; social interaction.

La Relación entre la Interacción Social con Adultos y la Estrategia de Afrontamiento de Conflicto en el Contexto Escolar

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Resumen

Sobre la base del aprendizaje social, este estudio se dirigió a conseguir una mejor comprensión sobre la influencia de la interacción social sobre la estrategia de adolescentes relativa al afrontamiento del conflicto. Este estudio usó los datos de la Taiwan Educational Panel Survey (N=8717) para medir la contribución de la implicación religiosa, la interacción padre-hijo, la interacción profesor/a-estudiante sobre la estrategia de adolescentes relativa al afrontamiento del conflicto cuando se encontraban con una ofensa interpersonal en la escuela. Los resultados muestran que la implicación religiosa, ser dañado por el padre, ser comprendido por el padre, y una interacción positiva profesor/a-estudiante podría aumentar la posibilidad de una estrategia de afrontamiento del conflicto positiva. Y ser dañado verbalmente por la madre y una interacción negativa profesor/a-estudiante disminuiría la posibilidad de una estrategia de afrontamiento positiva. Basado en estos resultados, se discuten implicaciones para la investigación y la práctica.

Palabras clave: estrategia de afrontamiento del conflicto; contexto escolar; adolescencia; interacción social.

Many problems in living, both clinically severe and normal ones, have their roots in or are exacerbated by interpersonal offenses (Wade & Worthington, 2003). If the response to interpersonal offense is expressed in forms of maladaptive coping, it can damage relationships and lead to avoidance and revenge (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Especially for now, youth violence is an increasing concern in our school and society. A significant factor in the involvement of violence is the inability to resolve conflict. Many adolescents who have shown violent behavior say that they are motivated by anger and revenge (Pfefferbaum & Wood, 1994). These situations might be improved if positive conflict coping strategy is involved. Although there are many positive coping strategies to deal with interpersonal offense, forgiving is an effective coping response which can diminish negative emotions and repair relationships, it is positively associated with conflict resolution, advice and support seeking strategies, and negatively associated with revenge seeking (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006; Worthington, Berry, & Parrott, 2001; Worthington & Wade, 1999).

Forgiving as a positive conflict coping strategy

In literature, Worthington et al (2007) suggest that there are two types of forgiveness: decisional forgiveness and emotional forgiveness. Emotional forgiveness will lead to decisional forgiveness, and decisional forgiveness may influence emotional forgiveness (DiBlasio & Benda, 2008). Emotional forgiveness is the emotional replacement of negative unforgiving emotions (like bitterness, resentment, and anger) by positive other-oriented emotions such as empathy, sympathy, compassion, or love. Decisional forgiveness is a behavioral intention to eliminate negative behavior and increase positive behavior toward the transgressor. People who grant decisional forgiveness are inclined neither to seek revenge nor avoiding the transgressor but treat the person well even though they might not have completely forgiven the person emotionally (Worthington, Jennings, David, & Diblasio, 2010). Decisional and emotional forgiveness are different processes. Emotional forgiveness is more conducive to mental health because negative affect and stress reactions can be overcome by positive affect. Decisional forgiveness is

a motivation statement about controlling one's future behavior which might improve reconciliatory processes and relationships (Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini, & Miller, 2007). Therefore, decisional forgiveness is more suitable to be used as coping response when people encounter interpersonal offense, it is a motivational transformation that inclines people to inhibit relationship-destructive responses and behave constructively toward someone who has behaved destructively toward them (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; Rusbult et al, 1991).

Peer world is important for adolescents and the subtlety of social interaction grows exponentially in this period (Denham et al., 2002), such complex peer interactions are complemented by increased social cognitive ability and forgiveness reasoning (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Enright, 1994). However, age may be related to increasingly abstract reasoning about conflict resolution, but it is not a strong predictor of it: many adolescents at this period still act in ways that lead to social rejection and relational aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Park & Enright, 1997; Worthington, 2007).

The Influence of Social Interaction on forgiving strategy

Forgiveness is a concept with deep religious roots. Religious traditions, beliefs, and rituals can influence people's interpersonal thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Forgiveness (decisional or emotional) in response to a transgression, is valued by every major religion such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, and they firmly advocate forgiveness as a way of controlling one's negative emotion and behavior (Worthington, Jennings, & DiBlasio, 2010). If religions emphasize the value of forgiveness, it would be unsurprising to find that people higher in religious involvement tend to be more forgiving than people lower in religious involvement. However, empirical research suggests that religious involvement related to forgiveness at a general, abstract level, but is not as strongly related to forgiveness in specific, real-life circumstances (McCullough & Worthington, 1999). In this study, we measured adolescents' response to a specific circumstance, but we are not sure whether there is a strong relationship between religious involvement and forgiving response to peer transgression.

Besides religious interaction, significant others also remain mostly responsible for the moral development of adolescents. According to social

learning theory, forgiveness as a moral virtue can be initiated through observation and imitation, children observe the behavior of parents over time and imitate what they see. Bandura and Walters (1963) stated that children from homes where heavy punishment predominated tended to believe the effectiveness of punishment and retributive justice. In addition to the observation of behavior, learning also occurs through the observation of rewards and punishments, a process known as vicarious reinforcement. Children can be induced to say that he or she grants forgiveness at a very early age, because they tend to think that forgiveness will help them avoid punishment and get rewards (Park & Enright, 1997; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Worthington, 2006). Adolescents become more social and capable of realizing social disapproval and approval for their responses to transgressions, forgiveness may happen under the conditions of social pressure, such as demands or suggestions from peers, family, or certain institutions that encouraging a forgiving response (Park & Enright, 1997). Noddings (2002) emphasized the need to develop and maintain an environment in which moral life could flourish, “How I treat you may bring out the best or worst in you.” Exposure to more mature others will stimulate maturity in adolescents’ own value processes, and these virtues will eventually be internalized and become a part in adolescents (Windmiller, Lambert, & Turiel, 1980). On the other hand, positive social interaction is associated with adolescents’ positive personality and emotion. The nurturing adult caregiver provides a model of concern for others, in the interaction with them, children will develop the capacity for empathy (Windmiller, Lambert, & Turiel, 1980). Youth who have positive personality traits such as agreeableness and emotional stability may treat the transgression less severe or less intentional, as well as interpret apologies as more sincere, thus they can forgive the transgressor more easily (Boon & Sulsky, 1997; McCullough, 2001).

For the role of parent-child interaction on forgiveness, Worthington (2007) demonstrated that parental socialization and emotional climate within the parent-child relationship could affect adolescents’ temperament and emotion-regulation capability (e.g. empathy, lessened anger and shame, appropriate guilt), which might influence forgiveness reasoning, motivation, and behavior. Mincic et al. (2004) also claimed that children’s perceptions of positive childrearing practices were related to children’s forgiveness. However, parents are not the sole models for the child. Durkheim (2012)

suggested that social unit of family was not constituted to be the agent to impart what was important to the culture, family was too small and too personal to reflect the whole of the social system, and school had the function of linking the child to this society, and teachers' role is extreme important in creating a social and moral being. In Taiwan and also many Asian societies, when children enter into senior high school, school life becomes more important. Most students immerse themselves in school at least eight hours a day, so teachers spend the longest time with students even compared with their parents. A teacher's classroom behavior is constantly under scrutiny by students. As a result, students learn a lot from a teacher's nonverbal behavior as well as their verbal behavior (Galloway, 1976). Children who perceive greater levels of support from teachers have fewer behavioural problems, higher levels of social competency, and better school adjustment (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta & Steinberg, 1992; Khamis, 2009). Besides, teachers as adult model in the school context can directly and indirectly tell and show students what emotions and behaviors are acceptable to express. To date there is no research investigating the relationship between teacher-student interaction and adolescents' forgiving coping strategy but based on the social support theory and related literature about parent-child interaction, it is reasonable to assume that teacher-student interaction is one influencing factor. We should keep in mind that school is a complex system different from family context, where students encounter more than one teacher, so rather than measuring the degree or frequency of a specific teacher's behaviour, the present study measured the number of teachers which students perceive with positive or negative interaction.

The Current Study

Building on previous research, we examined the extent to which religious involvement, parent-child interaction and teacher-student interaction influenced high-school students' conflict coping strategy when individual factors (Gender and Angry) were controlled. We expected to find that religious involvement and positive interaction with parents and teachers were positively associated with adolescents' positive conflict coping strategy, whereas, negative interaction with parents and teachers are negatively associated with adolescents' positive conflict coping strategy.

This research added to the literature on adolescent conflict coping strategy by assessing the influence of social interaction, especially teacher-student interaction, which has not been widely examined in previous research.

Method

Participants

This study made use of data from Taiwan Educational Panel Survey (Chang, 2008) for Wave 4 (2007) Senior High School. Taiwan Education Panel Survey is a national longitudinal project initiated by Academia Sinica and jointly funded by the Ministry of Education, the National Science Council, and Academia Sinica. A multistage stratified sampling method was used, and three classes from each school were sampled, with 15 students selected at random in each class. The dataset contained a sample of 12th graders in senior high school. The sample size in this study was 8717; the number of male was 4468 (51.3%), and the number of female was 4249 (48.7%). The full data set of students eligible for inclusion in the study contained 4.6 percent missing data, finally 8320 participants were included in this study.

Measures

Gender

Gender was coded 1 for males, 0 for females.

Angry

Angry as the control variable was measured by 2 items. Participants were asked: “In this semester, did these following things happen to you?” Items included, “want to scream, fight, and quarrel”, “feel irritated”. These 2 items assessed the self-reported frequency of angry experienced over the semester on a four-point Likert scale: never (assigned 1), sometimes (assigned 2), frequently (assigned 3), very frequently (assigned 4). The scores for each item were averaged to form a new variable called angry. The higher the scores were, the more severe the angry was considered to be. Cronbach's alpha was .63.

Religious Involvement

Respondents' religious involvement was measured by two items, they were asked: "whether you have religious affiliation" and "whether you attended religious service activities last summer vacation". Each question allowed a (0, 1) response. 0 means No, and 1 means Yes.

Parent-child interaction

Participants were asked to indicate whether their father or mother did any of the following things: (1) listen to my idea and communicate with me patiently; (2) give me help when I encounter some big problems or difficulties; (3) criticize me heavily when I make a small mistake; (4) beat me when I make a small mistake. Each question allowed a (0, 1) response. The first two questions measured positive interaction with parents, and the last two questions measured negative interaction with parents.

Teacher-student interaction

There were four items self-assessed by asking how many teachers behaved in a certain manner since the student started senior high school. Two of these items were averaged to measure positive interaction with teachers (Cronbach's alpha was .73): "When I express my ideas, the teacher will listen and try to understand." and "The teacher will praise me when I work hard." Another two items were averaged to measure negative interaction with teachers (Cronbach's alpha was .61): "The teacher may hurt my self-esteem when he or she tutors me.", and "The teacher sometime may punish us physically when we make a mistake." Each item was measured on a five-point Likert scale: none (assigned 1), 1~2 (assigned 2), 3~4 (assigned 3), 5~6 (assigned 4), more than 6 (assigned 5). Higher scores on the measure were indicative of more positive or negative interaction with teachers.

Positive conflict coping strategy

Positive conflict coping strategy as the dependent variable was measured by 1 item. Participants were asked: "If one of your classmates treats you badly, what will you do?" Options of this item included, "A: Treat him or her better", "B: Treat him or her the same as before", "C: Ignore and avoid him or her," "D: Treat him or her badly". Participants who chose A and B showing forgiveness toward transgressor were considered as positive

conflict coping strategy and scored as 1. In contrast, participants who choose C and D deemed to be negative conflict coping strategy and were coded as 0.

Results

Descriptive statistics showed that the number of adolescents who involved in religion activity were less than the number of those who didn't, $\chi^2(1,8605)=5706.72$, $p<.001$. For the parent-child interaction, more adolescents experienced verbal hurt rather than physical hurt from parents, $\chi^2(1,8594)=831.85$, $p<.001$, and more adolescents experienced positive interactions with mothers than fathers, $\chi^2(1, 8695)=467.45$, $p<.001$. In terms of conflict coping strategy, there were fewer students who had the intention to behave in a forgiving way when they are offended by a classmate, $\chi^2(1, 8716)=338.13$, $p<.001$. Descriptive statistics of the continuous variable showed that adolescents perceived more positive ($M=2.28$, $SD=0.9$) rather negative ($M=1.42$, $SD=0.58$) interaction with teachers, $t_{0.05(8544)}=75.9$, $p<.001$.

Table 1 display the regression coefficients, standard errors, odds ratio, and model statistics for three models. The baseline model (model 1) consisted of the control variables: gender and angry. And according to the previous research, religious and parental variables have an influence on adolescents' conflict coping strategy, but the influence of teacher-student interaction has not been tested. In addition, the influence of religious and parental variables happened before the influence of teacher variables on students, so we put them in model 2 simultaneously, and teacher-student interaction was added in model 3. Results for Model 1 revealed that female ($B=-0.23$, $SE=0.05$, $OR=0.8$, $p<0.01$) and adolescents with lower level of angry ($B=-0.5$, $SE=0.03$, $OR=0.61$, $p<0.01$) tended to show forgiveness to the offender. In Model 2, Likelihood ratio was decreased, Nagelkerke R^2 and Correct predicted percentage were all increased, which mean the regression equation in Model 2 was better than Model 1. The statistically significant and positive coefficients for Religion ($B=0.23$, $SE=0.05$, $OR=1.25$, $p<0.01$) and Religious service activity ($B=0.62$, $SE=0.08$, $OR=1.86$, $p<0.01$) supported the notion that religious interaction had a positive effect on adolescents' forgiving response to peer transgression. For the role of parent-child interaction, there are three noteworthy results. First, contrary to our hypothesis that negative parent-child interaction was related to negative

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coping strategy, we found that adolescents who experienced physically hurt by fathers were more inclined to be forgivable ($B=0.57$, $SE=0.12$, $OR=1.77$, $p<0.01$). Second, verbal hurt from mother ($B=-0.13$, $SE=0.06$, $OR=0.88$, $p<0.05$) but not from father ($B=-0.1$, $SE=0.07$, $OR=0.9$, $p>0.05$) decreased the probability of forgiveness. Last, only positive interaction with father (Understood: $B=0.15$ $SE=0.06$, $OR=1.16$, $p<0.01$; Helped: $B=0.12$, $SE=0.06$, $OR=1.13$, $p<0.05$) not mother (Understood: $B=0.08$ $SE=0.06$, $OR=1.08$, $p>0.05$; Helped: $B=0.08$, $SE=0.06$, $OR=1.09$, $p>0.05$) increased the probability of positive conflict coping strategy toward the offender. However, when parent-child interactions and teacher-student interactions were jointly examined in Model 3, the effect of “Helped by father” was not significant ($B=0.08$, $SE=0.06$, $OR=1.08$, $p>0.05$), and both positive and negative interaction with teachers emerged statistically significant (Positive: $B=0.38$ $SE=0.03$, $OR=1.46$, $p<0.01$; Negative: $B=-0.14$, $SE=0.04$, $OR=0.87$, $p<0.01$). According to Model statistics, the regression equation of Model 3 (Likelihood ratio=10888.80, Nagelkerke $R^2=0.098$, Correct predicted percentage=61) could better predict the intention of forgiveness than Model 1 and Model 2, and Hosmer-Lemeshow test (Chi-square=6.40, $p=0.60$) showed Model 3 had goodness of fit. Good model fit would be evidence in support of our hypothesis that teacher-student interaction played an important role in adolescents' positive conflict coping strategy.

Table 1. Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Positive Conflict Coping Strategy. (N=8320)

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B(S.E.)	OR	B(S.E.)	OR	B(S.E.)	OR
Constant	1.04**(0.08)	2.83	0.68**(0.09)	1.97	0.04(0.11)	1.04
Gender(Male)	-0.23**(0.05)	0.80	-0.23**(0.05)	0.80	-0.22**(0.05)	0.80
Angry	-0.50**(0.03)	0.61	-0.49**(0.03)	0.61	-0.47**(0.04)	0.63
Religion			0.23**(0.05)	1.25	0.23**(0.05)	1.26
Religious service			0.62**(0.08)	1.86	0.57**(0.08)	1.77
Physically hurt by father			0.57**(0.12)	1.77	0.57**(0.12)	1.76
Physically hurt by mother			-0.02(0.11)	0.98	-0.01(0.12)	1.00
Verbally hurt by father			-0.10(0.07)	0.90	-0.08(0.07)	0.92
Verbally hurt by mother			-0.13*(0.06)	0.88	-0.12*(0.06)	0.89
Understood by father			0.15**(0.06)	1.16	0.12*(0.06)	1.12
Understood by mother			0.08(0.06)	1.08	0.03(0.06)	1.03
Helped by father			0.12*(0.06)	1.13	0.08(0.06)	1.08
Helped by mother			0.08(0.06)	1.09	0.03(0.06)	1.03
Teacher Care					0.38**(0.03)	1.46
Teacher Control					-0.14**(0.04)	0.87
-2 Log likelihood	11270.588		11098.511		10888.791	
Nagelkerke R^2	0.04		0.066		0.098	
Correct Predicted Percentage	57.3		58.9		61	

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Conclusions and Discussion

The present work provided a preliminary theoretical and empirical basis for the influencing factors of conflict coping strategy in adolescents. In this paper, forgiving is viewed as a positive conflict coping strategy: When people forgive, they inhibit their normal destructive responses that would increase the probability of further relational disintegration and instead become more likely to enact constructive responses that would help to restore the damaged relationship to health (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; Rusbult et al, 1991). Forgiveness is a deeply religious concept for people from many faiths and cultures, issues of guilt, reconciliation, salvation, and redemption to many religions directly or indirectly question about forgiveness and its place in the life of individuals and communities (Paloutzian & Park, 2014). The result of this study showed that religious involvement was positively related to adolescents' forgiving response to peer transgression. This supported a large body of work showing that religion was positively related to forgiveness (for a meta-analytic review, see Davis et al, 2013). As Toussaint and Jorgensen (2008) pointed out, whether in formal religious services, prayer groups, or other venues, adolescents have many opportunities to study and learn about the reason and benefits of forgiveness, in the long run this can help shaping the forgiving personality.

In terms of relationship between parent-student interaction and forgiving response toward transgressors, our results revealed that adolescents who experienced physically hurt from father would be more forgiving, and this is inconsistent with our hypothesis that negative parent-student interaction is negatively associated with positive coping strategy. One possible explanation for this is that the negative experience such as being threatened, criticized, and punished excessively by adults could lead to a strict superego, which will make adolescents feel guilty. Guilt-prone individuals adopt more proactive and constructive strategies for managing anger, they are more likely to engage in constructive behaviors, such as non-hostile discussion with the target of their anger (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994). The second explanation is adolescents who often experienced physically hurt from fathers may tend to be afraid of the conflict with others, they are inclined to maintain a relationship rather than destroy it.

Another question raised by negative parent-child interaction is why only physically hurt by father (but not mother) and verbally hurt by mother (but not father) have an influence on adolescents' conflict coping strategy. Even for now there is no empirical research investigating the difference between the pattern of father and mother in punishment. A possible explanation based on our experience is that the degree of physically hurt from father is much more serious than mother, and the frequency of verbally hurt from mother is higher than father. The future research can measure specific components of maternal and paternal punishment and exam their influence on adolescents' outcome. Besides, we also found that only positive interaction with father not mother can increase the probability of positive conflict coping strategy. Consistent with our finding, previous research found that mothers' and fathers' contributions are different on the function of outcome (Williams & Kelly, 2005; Hastings, McShane, Parker, & Ladha, 2007). For the positive parent-child interaction, Day and Padilla-Walker (2009) asserted that connectedness and involvement from fathers (but not mothers) was negatively related to adolescents' internalizing and externalizing behaviors, whereas connectedness and involvement from mothers (but not fathers) was positively related to adolescents' prosocial behaviors and hope. Therefore, we assumed that the real mechanism underlying the association between positive conflict coping strategy and positive father-child interaction was that perceived care from father could significantly decrease the probability of negative conflict coping strategy (e.g. revenge or striking back) rather than increase the probability of positive conflict coping strategy. This assumption is still an open question and definitely an area for future research.

The specific hypothesis tested in the current research focused on the role of teacher-student interaction. While less commonly addressed, the way that teachers and students interact is a critical factor in determining the student's conflict resolution. Based on the result of binary logistic regression, teacher-student interaction played a more significant role in adolescent's conflict coping strategy than parent-child interaction. There are two possible explanation for this result. On the first hand, Pianta (1999) concluded that emotionally warm relationship between teachers and students (characterized by open communication, support, and involvement) provided students with a sense of security within school settings, which in turn promoted exploration and comfort, as well as social and emotional competence. Adolescents with

higher social and emotional competence had a greater willingness to forgive, because they could replace negative emotions with positive emotions such as emotional empathy (Fincham, Paleari, & Regalia, 2002; McCullough et al., 1998; Fincham et al., 2002) and had more rumination about the transgression (McCullough et al., 1998). On the other hand, a teacher who acts as a desirable social model can facilitate student social development and students' acquisition of appropriate social skills (Kahn & Cangemi, 1979). Teachers can make a sizeable difference in the social lives of students by serving as either positive or negative behavioral models (Englehart, 2009). Children learn basic conversational rules and conflict resolution in school context from seeing teachers as the adult models. Teachers who fail to manage their emotions and externalize anger and frustration in public display are not only missing an opportunity to model a socially desirable response but are also modeling an undesirable response in its place. When teachers respond to conflict in a calm, rational manner, respectfully acknowledge disagreement, and welcome multiple points of view, these behaviors can “rub off” on students, making them more able to confront the complexities of human relationships (Englehart, 2009).

A clear limitation of the current work was it measured conflict coping strategy on imagined scenario, so the dependent variable in present paper is intention rather than actual behavior. An extension of this work would involve collecting data from adolescents who have experienced a classmate's offense, and how they deal with this situation. Maybe the actual offense is harder to forgive than imaginary one. Another limitation was that parent-child interaction and teacher-student interaction are culturally embedded. A useful next step for research would be determine whether adolescents in other cultures share the same patterns in Taiwanese samples. Contrasting more family oriented or collectivistic cultures would be informative. The last limitation was that, in order to match up the items in TEPS, we only exam the influence of social interaction from adults on adolescents' conflict coping strategy, future research should examine whether social interaction from peers or siblings may influence adolescents' conflict coping strategy

In conclusion, positive conflict coping strategy not only diminishes victim's motivation to seek revenge and maintain estrangement from an offending relationship partner, but also increase their motivation to pursue goodwill and conciliation. We look forward to the possibility that the ideas

we have presented might help to build more efficient ways to increase adolescents' positive conflict coping strategy, and this will play a protective role for interpersonal relationship in school and might well be extended to community and society.

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Exploring the Association between School Belonging and Emotional Health among Adolescents

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Exploring the Association between School Belonging and Emotional Health among Adolescents

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the association between school belonging and wellbeing, distress, and emotional health status yielded from a bidimensional model among adolescents. Participants comprised of 413– 49.7% female and 50.3% male– adolescents, ranging in age between 11 and 18 years ($M = 13.96$, $SD = 1.64$). Findings from the preliminary analyses showed a large positive association between school belonging and emotional wellbeing variables, whereas a moderate negative association between school belonging and emotional distress variables. Additionally, primary analyses demonstrated that adolescents with high levels of the school belonging have low levels of the emotional distress, yet high levels of the emotional wellbeing. Significant main effects for emotional wellbeing, emotional distress, and bidimensional emotional health were observed across all school belonging scales. A larger effect size for the bidimensional emotional health main effect was found for school belonging, comparing with unidimensional emotional wellbeing and distress. Results of the study provide important implications for research and practice in term of mental health services.

Keywords: school belonging, bidimensional model, emotional wellbeing, psychological distress.

Explorando la asociación entre la pertenencia a la escuela y la salud emocional entre los adolescentes

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Resumen

El propósito del presente estudio es investigar la asociación entre la pertenencia a la escuela y el bienestar, la angustia y el estado de salud emocional producido a partir de un modelo bidimensional entre los adolescentes. Participantes compuestos por 413 –49.7% mujeres y 50.3% hombres– adolescentes, con edades comprendidas entre 11 y 18 años ($M = 13,96$, $DE = 1,64$). Los resultados de los análisis preliminares mostraron una asociación positiva grande entre las variables pertenecientes a la escuela y el bienestar emocional, mientras que una asociación negativa moderada entre la pertenencia a la escuela y las variables de angustia emocional. Además, los análisis primarios demostraron que los adolescentes con altos niveles de pertenencia a la escuela tienen bajos niveles de angustia emocional, sin embargo, altos niveles de bienestar emocional. Se observaron efectos principales significativos para el bienestar emocional, la angustia emocional y la salud emocional bidimensional en todas las escalas de pertenencia a la escuela. Se encontró un mayor efecto para el efecto principal de la salud emocional bidimensional para la pertenencia a la escuela, en comparación con el bienestar emocional unidimensional y la angustia. Los resultados del estudio proporcionan importantes implicaciones para la investigación y la práctica.

Palabras clave: pertenencia a la escuela, modelo bidimensional, bienestar emocional, angustia psicológica.

The need to belong is a fundamental human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) that refers to an important psychological construct including formative implications for both individuals' healthy development and wellbeing (Slaten, Ferguson, Allen, Brodrick, & Waters, 2016). The sense of belonging is described as significant affiliations between individuals and their surroundings—peoples, groups, or places, such as school belonging (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 2002). School belonging is based on the experiences of valued involvement, and fit between a student and the school environment (Arslan & Duru, 2016; Hagerty et al., 2002). Thus, it refers to students' subjective perceptions of being accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in their school surroundings (Goodenow, 1993). Students with high levels of the sense of belonging perceive themselves as important, meaningful, and valuable part of their school environment (Arslan & Duru, 2016). School belonging is significantly associated with positive educational experiences (e.g. achievement, motivation, academic efficacy; Arslan, 2016; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; McMahon, Parnes, Keys, & Viola, 2008), psychological outcomes (e.g. depression, anxiety; Arslan, 2017; Babakhani, 2014; Bond et al., 2007; Shochet, Smith, Furlong, & Homel, 2011), behavioral problems (e.g. violence, substance use; Balkis, Duru, & Buluş, 2005; Bond et al., 2007), and wellbeing indicators (e.g. life satisfaction; Arslan, 2017; Moffa, Dowdy & Furlong, 2016). Many longitudinal studies have supported this evidence, indicating the effect of school belonging on youths' mental health and wellbeing (e.g. Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013; Shochet et al., 2011; Tian, Zhang, Huebner, Zheng, & Liu, 2015). The need-to-belong theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) that is useful in understanding how the school belonging may associate with wellbeing and distress, arguing that the need to belong is a fundamental human motivation that promotes one's mental health and wellbeing. To this approach, the need to form and maintain strong and positive interpersonal relationships have a vital role in healthy development and wellbeing. However, the failure to satisfy this need causes various social, emotional and behavioral undesirable outcomes (see Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The framework has discussed the sense of belonging based on the two substantial dimensions, indicating a balance between individuals' negative and positive perceptions—social exclusion and

social inclusion (Malone, Pillow, & Osman, 2012). These factors, as measures of relational value, have importance to the youth positive development and wellbeing (Leary, 2005). For example, being accepted or included is related to more positive outcomes, such as happiness, contentment, and calm, whereas being excluded is associated with intense negative experiences, including depression, jealousy, and loneliness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Osterman, 2000). For all of this, it is substantial to gain a more detailed understanding of the sense of belonging and its effects at school.

School Belonging and Emotional Health

Traditional approach conceptualizes mental health using a unidimensional model, which is characterized as the absence of psychopathology such as depression or anxiety (Renshaw, Eklund, Bolognino, & Adodo, 2016). However, the bidimensional model of mental health, which has also named the dual-factor (Greenspoon & Sasklofske, 2001; Suldo & Shaffer, 2008) or two-continua model (Westerhoff & Keyes, 2010), offers a more comprehensive and complex conception of human mental health (Renshaw & Cohen, 2014). The model explores human mental health using two distinct-yet-related dimensions, including wellbeing and psychopathology indicators (Moore et al., 2015) and makes important contributions to the understanding of students' healthy and successful development (Renshaw & Cohen, 2014). Given the studies suggesting that the bidimensional model is more useful than traditional mental health model for youth positive development and wellbeing (Renshaw & Cohen, 2014; Suldo & Shaffer, 2008; Suldo, Thalji, & Ferron, 2011), the model may provide a more comprehensive picture for adolescents' current and future mental health (Moffa et al., 2016). Research has supported that the bidimensional model has a significant predictive effect on various student outcomes, such as academic achievement, school attendance, interpersonal connectedness, physical health, and adaptive social functioning (Renshaw & Bolognino, 2016). In addition, longitudinal effects of the model—subjective wellbeing and psychopathology—on many school outcomes (e.g. academic achievement, absences, and discipline problems) has been reported (Suldo et al., 2011). Given this theoretical framework, student mental health status

should be assessed using not only psychopathology but also using both psychopathology and wellbeing indicators together.

Previous research indicated that a high sense of school belonging was related to increased positive academic experiences (e.g., Arslan & Duru, 2016; Bond et al., 2007; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Neel & Fuligni, 2013; Sanchez, Colon, & Esparza, 2005), reduced psychological difficulties and improved adjustment (e.g. substance use; internalizing/externalizing problems, absenteeism; Moffa et al., 2016; Napoli, Marsiglia, & Kulis, 2003; Pittman & Richmond, 2007; Rostosky, Owens, Zimmerman, & Riggle, 2003), and increased wellbeing (e.g. life satisfaction, Arslan & Duru, 2016; Lam, Chen, Zhang, & Liang, 2015). Napoli et al. (2003) reported that a strong sense of school belonging is associated with low level of substance use, such as alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use in adolescents. Pittman and Richmond (2007) found the predictive effect of high school belonging on adolescents' academic outcomes and psychological adjustment, including grades, academic competence, self-worth, internalizing and externalizing problems. Likewise, Arslan and Duru (2016) reported the predictive effect of school belonging on subjective wellbeing and loneliness, as well as that school belonging was also associated with school-specific wellbeing (e.g. academic efficacy, educational purpose). In addition, many longitudinal outcomes have supported this evidence, indicating that school belonging is associated with various academic, psychological and behavioral consequences in adolescents (e.g. Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013; Moffa et al., 2016; Shochet et al., 2011). Despite this literature, its potential impacts on emotional health have remained relatively unexplored, and there has not been as much research on the association between school belonging and bidimensional emotional health.

Considering the literature noted above, previous studies have investigated the predictive validity on various student outcomes in adolescents (e.g. Arslan, 2016; Moffa et al., 2016; Napoli et al., 2003; Pittman & Richmond, 2007; Rostosky et al., 2003). However, its potential impacts on youths' emotional health have remained relatively unexplored, and the potential predictive effects of it on wellbeing and distress indicators has not been thoroughly examined. Therefore, additional research is warranted to examine how school belonging might be utilized to predict youth's emotional health using bidimensional model. By investigating students' sense of belonging at school, school counselors or other professions may

determine school-based prevention and intervention strategies. In this way, students' level of sense of belonging may contribute to promoting their emotional health based on the bidimensional model. To this end, the purpose of the present study reports the association between school belonging and wellbeing, distress, and emotional health status yielded from a bidimensional model among adolescents.

Method

Participants

Sample of the study comprised of 413 students (49.7% female) attending two public schools (66% secondary school) in a small city of Turkey. Participants ranged in age between 11 and 18 years ($M = 13.96$, $SD = 1.64$). The students reported socioeconomic status (SES) of their family as follows: Low SES = 18.1%, Moderate SES = 47.9%, and Upper SES = 33.9%. All students were invited to participate in the study, yet approximately 55% of adolescents consented to participate in the study. After the participants were informed about research purpose and instruments, a paper–pencil survey that was created using measures and demographic variable items (see, the Measure subsection) was distributed to the students who volunteered to participate in the study.

Measures

School Belongingness Scale (SBS). The SBS is a 10 item self-report survey developed to measure sense of school belonging in Turkish adolescents, and consists of two sub–dimensions: acceptance and exclusion (e.g. “I feel that I do not belong this school”, “I have close/sincere relationships with my teachers and friends”). All items are responded using 4-point Likert–type scale, ranging from 1 (*almost never*) to 4 (*almost always*), and after reversing negative items, total scores denote the overall school belonging. Previous research indicated that the scale had sound psychometric properties, strong internal reliability ($\alpha = .86$), and convergent validity with school-specific subjective wellbeing indicators (e.g., school connectedness,

academic efficacy), loneliness, and life satisfaction (Arslan and Duru, 2016). Observed scale characteristics with this sample are presented in Table 1.

Positive and Negative Experience Scale (PNES). The PNES is a 12-item self-report instrument developed to assess positive (6 items; e.g. “Positive”, “Good”) and negative feelings (6 items; e.g. “Unpleasant”, “Sad”), and all items are scored using 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 “*very rarely or never*” to 5 “*very often or always*” (Diener et al., 2009). Telef (2013) adapted the scale for Turkish adolescents, demonstrating the good data-model fit statistics, adequate internal reliability (positive affect $\alpha = .84$ and negative affect $\alpha = .75$), and convergent validity with criterion variables (e.g. loneliness, life satisfaction). Furthermore, observed scale characteristics with this sample are presented in Table 1.

Psychological Wellbeing and Distress Scale (PWDS). The PWDS was also used to measure psychological wellbeing and distress in adolescents. The PWDS is a 10-item self-report behavior rating scale designed to assess two dimensions of bidimensional mental health: psychological wellbeing and psychological distress (e.g. “Have you got on well at school?”, “Feeling low”). All items are rated using 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 to 5 (response format of first seven items: 1 = *never* to 5 = *always* and other three items: 1 = *rarely or never* to 5 = *about every day*; Renshaw & Bolognino, 2016). Previous research investigating psychometric properties of Turkish version of the PWDS showed that the scale had psychometrically adequate properties, strong internal reliability (PW $\alpha = .86$ and PD $\alpha = .83$) and construct reliability (PW $H = .86$ and PD $H = .87$), and predictive validity with criterion variables (Arslan & Renshaw, 2018). Observed scale characteristics with the present sample are presented in Table 1.

Data analyses

Prior to conducting the primary analyses, observed scale characteristics, and bivariate correlations were examined. Following, emotional health groups were created using standardized composite scores, and participants were classified into one of four possible emotional-health-status groups. After all scale composite scores were transformed into z -scores, the standardized composite scores were summed to create meta-composite scores for emotional wellbeing (psychological wellbeing z + positive affect z) and

emotional distress (psychological distress z and negative affect z). Like previous research (Renshaw et al., 2016; Renshaw & Cohen 2014), the participants were classified as *low to moderate* range (standardized composite scores ≤ 1 SD) and *at-risk to clinical* range (standardized composite scores ≥ 1 SD) emotional distress, and *languishing to low* range (standardized composite scores < -1 SD) and *moderate to flourishing* range (standardized composite scores ≥ -1 SD) emotional wellbeing. Following, these groups were used to create the participants' bidimensional health statues (*healthy emotionality*, *unhealthy emotionality*, *mixed emotionality*, and *diminished emotionality*). Following these preliminary analyses, a series univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the differential effects of bidimensional emotional health status on school belonging. All data analyses were performed using SPSS version 22.

Results

Preliminary analyses

Findings from preliminary analyses indicated that all variables had relatively normal distribution (skewness and kurtosis scores $\leq |1|$; see Table 1). Next, bivariate correlation analysis was conducted, and the results showed significant, large positive association between school belonging and emotional wellbeing variables (psychological wellbeing and positive affect), and the significant moderate negative association between school belonging and emotional distress variables (psychological distress and negative affect). In addition, results demonstrated significant, moderate negative relations between social exclusion (sub-dimension of school belonging) and emotional wellbeing outcomes; significant, moderate negative relations between social exclusion (sub-dimension of school belonging) and emotional distress outcomes; significant, large positive relations between social inclusion (sub-dimension of school belonging) and emotional wellbeing outcomes, and small-to-moderate negative relations between social inclusion (sub-dimension of school belonging) and emotional distress outcomes. Observed scale characteristics and bivariate correlations between study variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Results of Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (r)

Variable	Descriptive statistics				Correlation (r)						
	M	SD	Skew.	Kurt.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. School belonging	32.21	4.67	-.34	-.45	1	-.74	.83	.60	.54	-.39	-.43
2. Social Exclusion	7.18	2.30	1.04	.43		1	-.35	-.34	-.37	.43	.41
3. Social inclusion	14.61	3.37	-.16	-.76			1	.60	.51	-.25	-.33
4. Psychological wellbeing	18.50	4.90	-.52	-.54				1	.70	-.42	-.45
5. Positive affect	23.31	5.04	-.64	-.26					1	-.48	-.53
6. Psychological distress	9.49	4.53	1.27	1.05						1	.64
7. Negative affect	12.85	4.53	.56	-.07							1

Note. All correlation (*r*) values are significant at the .001 level (2-tailed).

Primary Analyses

Given the procedures in data analyses subsection, the majority of students were classified as being healthy emotionality compared to other bidimensional emotional health groups (see Table 2). Additionally, observed variable characteristics of the School belonging and emotional health status of participants are presented in Table 3.

Table 2

Bidimensional emotional health status of participants

<i>Emotional distress</i>	<i>Emotional wellbeing</i>	
	Languishing-to-Low	Moderate-to-Flourishing
Low-to-Moderate	Diminished Emotionality (<i>n</i> = 57)	Healthy Emotionality (<i>n</i> = 239)
At-Risk-to-Clinical	Unhealthy Emotionality (<i>n</i> = 58)	Mixed Emotionality (<i>n</i> = 39)

Table 3

School belonging and emotional health status of participants

Variables	Emotional health status							
	Healthy Emotionality		Unhealthy Emotionality		Diminished Emotionality		Mixed Emotionality	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Social exclusion	6.49	1.93	9.59	2.79	7.89	2.65	10.00	4.33
Social inclusion	15.88	2.96	12.05	2.89	11.80	2.64	14.97	3.34
School belonging	34.38	3.74	27.50	4.81	28.89	3.84	30.61	4.68

Overall findings from a series of ANOVA indicated significant main effects of emotional wellbeing, emotional distress, and bidimensional emotional health classifications on students' overall school belonging and its sub-dimensions, ranging from moderate to large effect size (see [Table 4](#)).

Table 4

Univariate analysis of variance results

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>g</i> [95 % CI]
Emotional wellbeing	Social exclusion	35.00	<.001	.08	.65[.38, .92]
	Social inclusion	135.12	<.001	.25	1.29[1.58, .99]
	Overall belonging	150.13	<.001	.28	1.36[1.77, .95]
Emotional distress	Social exclusion	100.94	<.001	.21	1.10[1.35, .85]
	Social inclusion	22.66	<.001	.06	.57[.25, .89]
	Overall belonging	75.37	<.001	.16	.95[.51, 1.40]
Bidimensional Emotional Health	Social exclusion	39.82	<.001	.24	–
	Social inclusion	46.58	<.001	.26	–
	Overall belonging	54.47	<.001	.34	–

First, the results showed that there was a significant difference between emotional wellbeing groups for social inclusion ($F(1, 395) = 135.12$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .25$, Hedge's $g = 1.29$), social exclusion ($F(1, 395) = 35.00$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .08$, Hedge's $g = .65$), and overall school belonging ($F(1, 395) = 139.66$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .26$, Hedge's $g = 1.30$). Thereafter, the main effect of emotional distress was significant for social inclusion ($F(1, 404) = 21.74$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .05$, Hedge's $g = .57$), social exclusion ($F(1, 404) = 92.17$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .19$, Hedge's $g = 1.10$), and overall school belonging ($F(1, 404) = 77.66$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .16$, Hedge's $g = 1.01$). Finally, the results demonstrated significant main effects of bidimensional emotional health classifications on students' social exclusion ($F(3, 389) = 39.82$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .24$), social inclusion ($F(3, 389) = 46.58$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .26$), and overall school belonging ($F(3, 389) = 65.52$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .34$). In order to compare the selected bidimensional emotional health groups, post hoc analyses were conducted using a Bonferroni adjustment. Findings from post hoc comparisons indicated that there was no significant difference between all groups for social exclusion. However, significant comparisons were observed between all groups for social inclusion and overall school belonging. Moreover, Hedge's g results demonstrated large effect sizes for the comparisons between all bidimensional emotional health groups in social inclusion; large effect sizes for the comparisons between healthy emotionality–unhealthy emotionality as well as moderate effect sizes for the comparisons between healthy emotionality–diminished emotionality in social exclusion, and moderate-to-large effect sizes for the comparisons between all bidimensional emotional health groups in overall school belonging, see [Table 5](#).

Table 5

Comparisons results for bidimensional emotional health groups

Dependent Variable	Group		M Diff.	SE	p	g [95 % CI]
	(A)	(B)	(A-B)			
Social exclusion	HE	UE	-3.10	.37	<.001	1.46[1.70, 1.21]
	HE	DE	-1.41	.37	<.001	.67[.91, .43]
	ME	UE	-.41	.52	.85	.12[.58, .81]
Social inclusion	HE	UE	3.79	.43	<.001	1.28[.95, 1.62]
	HE	DE	4.10	.43	<.001	1.40[1.07, 1.74]
	ME	UE	2.86	.61	<.001	.93[.32, 1.54]
Overall belonging	HE	UE	6.89	.59	<.001	1.73[1.28, 2.18]
	HE	DE	5.49	.60	<.001	1.46[1.02, 1.88]
	ME	UE	3.11	.84	<.001	.65[.30, 1.60]

Note. M Diff. Mean difference, HE healthy emotionality, UE unhealthy emotionality, ME mixed emotionality, DE diminished emotionality.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the association between school belonging and wellbeing, distress, and emotional health status yielded from a bidimensional model among adolescents. Given the literature suggesting the link between school belonging and various educational, emotional, and behavioral outcomes in adolescents, it is substantial to gain a more detailed understanding of the sense of belonging and its effects at school. Despite this literature, its potential impacts on emotional health have remained relatively unexplored. To this end, the purpose of the present study was to report the association between school belonging and emotional health status as conceptualized by the bidimensional model of mental health among adolescents. Findings from preliminary analyses showed a significant and large positive association between school belonging and emotional wellbeing variables, whereas a moderate negative association between school belonging and emotional distress variables. Additionally, primary

analyses demonstrated further evidence supporting that bidimensional emotional health had also larger effect sizes (R^2) in comparison with the unidimensional distress and wellbeing effect sizes for school belonging.

Findings from the present study indicated the significant main effects for emotional wellbeing, emotional distress, and bidimensional emotional health across all school belonging scales. An emotional health classifications main effect was observed across all dependent variables, suggesting that students' emotional wellbeing, emotional distress, and bidimensional emotional health were significantly related to key indicators of school belonging—social inclusion and social exclusion. Both R^2 and Hedge's g results illustrated moderate-to-large effect sizes for all emotional health variables on social exclusion and inclusion. Furthermore, the results indicated larger effect sizes for the bidimensional emotional health main effect than the unidimensional distress and wellbeing across social exclusion and inclusion. Participants characterized as at-risk-to-clinical reported the higher social exclusion; however, they identified as moderate-to-flourishing had the highest social inclusion. Consistent with the outcomes, research indicated that individuals who were socially excluded had lower emotional wellbeing and higher emotional distress than those who were accepted (Aydın et al., 2014). The need-to-belong framework is consistent with this study results showing that being included is strongly related to positive outcomes while being excluded is closely associated with intense negative experiences (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The quality of social relationships has a potential to influence on youth emotional health; however, social exclusion refers to emotionally and psychically negative relations with others (Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd 2016). Therefore, students who are excluded within their school surroundings are more likely to suffer from difficulties in emotional health than those who are accepted (Arslan & Duru, 2016; Baumeister and Leary 1995). Additionally, given the results of overall school belonging, significant main effects of emotional wellbeing, emotional distress, and bidimensional emotional health classifications were observed on students' school belonging. Both bidimensional and unidimensional emotional health had the strongest effect on participants' school belonging. The results also demonstrated larger effect size for the bidimensional emotional health main effect than the unidimensional distress and wellbeing across school belonging. Moreover, Hedge's g results demonstrated moderate-to-large effect sizes for the comparisons between all bidimensional emotional health

groups in overall school belonging. Considering the comparisons results, the significant comparisons were observed between all groups for school belonging, indicating that youth identified as healthy emotionality had the highest scores of the school belonging than other emotional health status.

Similar to outcomes from this study, previous research showed that students identified as unhealthy or vulnerable had higher levels of risk for academic and behavioral outcomes, including low levels of school belonging compared to other emotional health groups (Antaramian, Huebner, Hills, & Valois, 2010; Moffa et al., 2016). For example, Renshaw and colleagues (2016) reported that the bidimensional model of emotional health had the significant effects on social connectedness, academic achievement, and physical health among college students, and participants identified as “healthy emotionality” reported higher social connectedness, physical health, and life satisfaction compared to those identified as “unhealthy emotionality and diminished emotionality”. Thereafter, comparing with unidimensional emotional wellbeing and distress, the larger effect size for the bidimensional emotional health main effect was found across school belonging. Consistent with this outcome, research demonstrated the longitudinal effectiveness of this model on many school outcomes in adolescents, such as academic achievement, absences, and discipline problems (Suldo et al., 2011). The bidimensional model had a significant predictive effect on various school outcomes, such as academic achievement, school attendance, interpersonal connectedness, physical health, and adaptive social functioning (Renshaw & Bolognino, 2016). Moffa and colleagues (2016) investigated whether adolescent complete mental health groups differ on their self-reported sense of school belonging, demonstrating that youths characterized by low life satisfaction and elevated distress had the lowest school belonging, while those who had high life satisfaction, regardless of psychological distress level, reported the highest school belonging. They also reported the longitudinal predictive effect of school belonging to students’ social-emotional wellbeing and internal distress. Likewise, another study by Suido and Shaffer (2008) showed that adolescents with high subjective wellbeing and low psychopathology had better positive educational outcomes (e.g. reading skills, school attendance, and academic goals), social support, physical health, and fewer social problems compared to vulnerable peers without clinical levels of mental illness but with low wellbeing. Taken together, consistent with the literature,

findings from the present study illustrated further evidence, providing insight into understanding the association between school belonging and emotional health among adolescents.

Conclusions and Limitation

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the association between school belonging and emotional health status as conceptualized by the bidimensional model of mental health among adolescents in Turkey. Outcomes of the study provide a few significant implications for future research and practice of mental health work in the context of mental health services at schools. First, findings from the present study suggest that school belonging is an important component of students' emotional health status. Significant main effects for emotional wellbeing, emotional distress, and bidimensional emotional health were observed across all school belonging scales. Specifically, emotional wellbeing has the larger effect size in comparison with the emotional distress effect size for school belonging. With this knowledge, school counselors or other mental health professionals may determine school-based prevention and intervention strategies. Traditionally, mental health research and practice have focused on the symptoms of psychopathology (Keyes, 2005), and subjective wellbeing is not considered as a domain of functioning that warrants assessment and intervention practices (Renshaw et al., 2016). Considering the outcomes of this study demonstrating that emotional wellbeing is more important than emotional distress, school counselors and mental health professionals might integrate subjective wellbeing interventions with school-based traditional practices (Moffa et al., 2016; Renshaw et al., 2016). Following, the larger effect size for the bidimensional emotional health main effect was observed for school belonging, compared with unidimensional emotional wellbeing and distress. To this end, school-based mental health service providers may consider school belonging to be a differentiating construct among emotional health groups, and they provide prevention and intervention strategies aimed at bolstering adolescents' belonging and connections to school (Moffa et al., 2016). For example, considering the negative outcomes associated with low levels of school belonging, such as educational difficulties, social and emotional behavior problems (e.g. Anderman, 2003; Arslan 2016; Deci &

Ryan 1991; Finn, 1989; Osterman, 2000), school counselors might develop school-based prevention and intervention strategies aimed to promote students' sense of belonging at school setting. School-based mental health service providers can use these programs to enhance youths' subjective wellbeing, whereas reducing the emotional distress in school settings.

Despite findings from the present study suggesting significant both theoretical and practical implications, the outcomes should be considered in light of several methodological limitations. First of all, the sample of the study consisted of adolescents that were obtained via convenience sampling; therefore, these are significant limitations for the generalizability of the results of the study. To this end, future research is required to replicate and generalize the study results in a diverse and large sample that are obtained via different sampling methods (e.g. random sampling). Next, considering that all variables of the present study were based on responses from self-report measures, which suggests the possibility of common method bias. Furthermore, a cross-sectional analytic approach was conducted in present study; therefore, longitudinal designs can be conducted to understand the association between emotional health and school outcomes, such as school belonging, academic efficacy, academic achievement, and motivation. Finally, the cut-off scores for emotional health groups were created using standardized composite scores. Although these were empirically based, further research might be employed to replicate and generalize the study results using different classification approaches.

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Perspectives and Practices of Academics and Students of English Language Teaching Post-Graduate Programs within the Mediation Theory

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Perspectives and Practices of Academics and Students of English Language Teaching Post-Graduate Programs within the Mediation Theory

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Abstract

Due to unsatisfactory number of researches investigating ELT post-graduate programs, and perceptions of academics and students in these programs regarding mediation theory of Feuerstein, this study attempted to investigate the aspects of this theory in doctorate and master programs in ELT department of a state university. Methodologically, this study employed a qualitative case study approach and the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 4 academics and 2 focus-group interviews with students. The results showed idiosyncrasy of academics' use of mediation theory aspects. 'Significance' and 'purpose beyond the here and now' were important aspects for students in being a guide for them to find research topics. Academics paid special attention to relate the topics and tasks with learners' daily practices. However, in order to maximize student-supervisor relationship and increase students' success, there is a need for a change in the system. Most of the criticisms of the students stemmed from the limited time of the academics. Institutional implications include necessary changes in this post-graduate program. The results of this study allowed academics to know the views of the students in post-graduate programs regarding how, when, and where exactly they could use mediation theory aspects.

Keywords: mediation theory, post-graduate program, English Language Teaching



Perspectivas y Prácticas de Académicos y Estudiantes de Postgrados de Enseñanza del Inglés Dentro de la Teoría de la Mediación

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Resumen

Debido al alto número de investigaciones sobre programas de postgrado ELT y las percepciones de los académicos o estudiantes en estos programas con respecto a la teoría de la mediación de Feuerstein, este estudio tuvo como objetivo investigar los aspectos de esta teoría en los programas de doctorado y maestría en el departamento de ELT de una universidad estatal. Se emplea un enfoque de estudio de caso cualitativo. Se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas con 4 académicos y 2 grupos focales con estudiantes. Los resultados mostraron semejanzas con la teoría de mediación de los académicos. "Importancia" y "propósito más allá del aquí y ahora" eran aspectos importantes para los estudiantes como guía para encontrar temas de investigación. Los académicos prestaron especial atención a relacionar los temas y las tareas con las prácticas cotidianas de los alumnos. Sin embargo, con el fin de maximizar la relación estudiante-supervisor y aumentar el éxito de los estudiantes, hay una necesidad de un cambio en el sistema. La mayoría de las críticas de los estudiantes nacen del tiempo limitado de los académicos. Las implicaciones institucionales incluyen cambios necesarios en este programa de postgrado. Los resultados de este estudio permitieron a los académicos conocer los puntos de vista de los estudiantes en los programas de postgrado con respecto a cómo, cuándo y dónde exactamente se podrían utilizar aspectos de la teoría de mediación de manera más eficaz.

Palabras clave: teoría de la mediación, programa de posgrado, enseñanza del inglés

In today's rapidly developing and globalizing world, learning a foreign language is a must for each individual. English takes the role of the most widely spoken language with more than 350 million native speakers and more than 400 million speakers of it as a second or foreign language (Kenji, 1996). The popularity of English increases the need and demand for learning and teaching it. Moreover, more and more universities launch new departments of study about English to attract students. However, the most important one among these departments is English Language Teaching (ELT), which trains future teachers of English, especially in countries where it is spoken as a foreign language as in the case of Turkey.

Teaching foreign languages has always been an important part of education system in Turkey (Küçüköğlu, 2013). With the westernization movement after Turkish republic in 1923, speakers of English outnumbered those of French (Kırkgöz, 2005). The significance of English teaching is embodied in higher education institutions in Turkey as well. Many departments of study have one-year preparatory English classes and English is a compulsory course for all departments. Although the critical period for foreign language learning is primary school period, the effort concerning teaching English in higher education institutions is also remarkable due to their place in development of a country in different areas. When it is considered in the context of ELT in higher institutions, the quality of ELT department determines the quality of teachers of English and eventually quality of English training in Turkey. From a broader perspective, the increasing number of students, programs, and universities in Turkey accelerates the demand for language teacher education programs. In parallel with this fact, the demand for language academics training future academics in this discipline increases as well. Hence, master and doctorate programs in ELT departments play a fundamental role for the candidates to become future academics. However, these post-graduate programs' audience is not limited with the candidates of future ELT academics. Students in this specific discipline study with the purposes of personal development, getting better positions in their jobs, and personal fulfilment as well.

As the first step toward post-graduate programs, ELT undergraduate programs were reformed in 1998 and 2006. Especially the one in 2006 suggested covering the tenets of constructivist approach (Yavuz & Topkaya, 2013). Distinguished supporters of this approach, Vygotsky and Feuerstein, claim that the role of teachers is not merely acting as disseminators of

knowledge, rather they should be 'mediators' and 'facilitators' of students' learning (Williams & Burden, 1997). Unlike teaching and learning taking place through transmission and reception, a mediational approach to teaching and learning aims at helping learners to construct their own knowledge, to solve problems on their own and to understand their own thinking processes (Fraser, 2006). Particularly, learners in the post-graduate programs of ELT departments need to have the knowledge of the role of mediator and the practices of this specific role.

If the academics do not have the knowledge of current teacher roles, it cannot be possible to observe the philosophy of that approach in the practices of student-teachers and future academics. However, there has been no effort to investigate the perceptions and practices of academics and students of post-graduate programs in ELT departments in terms of the principles of mediation. This may stem from the view that mediation was primarily considered to be used with disadvantaged adolescents and children in 1990s. However, the theory had wider applications and could be proved to underpin teaching practices across all levels of education (Seng, 2003). Given the significance of the mediator role of an EFL teacher and the understanding of them by future teachers of English in Turkey, this unique research attempts to fill this gap by investigating academics and students of post-graduate programs in an ELT department regarding the role of mediator and the aspects of the mediation theory. With respect to these aims, the current research attempts to find answer to the following research question: *How do the academics and students in post-graduate programs of ELT department consider the different aspects of mediation to promote learning?*

Theory of Mediation

Education is not simply transmission of knowledge from one source to its receivers. For this reason, psychology of education has always been a complicated issue in the complex nature of human psychology. This complex process maintains its importance and complexity in language teaching and learning as well. The trend in the psychological approaches in language teaching and learning has changed in its brief history. One of the recently embraced ones is constructivism (Williams & Burden, 1997). It claims that 'individuals are actively involved right from birth in constructing personal meaning that is their own personal understanding, from their experiences'

(Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 21). It includes 'personal' and 'social' constructivism (Woolfolk, 2004). Especially social constructivism highlights the acquisition of knowledge through interaction with the environment instead of relying on the teacher (Fraser, 2006).

Vygotsky and Feuerstein are two important figures in social constructivism. They claim that people are born into a social world and they learn language through interaction with other people. The claim of Vygotsky and Feuerstein is one of the departure points for the present study, because students' learning in master and doctorate programs is shaped by the intervention of academics. Therefore, in the context of this study, post-graduate programs take the role of social world learning occurs and academics play the role of mediators in social constructivist perspective.

The word mediation comes from a social interactionist approach to psychology (Fraser, 2006). In the context of education, mediation is conducted by teachers into the learning process of learners. Therefore, for Feuerstein, the significant people helping and guiding learners in order to enrich their learning are 'mediators'; experiences provided by these significant people are 'mediated learning experiences' (MLE). MLE is basically concerned with the quality of the interaction between learners and mediators. The main aim of MLE is to help learners change qualitatively by enabling him/her to develop cognitive prerequisites for learning on his/her own from direct stimuli (Kozulin, 1991).

According to mediation theory, 'the mediator helps learners to bridge the gap between what they cannot do on their own and what they can do with a little help' (Grosser & De Waal, 2008, p. 43). It is quite similar to Vygotsky's most widely known concept Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Mediation is located in the center of psychology of both Vygotsky and Feuerstein. Thus, it can easily be understood that the gist of both theory of mediation of Feuerstein and ZPD are the same. However, it is also claimed that Vygotsky's theoretical framework does not clearly elaborate the role of the human mediator (Seng et al., 2003). In contrast, the major role is employed by a human mediator in Feuerstein's (1990) theory of mediated learning. Therefore, mediation theory of Feuerstein seems meaningful to be adopted for the present study due to its inclusion of ZPD.

Parameters of Mediation

According to Feuerstein (1991), the mediator can mediate learners in 12 different ways to provide real educational learning experiences. The first three of these are considered to be essential for all learning tasks. 'These are also considered universal, in the sense that they can be present in all races, ethnic groups, cultural entities, and socioeconomic strata' (Seng et al., 2003, p. 36). The remaining nine are known as situational, because they are not used in every MLE. The twelve key features of mediation are presented with their explanations below:

Significance: The teacher needs to make learners aware of the significance of the learning task so that they can see the value of it to them personally and in a broader cultural context.

Purpose beyond the here and now: Learners must be aware of the way in which the learning experience will have wider relevance to them beyond the immediate time and place.

Shared intention: In presenting a task, the teacher must have a clear intention, which is understood and reciprocated by the learners.

A sense of competence: The feeling that they are capable of coping successfully with any particular task with which they are faced.

Control of own behavior: The ability to control and regulate their own learning, thinking and actions.

Goal-setting: The ability to set realistic goals and to plan ways of achieving them.

Challenge: An internal need to respond to challenges, and to search for new challenges in life.

Awareness of change: An understanding that human beings are constantly changing, and the ability to recognize and assess changes in themselves.

A belief in positive outcomes: A belief that even when faced with an apparently intractable problem, there is always the possibility of finding a solution.

Sharing: Co-operation among learners, together with the recognition that some problems are better solved co-operatively.

Individuality: Recognition of their own individuality and uniqueness.

A sense of belonging: A feeling of belonging to a community and a culture. (Williams & Burden 1997, p. 69)

Studies related to Mediation Theory

There has not been a study related to Feuerstein's theory of mediation to language teaching in the context of Turkey. It has been researched in many different contexts abroad, such as China (Xiongyong, 2012; Xiongyong, Samuel & Hua, 2012); Iran (Hassaskhah, 2011); Taiwan (Chang, 2004); South Africa (Ngidi, 2012; Grosser & De Waal, 2008); France (Brown, 2002).

The educational levels of these studies also differed. While the studies of Xiongyong (2012), Xiongyong et al. (2012), and Ngidi (2012) were conducted in the secondary education institutions; Brown (2002), Grosser and De Waal (2008), and Chang (2004) investigated the concept of mediation in tertiary level. Beyond the educational setting of the studies, the methodology followed in these researches differed as well. Researchers (Ngidi, 2012; Grosser & De Waal, 2008; Brown, 2002) mostly preferred questionnaires to gather data from a large sample. Apart from questionnaires, qualitative approach implementers used just observation and interviews in their researches (Xiongyong et al., 2012; Hassaskhah, 2011). 'Mixed methodology' was also employed by integrating findings of questionnaire, interview, and observation (Xiongyong, 2012; Chang, 2004). Despite employing different methodologies, both studies conducted on the secondary education level (Xiongyong, 2012; Xiongyong et al., 2012) showed that teachers had very limited or no knowledge of the mediation concept or the role of mediator.

Among the studies conducted on tertiary education level mentioned above, there were some common points in the findings. Though conducted in very different cultures (Taiwan and France), both in Brown's (2002) and Chang's (2004) studies, teachers valued 'a sense of competence' aspect the most. This aspect was the most important aspect for the students as well in Chang's (2004) study. On the other hand, although 'purpose beyond the here and now' was among the most actively practiced mediation theory aspects in Brown's study, it was one of the least important parameters for the students in Taiwan. Researchers also conducted studies about the role of mediator and the concept of mediation in language learning and teaching in South African culture. Grosser and De Waal's (2008) results provided similar findings with those of Xiongyong (2012). Although Grosser and De Waal investigated practicing

teachers' understanding of mediation which was different from Xiongyong (2012), the results revealed deficiencies in their understanding of the meaning of mediation as Xiongyong found out in his study. Therefore, it is possible to claim that teachers are not very well aware of these concepts in different parts of the world.

Literature on the concept of mediation and the role of a mediator showed that studies on different levels of education employing different methodologies provided various results. It is also obvious that there has been a lack of studies combining Feuerstein's theory of mediation and ELT post-graduate programs. This study tries to bridge this gap.

Method

The present study had the assumptions of 'constructivist worldview' and 'case study' (Creswell, 2003) as strategy of inquiry in qualitative research tradition in order to deeply investigate theory of mediation, twelve aspects of it and students' and academics' perspectives related to them in ELT post-graduate programs. Case study approach was adopted in the present study because they provide very detailed descriptions of participants or settings within their own setting (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

Research instruments

Four semi-structured personal interviews with lecturers and two focus-group interviews with post-graduate students were used for data gathering in the present study. Firstly, in both types of interview, the researcher used a set of questions including 12 mediation theory aspects and personal questions. It starts with personal questions, such as age, gender, the experience as an academic in both master and doctorate programs, and students' academic background. This interview protocol includes 14 questions involving academics' and students' views regarding 12 mediation theory aspects. Questions were prepared by taking the fact that the respondents may not know the aspects of mediation theory into account by avoiding direct questions like 'how do you use significance?'. Instead, indirectness was preferred for the preparation of the questions. Also, the questions were prepared with the awareness that the students are adults and the academics are the educators of adults. Therefore, instead of using words like 'teaching', words like 'guiding'

or ‘encouraging’ were preferred for suitability. Apart from the main questions which serve as a guide and a point of departure in the present study, some probes were also employed to go deeper into the interview responses. The main concern of the researcher in using focus-group interviews separately both with the master and doctorate students was to let students listen to each other’s ideas which allows them to be stimulated by one other and to inspire new ideas (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

A pilot study was carried out with the objective of testing the questions in the interviews. In this pilot study, 2 semi-structured personal interviews with two academics and two focus-group interviews with the participation of two students were conducted. The questions were found to be eliciting the views about mediation theory and its twelve aspects. The questions were also checked by two experts during this process in order to check appropriateness for the main study.

Reliability and validity issues

Establishing trustworthiness was one of the major objectives of the researcher as in all qualitative researches. In order to ensure trustworthiness, five procedures were implemented in this study, which were put forward by Creswell and Miller (2000). *Triangulation* was established by using a combination of personal semi-structured interviews and focus-group interviews. Additionally, the data were gathered from different participant groups. *Collaboration* was used with participants’ kind acceptance to spend their time for interviews. For *member checking*, the researcher provided participants with the interview transcriptions and received the approval of using them. *Thick and rich description* of the post-graduate programs were made so that the reader can easily understand all the procedures in the research design and it can be replicated. For *peer debriefing*, researcher received feedback over time during the process of the entire study from a PhD student studying in the same department.

Research setting and participants

The setting was education faculty of a state university in Turkey. This university offers undergraduate and post-graduate programs in the department of ELT. First of all, students applying to MA or doctorate program should

have diplomas from related disciplines, have required scores from the related parts of national exams including foreign language exam, and be successful in the interview and written exam administered by the department.

Students who have the chance to join these programs need to take a minimum of seven courses/21 credits and write a thesis. The programs have the objectives of educating experts who are skilled at research studies in the particular field, educating individuals who are good at using the intercultural communication strategies. The courses are taught by eight academics. In terms of sample selection, this study employed convenience sampling due to convenient and readily available participants (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). There were 4 academics who voluntarily participated in this study. Their personal information is provided below in Table 1.

Table 1
Personal information of the academics

Participant Codes	Gender	Age	Experience			Teaching
			ELT department	ELT Master program	ELT Doctorate Program	
T1	Female	41	11 years	9 years	6 years	Fundamental Issues In Foreign Language Teacher Education (doctorate)
T2	Female	44	12 years	12 years	6 years	Beyond The Borders Of Language Teaching Methodology (master), English for Specific Purposes (doctorate)

Table 1 (continued)
Personal information of the academics

Participant Codes	Gender	Age	Experience			Teaching
			ELT department	ELT Master program	ELT Doctorate Program	
T3	Male	35	3 years	3 years	No experience	Second Language Acquisition (master), Language Teaching and Educational Psychology (master), Teaching English to Young Learners (master)
T4	Male	32	1 year	1 year	No experience	

As shown in Table 1 above, the participants were coded by the researcher. The codes were given according to the groups they belong to. For instance, teacher participants got 'T' and the numbers were added next to their codes, such as 'T1' and 'T2'. Except for one master student working at a state secondary school (M1), all doctorate and master students participated in this study were instructors of English language at various universities in Turkey. The personal information of master and doctorate students is provided below in Table 2 and in Table 3.

Table 2
Personal information of master students

Participant codes	Age	Department of graduation (undergraduate)
M1	23	ELT
M2	24	ELT
M3	27	ELT
M4	28	ELT

Table 3

Personal information of doctorate students

Participant codes	Age	Department of graduation (Undergraduate)	Department of graduation (Master)
D1	31	ELT	ELT
D2	30	ELT	ELT
D3	39	ELT	ELT
D4	31	ELT	MBA: Master of Business Administration
D5	29	ELT	Teaching Turkish as a foreign language
D6	34	ELT	ELT

Data collection and analysis

Personal semi-structured interviews with T1, T2, T3, and T4 took 64, 52, 28, 21 minutes respectively. Focus-group interviews were conducted in 28 minutes both with master and doctorate students. The participants who took part in the pilot study did not take part in the main study. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. All interviews were in English except for the one with T4.

What was employed for the analysis of the data in the present study was ‘interpretive-descriptive’ approach, which involves careful selection and interpretation of the researcher together with the objective of accurate description of the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher did not only clearly express lived experiences of the participants but also added their interpretation. Therefore, ‘interpretive-descriptive’ analysis technique served best for the purposes of this study.

The data in the present study came in words rather than numbers. In this situation, Miles and Huberman (1984, p. 21) suggest that 'data analysis consists of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification'. These steps were followed in the present study as well. First of all, the data were put into initial analysis in which the repetitions and irrelevant parts were removed. The responses of the academics and students in interviews were put together in table format to ease data management. In this way, the researcher selected and eliminated the irrelevant

parts and made them simple to use for data analysis by using data reduction and display. Concerning the conclusion drawing or verification, the researcher triangulated data coming from personal semi-structured interviews and focus-group interviews.

Findings and Discussion

Academics and students of ELT post-graduate programs were questioned in interviews about 12 aspects of mediation theory. The aspect of ‘significance’ was investigated by questioning efforts of academics to relate the tasks with learners’ practices and how they stated the significance of subjects. To start with, all academics except for T2 pay special attention to relating the task with learners’ practices. The reason why T2 does not do it specifically is the academic nature of activities taking place in her post-graduate classes. She thinks that academic nature of these activities may not be parallel with learners’ daily teaching activities even though they are also teachers. However, this does not block her from relating the tasks with learners’ practices. She explains it with an example:

For example, if they are gonna do a needs analysis, I say "don't go out of your institution. If your institution allows you to do something like this, just walk around and ask questions". They should see the relevance of what we are doing here academically to their own work setting.

On the other hand, for other academics, mentioning about their own personal experiences or asking students about their practices regarding that aspect are two important strategies used for relating the tasks with learners’ daily teaching practices. However, it is obvious that academics working with doctorate students have higher expectations.

From students’ perspective, academics’ relating the learning task with their practices depends on the course and their practices. Especially master students pay attention to academics’ efforts in this regard. In terms of explicitly stating the importance of a specific topic, master students consider that they need this kind of information in order to value a topic. M3 states that: ‘well, it is important because their perspective is broader. We do not possess all knowledge. So, I think their stating explicitly that something is

important will help us in future studies'. Master and doctorate students mostly think that academics' statement about the importance of a topic is guiding them in finding the topics for their researches. The overall idea among doctorate students is that ELT is a very broad term; therefore, it eventually touches upon their daily practices somehow.

D5: I think by this way they let us know the current developments in our field of study. For example, they say "this has been the most commonly studied topic recently" or they can say "it is currently a hot issue" or "it is a unique topic".

Besides, it is interesting to find out that the academics with less experience in post-graduate programs (T3, T4) specifically tend to state the importance of one topic or the task in classes. On the other hand, more experienced academics (T1, T2) are more concerned with showing the relationships of all topics to let the learners reach the synthesis of topics. The experience of the academics may play a vital role in understanding the reactions of learners in adult education. Although it can lose its effect when frequently uttered, stating the significance of the topic may help learners skip unimportant information and focus on more specific parts of theories or concepts. As a result, 'the teacher's role is to help learners to perceive how the activity is of value to them' (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 70).

The perspectives of academics differ greatly on 'purpose beyond the here and now' depending on their evaluation of students. While T2 and T4 specifically put special emphasis on showing the relation between current and future topics, according to T3, post-graduate students already have this skill and there is no need for explicit instruction. T4 stated that: 'for example suggestions for Turkey case, I suggest them what they can study in Turkish case, how they can do it, what can be applicable in this context'. Suggestions for further researches or academics' indication of a simple relation between the constructs may be very exciting for doctorate students. This aspect together with the aspect of 'significance' may play an important role in helping learners eliminate their worries regarding dissertation topic search as well.

As a response to academics' views, both master and doctorate students consider the use of this aspect as guiding. The relationships between topics

and suggestions of the academics regarding subject search for their dissertations and papers are invaluable for the learners due to the lack of expertise in the field of ELT.

The views of academics and students concerning ‘significance’, and ‘purpose beyond the here and now’ show some similarities and differences compared to the results of other studies. For instance, Xiongyong et al. (2012) found out that teachers did not employ these two aspects. In addition, in Chang’s study (2004), these aspects were among the least important aspects according to students. In contrast, in Brown’s study (2002), ‘purpose beyond the here and now’ was one of the most actively practiced parameters. According to the results, depending on the culture the study was conducted in and the individuals’ views, the use of mediation theory aspects differed.

It was interesting to receive similar responses from all academics regarding ‘shared intention’, which basically refers to mutual understanding between academics and students in post-graduate program context. All academics claimed to provide a course content to make it easier for learners to understand what they expected in tasks, presentations, and discussions during the classes. T1 states that: ‘I do have the course content, a detailed one, and I have my expectations. But obviously I need to repeat myself later when necessary just before they give the presentations or just before they do the tasks’.

However, especially doctorate students criticized some academics for inadequate details about the tasks provided in course contents. In addition, students expect to see good examples of the tasks written by other students in previous years clearly representing academics’ expectations. In this way, it may be possible to eliminate the worries of students. ‘Shared intention’ received considerable attention according to the results of previous studies as well. In the studies of both Xiongyong et al. (2012) and Brown (2002), it was employed and considered important by the teachers. The results showed similarity to those of the present research. It shows that regardless of culture and level of students, being understood by students and having a mutual understanding with them are the important points for the teachers. According to Brown (2002, p. 5) ‘people who feel competent may perform better than those who do not, irrespective of their real level of knowledge’. Therefore, ‘a sense of competence’ aspect of mediation theory was assumed to be actively used in post-graduate classes. T1 highlighted individual or

group tutorials in serving for the purpose of making learners become self-confident. She stated that:

When I was a student, I wanted to hear that kind of appreciation. I did not have like "ok that was a good job, I really liked it, that was a good idea". I do it when there is a new idea. I want to appreciate time, effort, and especially creativity. I think it would boost their confidence.

T3 also encourages students to have a higher self-confidence. He states that, regardless of the program, all students need some booster, some encouragement to feel that they can do it. He states that:

I say "you all know these things", "in practice you are all doing these things, but, the only thing you have to do is to try to understand these theoretical aspects and relate them to your own practices as teachers".

Students are mostly aware of the expectations of academics and they do not need extra support from them to be motivated and self-confident. M3 states that: 'They think that only the ones who can overcome this problem should come to this program'. However, when they were questioned about the kind of support they would like to receive, students preferred individual feedback. They also criticized academics for the lack of feedback on their tasks. D2 criticizes: 'we mostly don't get feedback about our studies. Personally speaking, there are not clear explanations in the feedbacks, so I cannot understand how it can guide me'.

This aspect was the most important mediation theory aspect for Taiwanese teachers teaching English at a college (Chang, 2004). Even though it was not the most popularly used aspect by the academics in the present study, the results were almost similar. In both studies, 'a sense of competence' aspect of mediation theory was perceived as an important parameter of being a mediator in the classes.

Except for T4, academics did not prefer to use 'control of own behavior' aspect due to some reasons. This aspect is related to academics' attempt to make students autonomous. However, academics mostly think that students in this level should already control their own learning. In addition, this attempt requires a great deal of time. Therefore, academics claimed that unless there

is a supervisor-student connection, it is not possible to transfer this into practice. T4 makes more obvious efforts compared to other academics. He claims that he helps students in reaching the library databases or some online books which allow them to study on their own. He states that: 'I try to guide them how to learn, how to self-study'.

Despite academics' ignorance of this parameter in ELT post-graduate programs, findings regarding 'control of own behavior' in the study of Xiongyong et al. (2012) showed that Chinese teachers preferred to use this aspect. There are differences between the views of doctorate and master students. While master students consider themselves lacking in having the features of an autonomous learner, doctorate students think that they cannot be successful in this program unless they are autonomous learners. It is obvious that master students' expectation of assistance regarding the use of this aspect was not met in the master program.

In terms of 'goal setting' aspect, all academics agreed that they allowed learners to participate in shaping the course content which means students had the chance to set their own goals in this respect. T1, for instance, states that she allows them to design their own researches, presentations or choose their own topics. However, she plays the role of a controller who puts the plans in the doable framework. She stated that:

Sometimes they are so ambitious, and they feel like they can solve many problems about teacher education and teaching English, which is not realistic. So, I limit their topic, research area, research questions. Actually, I try to shape and modify their perspective.

However, students' responses showed that they were passive in this process and the goals were already set for them.

M2: I think we follow teachers' goals. Because the classes are generally set and chosen, so we don't have the right to choose. So for the course period, I need to do what is required from those classes, but during thesis period in terms of choosing a topic, it will be more personal.

The mismatch between academics' and students' views stems from the fact that despite students' chance to contribute to the formation of the course

content, they were not knowledgeable in the beginning of the term. Therefore, they did not have any suggestions regarding the goals of the courses. In order to solve this problem, all planned course contents may be provided online for the students before the classes start. In this way, students may have a general idea about the possible topics of the course and they may add more options for the final versions of the content. It is of crucial importance because Williams and Burden (1997, p. 74) claim that 'learners need to set their own goals instead of following what teachers set for them because an absence of goals can lead to aimlessness and a lack of any sense of direction'.

Almost all academics agreed that writing a research paper is the most challenging task in both programs. The reasons differ according to academics. For instance, while the reason for T1 was students' having hard situations, such as being a teacher or travelling for long periods, it was students' not being ready for that task and also the time limitation they had for each task for T2. The important point mentioned by T2 was the collaboration among academics in providing tasks for the students. They try to balance the level of challenge of the tasks. The confounding fact between academics' and students' responses is that despite collaboration of academics concerning the tasks, students' claims show that there are some overlaps among the course contents of different classes. Therefore, stronger collaboration is needed among academics during planning phase. Otherwise, students may become disinterested because of discussing the same topics over and over in different classes.

Concerning 'awareness of change', both academics and students agree that there is an academic progress. It is interesting to find out doctorate students' realization of changes related to society and human relations.

D5: I think your conversations with your colleagues change as well. For example, I observe an increase in the conversations I make with assistant professors or associated professors or professors in my own institution as a person who is studying at an ELT doctorate program.

Therefore, it can be deduced that doctorate program helps students to be positioned in a higher place in the eyes of the students' colleagues. Despite the importance of this aspect, 'awareness of change' was chosen as the least important mediation theory aspect according to the results of Chang's study

(2004). However, when the nature of the context of the present study is considered, it is possible to expect that students are aware of the changes taking place throughout the long process. The first reason is that students are adults and they know their current capabilities. Thus, it is possible that they do not need any academics' effort to realize it.

In terms of 'a belief in positive outcomes', academics focus on two constructs: trust between students and academics, and students' initiative to express their problems. For instance, T2 does not have a special interest in understanding the problems students unless students talk to her. She states that she can be flexible in terms of the task submission deadlines. However, the way students approach identifies the way she approaches students. She states that: 'this is adult education. It's very difficult to know what problems. But if they drop a mail about their problems, I always give that room and I can be flexible'. It is also obvious that there is limited academic-student communication regarding personal problems of students. Academics are ready to help learners if they trust students and only if students initiate the conversation. On the other hand, students think that academics are too busy to tackle with their personal problems. In addition, even if they have problems, they think it is a kind of embarrassing situation for them to share it with the academics. Adult learners, as in the case of this study, may have closer relationships with academics. On the other hand, they are more withdrawn in terms of sharing problems.

For the aspect of 'sharing', academics mostly try to encourage friendship in their classes by providing pair or group works. They have the idea that students can learn better from each other. T1 emphasizes importance of friendships during doctorate program for future collaboration by stating that:

PhD is a friendship and it is very important. Because they are mature enough and they have similar goals and responsibilities. Therefore, I told them, when you graduate, just work with each other because PhD friendship is about future collaboration.

Students' choices about working together, on the other hand, depends on the kind of activity. They prefer working alone in writing activities, whereas they prefer sharing and discussing about topics in a group. M1 states that: 'I support working together to understand topic better, but the process of writing

is more personal. But in order to understand a topic, I prefer working with a small group and learning from them instead of reading alone'.

Although Williams and Burden (1997) claim that working in pairs or in groups brings success to young and adult learners, the parameter of 'sharing' is considered and implemented as the least important parameter of mediation by the teachers working at university in English language classrooms according to the results of Brown's study (2002). However, the use of 'sharing' in post-graduate programs is popular. The reason may be the need of cooperation among students to be successful.

Concerning 'individuality' aspect, academics mostly try to let each learner in the classroom participate by sharing their own experiences as a teacher or a researcher. Students in both programs agree with academics that they can express their own ideas independently. The busy timetables of academics do not give them the chance to monitor each student's individual development. Students are also aware of the limited time. Therefore, they do not have the expectation of receiving individual tutorials. This aspect was also the least important parameter for the students according to the findings of Chang's study (2004), which was also conducted in university context. Thus, it can be deduced that young adults already have the realization of their own uniqueness and individuality without teachers' effort and they do not expect from their teachers.

The last mediation theory aspect was 'a sense of belonging', which refers to feeling of belonging to a community and a culture. From academics' perspective, students feel belonging to master and doctorate programs naturally and implicitly despite lack of their effort in this respect due to their busy timetable. T1 explains it:

I think the course or the program itself bounds everybody together. I mean it is kind of glue. You know they all need to survive in the program, and they need to collaborate to pass because they need to learn from each other.

Students agreed with academics in this respect. Students feel like a part of a group in their programs and they also know the importance of this feeling to be successful in these programs. D4 considers that it is important for students' success: 'when there is a harmony, we have better results. I mean we have a cooperative atmosphere'. D6 also expresses the feeling of a student in

a class in which there is a high level of belonging feeling: 'you feel yourself calm for example when you are making a presentation. You don't feel the threat that they will criticize you. You feel that they are my friends and they will consider what's best for me'.

The students' perspectives found in Chang's study (2004) are in accordance with those of the students in the present study. However, Brown (2002) also considers this feature of mediation as the most difficult parameters of Feuerstein to adapt to the area of language learning. Therefore, it can be claimed that though the implementation of this aspect is not easy due to its time-consuming nature and high number of students, students are already aware of the significance of it. Thus, it occurs naturally without any specific effort of teachers.

Conclusions and Implications

The results remind us that the use of mediation theory aspects in this specific post-graduate ELT program is idiosyncratic from academics' perspective despite similarities. The main point was to have a shared understanding in the classes with students. One of the strategies academics used in order to have this understanding was providing a course content form in the beginning of the term. However, students considered that some of these course contents lacked necessary details. The reason was high expectation of academics from students in post-graduate programs. However, students in both programs mentioned about the need of good examples of tasks written by previous students. Thus, academics should include every detail in their course contents regarding sources, evaluation, preparation, and format. The good examples of these tasks written by previous students can also be provided in these course contents. A better and more organized alternative of providing previous students' works may be exhibiting them in a library or in a classroom where students can reach and take from. It is also possible that academics upload these examples on their personal websites for the easy access of students. In this way, the mismatch between the expectations of academics and students regarding the tasks can be eliminated.

The results concerning 'purpose beyond here and now' along with 'significance' aspect showed that learners in post-graduate programs in ELT department needed assistance from academics for dissertation topic search.

When they do not receive this help from academics, they get lost in the vast area of ELT. Hence, understanding the importance of the use of these aspects is crucial for academics for guiding them with respect to their interests and skills.

In terms of 'a sense of competence', students preferred receiving individual feedback from academics. Receiving negative feedback among group friends demoralized them. In addition, students complained about the lack of feedback. Therefore, academics should prefer individual feedback and they should provide feedback for almost all possible tasks for students.

Regarding 'challenge' aspect, all academics should discuss about course contents of each class before the classes start. Similar topics can be eliminated or replaced with another possible one. Therefore, more cooperation in this respect is needed in ELT post-graduate program.

It was also obvious from the responses of both academics and students that students could only find the chance of discussing about their personal goals and have closer relationships with academics after they chose their thesis supervisors at the end of the first term of the course period. However, after course period, students and their thesis supervisors mostly cannot meet as often as desired due to time limitation of both sides. The close relationship students have during the thesis period with their supervisors may help learners improve themselves. However, they cannot use this chance because they do not spend time with thesis supervisors as much as they do during the course period. In order to maximize this chance of the students, institutions should allow students to choose their thesis supervisors at the very beginning of the course period. By this means, students may benefit fully from the expertise, experience, and, the knowledge of their supervisors. On the other hand, in order to put this change into practice, students should either have personal interviews with academics to get their approval or academics' curriculum vitae should be updated regularly so that students can understand whose research interests are closer to those of themselves before they start the course period.

Another mediation theory aspect which is related to students' having closer relationships with academics and among themselves is 'a sense of belonging'. Organization of congresses or conferences, a group work of article writing, or presenting a research paper at a conference may be effective ways of enhancing students' sense of belonging in these programs.

As a conclusion, despite the fact that students were post-graduate students, they needed a kind of guidance in many respects. Hence, in order to meet their needs, the use of two universal mediation theory aspects, namely 'significance' and 'purpose beyond the here and now', was important in academics' being a guide for them. Avoiding group feedback and providing strength and weaknesses for all works of students are crucial for students' sense of competence. The challenge and goals of the course should be set in cooperation with the learners in post-graduate programs. Trust between one another is another major issue both for the students and academics for the belief in positive outcomes. With all these results, this study provides a projection for academics in designing their courses and way of teaching to play the role of mediator in post-graduate programs. The post-graduate students who are candidates to be future academics in this department may also benefit from the findings in this respect.

According to the findings, the main problem of not using mediation theory aspects or partial use of them stems from the limited time of academics in master and doctorate programs in ELT department. The busy timetables of academics include classes from ELT undergraduate program, ELT master and doctorate programs, and administrative works. In order to solve the time problem, academics may have classes just in master and doctorate programs. By this way, they may have longer time for thesis supervision, task feedbacks, or personal development of students. Consequently, institutions responsible for organizing post-graduate programs may take into consideration the problems emerged due to the busy schedules of academics which was apparent as the reason for almost all aspects. Thus, the results may also be valuable to managers concerned with this topic.

Suggestions for further research draw in part from aspects related to the limitations of the current research. Due to the case study nature of this study, generalizability of the results was not the main concern. However, in case of a general mediation theory use examination in post-graduate programs in ELT departments, a quantitative nationwide investigation of post-graduate programs in this specific field is needed for generalizable findings. Another limitation of the present study was the validation of the instrument that guided the interviews just by two experts in the field, which could have been established in a more systematic way through the views of more experts.

Besides, this study mostly dealt with how mediation theory was put into action by academics in these programs together with the views of the students. The results provided no information about the role of each mediation theory aspect on students' success. A comprehensive investigation of mediation theory aspects regarding their role in students' success is also recommended. Finally, it is recommended that researchers investigate the use of mediation theory aspects cross-culturally. In this way, it may be possible to understand whether culture plays a significant role in the use of these aspects or not.

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Reflective Thinking, Self-efficacy, Self-esteem and Academic Achievement of Iranian EFL students

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Reflective Thinking, Self-efficacy, Self-esteem and Academic Achievement of Iranian EFL students

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Abstract

The present study investigated the relationship between reflective thinking, general self-efficacy, self-esteem and academic achievement of Iranian EFL students. To this end, 132 Iranian EFL students from three state universities were recruited. To collect the data, the participants completed four questionnaires, namely background information questionnaire, the reflective thinking skills questionnaire, the general self-efficacy scale and Rosenberg self-esteem scale. The results of two correlation matrixes revealed that there were statistically significant positive relationships between general self-efficacy, self-esteem and academic achievement of Iranian EFL students, while reflective thinking had no significant relationship with self-esteem, self-efficacy and academic achievement of the participants; in addition, no significant relationship between the components of reflective thinking and academic achievement of Iranian EFL students was observed. Moreover, the results of multiple regression analysis showed that between self-esteem and self-efficacy, the former was a stronger predictor of academic achievement of the Iranian EFL students.

Keywords: reflective thinking, self-efficacy, self-esteem, academic achievement, Iranian EFL students.

Pensamiento Reflexivo, Autoeficacia, Autoestima y Rendimiento Académico de Estudiantes Iranís con Inglés como Segunda Lengua en Educación Superior: ¿Existe una Relación?

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Resumen

Este estudio investigó la relación entre el pensamiento reflexivo, la autoeficacia general, la autoestima y el rendimiento académico de estudiantes iranís con inglés como segunda lengua. 132 estudiantes iranís con inglés como segunda lengua fueron reclutados de tres universidades estatales. Los participantes completaron cuatro cuestionarios: un cuestionario de información básica, el cuestionario de habilidades de pensamiento reflexivo, la escala de autoeficacia general y la escala Rosenberg de autoestima. Los resultados de dos matrices de correlación revelaron que existe una relación positiva estadísticamente significativa entre la autoeficacia general, la autoestima y el rendimiento académico de estudiantes iranís con inglés como segunda lengua, mientras que el pensamiento reflexivo no tuvo una relación significativa con la autoestima, la autoeficacia y el rendimiento académico de los participantes. Además, no se observó ninguna relación significativa entre los componentes del pensamiento reflexivo y el rendimiento académico de estudiantes iranís con inglés como segunda lengua. También, los resultados del análisis de regresión múltiple mostraron que, entre la autoestima y la autoeficacia, la primera fue un predictor más fuerte del rendimiento académico de estudiantes iranís con inglés como segunda lengua.

Palabras clave: pensamiento reflexivo, autoeficacia, autoestima, rendimiento académico, estudiantes iranís con inglés como segunda lengua.

Numerous factors are involved in academic achievement of English as foreign language (EFL) students. Among these factors, affective factors play a significant role in their academic success. Drawing upon Gass and Sekinker's (2008) argument, non-language factors such as affective factors can play a determining role in students' success in EFL contexts. This can justify the significance of investigation into the impact of EFL students' affective factors on their academic success. In the same vein, Dornyei (2009) also exerts emphasis on the affective factors leading to individual differences, and in turn to variation in their performances. According to Williams and Burden (2000), a successful educator should be aware of the complexity of learning process and the factors involved in learning process to assist learners in achieving their goals. With the importance of affective factors in mind, a vast array of studies has been conducted to examine the relationship between psychological factors and EFL students' achievement (e.g. Asakereh & Dehghannezhad, 2015; Carroll et al., 2009; Ghanizadeh, 2016). However, the extant literature indicates that reflective thinking as a significant factor in EFL students' academic success has not been given due attention and self-efficacy, self-esteem and reflective thinking have not been brought together to date to ascertain their possible relationship with academic achievement of EFL students. The present study therefore attempted to explore the possible relationship between the above-mentioned affective variables and academic achievement of Iranian EFL students. The other motive behind conducting the current study was to unravel among the variables of the study which one is the strongest predictor of academic achievement of Iranian EFL students.

Reflective thinking

The concept of reflective thinking is associated with Dewey's (1933) seminal publication entitled *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. Barell (1984, p.194) posits that "reflective, productive, critical are all words used to describe thinking at higher, more complex than rote levels". Reflective thinking is composed of four stages, namely, habitual action, understanding, reflection and critical reflection (Kember et al., 2000). Learners who think reflectively can control their learning and are cognizant of the gap between what they know and what they need to know (Dewey, 1933). van Velzen (2016) believes that

students who are not engaged in reflective thinking fail to evaluate any given situation critically; consequently, they may not be able to improve the status quo. When students reflect on their actions and analyze them they can identify the aspects which need further improvement and those which have gone well (Van der Schaaf et al., 2011). Beveridge (1997) also posits that students who are able to perceive their success learn more and, in turn this can lead to further academic achievement. Ersözülü and Arslan (2009) further state that reflective thinking assists students to ascertain their thinking and learning process and to identify their strengths and weaknesses; in addition, it makes students actively engaged in their learning process (Song et al., 2006).

White (1981) holds that if schools exerted further emphasis on students' reflective thinking rather than merely emphasizing acquiring knowledge, the situation would be far better than the status quo. Students are supposed to develop their reflective thinking. To do so, they need to question their habitual actions (Lucas & Tan, 2007).

There are a handful of studies addressing the relationship between reflective thinking and students' academic performance. For example, Ersözülü and Arslan (2009) explored the impact of activities developing reflective thinking on Turkish primary school students' metacognitive ability. The results indicated that the activities improved the participants' metacognitive ability. That is, reflective thinking had a positive impact on the students' metacognitive skills. Soodmand Afshar and Rahimi (2015) also investigated the relationship between reflective thinking, emotional intelligence, and speaking skills of 150 Iranian EFL students. The results of the study showed that there were significant relationships between the variables of the study, and both emotional intelligence and reflective thinking were strong predictors of speaking skills, with the former being a stronger predictor. In another piece of research, Soodmand Afshar and Hamzavi (2014) explored the relationship between reflective thinking, listening anxiety, and listening comprehension of 223 Iranian EFL students. The findings of the study revealed that there was a positive relationship between reflective thinking and listening comprehension while there was a negative correlation between reflective thinking and listening anxiety.

Ghanizadeh (2016) also had an inquiry into the relationship between reflective thinking, critical thinking, self-monitoring, and academic

achievement of 196 Iranian university students. Part of the findings demonstrated that critical thinking and reflective thinking significantly predicted students' academic success, with habitual action being the weakest predictor and reflection the strongest one. Furthermore, Lew and Schmidt's (2011) study showed that Singaporean students' reflective thinking on what and how they learned brought about positive changes in their performance; however, the changes were modest. In part of his study, Phan (2009) also found that reflecting thinking had a direct impact on academic success of undergraduates studying at the University of the South Pacific, Laucala Campus, Suva, Fiji.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy, adopted from Bandura's social cognitive theory, refers to individuals' conviction that they are able to complete a task successfully (Bandura, 1977). According to Lee and Mao (2016) and Phan (2012), self-efficacy can predict students' motivation and academic achievement. Bandura (1977, 1999) posits that those who believe a task is beyond their ability are likely to fail in task performance while those who believe in their ability are likely to perform the task successfully and even if initially they encounter problems in the way of their task performance, they persist with their endeavors. Komarraju and Nadler's (2013) study on 407 psychology undergraduates with European American, African American, and other backgrounds corroborated Bandura's claim. The results of the study revealed that students with low self-efficacy had the inclination to believe that intelligence is a fixed and immutable trait while those with high self-efficacy believed perseverance and persistence can help them obtain their goals.

In Pajares's (1996, p.544) word, "how individuals interpret the results of their performance attainments informs and alters their environments and their self-beliefs, which in turn inform and alter their subsequent performances". That is, those who possess low self-efficacy envisage failure scenario while those with high self-efficacy visualize successful scenario (Bandura, 1999).

Bandura (1999) proposes four sources of self-efficacy development, namely performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Performance accomplishments refer to individuals' success in performing a task as repeated failures can have

debilitative effects on their task performance in the future. Vicarious experience is defined as individuals' exposure to others' task performance through which they can obtain further confidence to perform future tasks. Verbal persuasion refers to positive feedback which a task performer receives while s/he is engaged in task performance, and emotional arousal can be defined as the affective factors impinging upon individuals' task performance.

With the importance of self-efficacy in mind, some studies were carried out to address the correlation between self-efficacy and academic achievement. Honicke and Broadbent (2016) reviewed 12 years of research (2003-2015) on the relationship between self-efficacy, academic achievement, motivational and cognitive variables. The results of this review showed a moderate relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement. What follows are a number of studies addressing the relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement. de Fátima Goulão (2014) investigated the relationship between academic self-efficacy of 63 Portuguese EFL freshmen in an online context and their academic achievement. The results of the study indicated the existence of significant correlation between self-efficacy and academic achievement of the participants. Carroll et al. (2009) conducted a cross-sectional study to examine the relationship between self-efficacy, academic aspirations, and delinquency and academic achievement of 935 students from ten schools in Australia. Part of the findings revealed that there was a positive relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic achievement while a negative relationship was observed between social self-efficacy and academic relationship. Tenaw (2013) also carried out a study on the relationship between self-efficacy, gender, and academic achievement of 100 Turkish students majoring in Chemistry. The findings of the study revealed that there was no significant difference between males and females in terms of their self-efficacy. Furthermore, there was a significant relationship between their self-efficacy and academic achievement. Bahmani Fard (2013) conducted a study to examine the relationship between self-efficacy, self-esteem and test anxiety of 72 Iranian students majoring in English literature. The findings of the study demonstrated positive relationship between self-esteem and self-efficacy. Moreover, self-esteem and self-efficacy had a positive relationship with the students' final scores. Shkullaku's (2013) inquiry into gender, self-

efficacy and academic achievement indicated that there was a significant difference between males and females regarding their self-efficacy; in addition, the findings revealed a significant relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement. Wang and Neihart's (2015) qualitative study on Singaporean exceptional students also corroborated the contribution of self-efficacy to students' academic performance. On the other hand, Hwang, Choi, Lee, Culver, and Hutchison's longitudinal study (2016) on a large sample of Korean students showed that there was a reciprocal interplay between self-efficacy and academic achievement of the students. More specifically, the findings indicated that the impact of the students' past academic performance on their self-efficacy beliefs was stronger than the impact of self-efficacy beliefs on academic performance.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem refers to the amount of value people give to themselves (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, Vohs, 2003). Clemes and Bean (1990) assert that one of the principal factors impinging upon students' performance in school is the level of their self-esteem. They further state that students with low self-esteem tend to develop dissatisfaction with school context, which in turn, affects their learning process. Generally, those who appreciate their ability are more likely to succeed in their task performance than their counterparts with the same ability but less self-esteem (Apter, 1997). Low self-esteem can also lead to anxiety and depression, which can affect social performance (Branden, 1983).

A number of studies have been conducted to investigate the possible correlation between students' self-esteem and academic successes. For instance, an old study by Watkins and Astilla (1980) indicated the significant relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement; in addition, some recently published researches also demonstrated the significant positive relationship between the two variables. For example, Booth and Gerard (2011) investigated the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement of 86 North American and 86 British senior high school students. Part of the findings of the study indicated the existence of relationship between the participants' Mathematics scores and their self-esteem. Bhagat (2016) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement of 400 secondary students.

The results showed a positive correlation between males' self-esteem and their academic achievement while there was a negative correlation between females' self-esteem and their academic achievement. Román, Cuestas and Fenollar's (2008) study on 553 Spanish university students' self-esteem and academic achievement also indicated a positive relationship between the two variables. Furthermore, the findings of a study conducted by Duru and Balkis (2017) in the Turkish context also revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement of Turkish undergraduates.

Reflective thinking, self-efficacy, self-esteem and academic achievement

Generally, the Iranian education system has been mainly teacher-centered (Soodmand Afshar & Movasagh, 2014) and students have had little opportunity to have their voice heard; consequently, there is a danger that the psychological factors affecting their learning process are overlooked. Therefore, studies shedding light on these factors in relation to EFL students' academic success in the Iranian context can be of paramount importance.

Drawing on the literature, the role of reflective thinking in students' task performance has been emphasized by numerous scholars in the field (e.g. Beveridge, 1997; van Velzen, 2016) and a few studies also demonstrated a significant relationship between reflective thinking and academic achievement (e.g. Ghanizadeh, 2016; Soodmand Afshar & Rahimi, 2016). However, the relationship between reflective thinking, self-efficacy and self-esteem has remained uncharted. Partly the current study thus was aimed at addressing this lacuna. Furthermore, the literature showed self-efficacy and self-esteem were regarded as determining affective factors in academic contexts (e.g. Clemes & Bean, 1990; Lee & Mao, 2016; Phan, 2012) and a number of studies substantiated their relationship with academic achievement (e.g. Bhagat, 2016; Tenaw, 2013). Moreover, a handful of studies demonstrated the positive relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement (e.g. Bahmani Fard, 2013). Despite the fact that all the variables of the current study have played a significant role in students' academic performance, it is not clear which variable is the strongest predictor of students' academic achievement; hence, the second motive for

conducting the present study. Therefore, the following research questions were formulated to address the niche in the literature:

1. Is there any significant relationship between reflective thinking, self-efficacy, self-esteem and academic achievement of Iranian EFL students?
2. Among reflective thinking, self-efficacy and self-esteem, which one is the strongest predictor of Iranian EFL students' academic achievement?
3. Is there any relationship among different components of reflective thinking and academic achievement of Iranian EFL students?

Method

Participants

A total of 132 second-year EFL undergraduates, out of which 100 were female and 32 were male, were recruited from three Iranian public universities based on a cluster random sampling. The participants whose first language was Persian and who had already been educated in the Iranian schools which are mainly teacher-centered (Soodmand Afshar & Movasagh, 2014) were majoring in either English literature or English translation at the time of the study. Moreover, their age ranged from 18 to 45 ($M=21$). All the participants had already passed general English courses such as listening and speaking, grammar and reading comprehension courses. Therefore, they were not expected to encounter any problem with understanding the items of the questionnaires. Having stated that, one of the researchers was present on the day of administration of the questionnaires to explain the purpose of the study and answer possible related questions asked by the participants.

Instruments

To collect the data, a background information questionnaire, the reflective thinking skills questionnaire (RTQ) (Kember et al., 2000), the general self-efficacy scale (GSE) (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) and Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES) (Rosenberg, 1965) were employed. Further information on the questionnaires is presented below:

Background information questionnaire was used to collect the participants' demographic information such as age, gender, major, grade point average (GPA).

The RTQ is a five-point Likert scale questionnaire which comprises 16 items. The questionnaire evaluates four components namely habitual action (items 1, 5, 9 and 13), understanding (items 2, 6, 10 and 14), reflection (items 3, 7, 11 and 15) and critical reflection (items 4, 8, 12 and 16). To ascertain the validity and reliability of the RTQ, it was pilot tested with 50 participants from the same population. The results of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) showed that the questionnaire enjoyed an acceptable KMO of 0.83. Moreover, Cronbach's Alpha was estimated 0.81.

The RSES is composed of ten items on a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Items 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 are reverse scored, that is, strongly agree=0, agree=1, disagree=2 and strongly disagree=3. Higher score indicates more self-esteem. To examine the validity and reliability of RSES, it was piloted with 50 participants from the same population. The results of KMO revealed that the questionnaire enjoyed adequate KMO of 0.76. Additionally, Cronbach's Alpha was run to estimate the reliability of RSES, the results of which indicated an acceptable reliability index of 0.78.

The GSE is composed of ten items on a four-point scale ranging from "not true at all" to "exactly true". The sum of all items is considered as the total score of GSE. The total score ranges from 10 to 40, with a higher score rendering more self-efficacy. To examine the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, the GSE was also piloted with 50 participants from the same population. The results of KMO revealed an adequate KMO of 0.81 and the Cronbach's Alpha was estimated 0.83, which is acceptable.

Procedure

Having piloted the questionnaires, one of the researchers administered them to the participants at three state-run universities in Iran. No time limit was specified for completing the questionnaires; however, it took 25 minutes on average to fill out all the questionnaires. Although the participants were informed that participating in the study was not compulsory, they were requested to complete the questionnaires in the classroom in order to minimize the likelihood of their dropouts from the study. Furthermore, the participants were not asked to write down their names on the questionnaires so that they would provide their honest responses and their identities would be safeguarded.

Data analysis

SPSS software version 16 was used to analyze the data. To investigate the possible relationship between reflective thinking, self-efficacy, self-esteem and academic achievement of Iranian EFL students (research question 1), a correlation matrix (Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient) was run. A multiple regression analysis was run to examine the strongest predictor of Iranian EFL students' academic achievement from among reflective thinking, self-efficacy and self-esteem (research question 2). A correlation matrix (Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient) was also run to investigate the possible relationship between different components of reflective thinking and academic achievement (research question 3).

Results

The first research question set out to examine the relationship between reflective thinking, self-efficacy, self-esteem and academic achievement. A correlation matrix was run to answer this research question. As can be seen in Table 1, there was a significant relationship between self-efficacy, self-esteem and students' academic achievement, while reflective thinking had no correlation with self-efficacy, self-esteem and the students' academic achievement.

Table 1
A correlation matrix investigating the relationship between reflective thinking, self-efficacy, self-esteem and academic achievement

		Reflective- thinking	Self- efficacy	Self- esteem	Students' achievement
Reflective thinking	Pearson Correlation	1	.146	.007	.021
	Sig. (2- tailed)		.095	.938	.810
	N	132	132	132	132
Self-efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.146	1	.572**	.312**
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.095		.000	.000
	N	132	132	132	132

N		132	132	132	132
Table 1 (continued)					
		Reflective- thinking	Self- efficacy	Self- esteem	Students' achievement
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	.007	.572**	1	.364**
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.938	.000		.000
	N	132	132	132	132
Students' achievement	Pearson Correlation	.021	.312**	.364**	1
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.810	.000	.000	
	N	132	132	132	132

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The second research question sought to investigate between reflective thinking, self-efficacy, self-esteem, which one is the strongest predictor of Iranian EFL students' academic achievement. A multiple regression analysis was run (see Tables 2, 3 and 4). It should be noted that as there was no correlation between reflective thinking and students' achievement, reflective thinking was not included in the multiple regression analysis.

Table 2

Model summary rendering the multiple correlation coefficients, the adjusted and unadjusted R of self-efficacy and self-esteem, with academic achievement

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.386 ^a	.149	.129	1.1147

Regarding Table 2, the multiple correlation coefficient (R), employing the two predictors (i.e. self-esteem and general self-efficacy) simultaneously, is 0.39 ($R^2 = 0.14$) and the adjusted R^2 is 0.12. It shows that 12% of the variance in academic achievement of the participants can be predicted from the combination of the above-mentioned predictors.

ANOVA was also run to ascertain whether the combination of the predictors (self-esteem and general self-efficacy) significantly predicated the Iranian EFL students' academic achievement.

Table 3

ANOVA for the prediction of the academic achievement of the Iranian EFL students by the combination self-esteem and self-efficacy

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	27.78	2	9.26	7.45	.000 ^a
Residual	159.06	128	1.24		
Total	186.85	131			

As shown in Table 3, the combination of self-esteem and self-efficacy predicated academic achievement of the Iranian EFL students, $F(2, 128) = 7.45$, $p = .000 < .05$.

Table 4

Multiple regressions for the predictive power of general self-efficacy and self-esteem

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	14.44	.79		18.14	.000
Self-efficacy	.37	.24	.15	1.53	.128
Self-esteem	.72	.26	.27	2.76	.006

Concerning Table 4, between general self-efficacy and self-esteem, the latter was a stronger predictor of academic achievement of the Iranian EFL students, ($\beta = .27$, $t = 2.76$, $p = .000 < .05$).

The third research question investigated the possible relationship between different components of reflective thinking and academic achievement.

Table 5

A correlation matrix investigating the relationship between different components of reflective thinking and academic achievement

		Academic achievement	HA	U	R	CR
Academic achievement	Pearson Correlation	1	-.072	.098	.142	-.042
	Sig. (2- tailed)		.414	.265	.105	.634
	N	132	132	132	132	132
HA	Pearson Correlation	-.072	1	.055	.071	.201*
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.414		.531	.420	.021
	N	132	132	132	132	132
U	Pearson Correlation	.098	.055	1	.548**	.544**
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.265	.531		.000	.000
	N	132	132	132	132	132
R	Pearson Correlation	.142	.071	.548**	1	.437**
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.105	.420	.000		.000
	N	132	132	132	132	132
CR	Pearson Correlation	-.042	.201*	.544**	.437**	1
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.634	.021	.000	.000	
	N	132	132	132	132	132

Note: HA=habitual action, U=understanding, R=reflection, CR=critical reflection

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As Table 5 displays, there was no correlation between different components of reflective thinking and academic achievement of the Iranian EFL students.

Discussion

The current study was conducted to investigate the relationship between reflective thinking, general self-efficacy, self-esteem and academic achievement of Iranian EFL students. To our surprise, part of the findings revealed that there was no significant relationship between reflective thinking and academic achievement of Iranian EFL students. The findings of this part of the study were at odds with those of Soodmand Afshar and Hamzavi's (2014) and Ghanizadeh's (2016). It should be noted that Soodmand Afshar and Hamzavi's study only focused on the relationship between listening skills and reflective thinking, which means the relationship between only one language skill rather than general academic achievement and reflective thinking was taken into account. Therefore, caution should be exercised when the findings of the present study are compared with those of Soodmand Afshar and Hamzavi's (2014) and Ghanizadeh's (2016). It seems further research is needed to illuminate the interplay between the two variables. However, the findings can be explained by the premise that as in Iran education system grammar translation method (GTM) is still being practiced (Karimi & Richards, 2015), students may not be nurtured as reflective thinkers. Griffith and Frieden (2000) asserted that an education system which encourages memorization cannot develop reflective thinking in students. Moreover, in the Iranian education system, teachers are the authority and students are expected to be submissive (Abednia & Izadinia, 2013); therefore, there are little opportunity for students to develop their reflective thinking. Griffith and Frieden (2000) believe that teachers can encourage reflective thinking through Socratic questioning, journal writing, and stimulated recall protocol

In addition, reflective thinking had no significant relationship with self-efficacy and self-esteem. To the best of researchers' knowledge, no study has addressed the relationship between these variables to date; therefore, further research is needed to highlight this issue.

A significant relationship was observed between general self-efficacy and academic achievement. The findings of this part of the study were in harmony with those of Tenaw's (2013), Shkullaku's (2013), de Fátima Goulão's (2014). This capitalizes the significant contribution of self-efficacy to academic achievement. Teachers can refer to the sources of self-efficacy

(i.e. performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal) proposed by Bandura (1977) to help students develop their self-efficacy with the aim of enhancing their academic achievement.

The results demonstrated that there was also a significant relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement of Iranian EFL students. The findings of the current study are in line with those of Watkins and Astilla's (1980) and Román, Cuestas and Fenollar's (2008). It seems the worthiness that students attribute to themselves can be of paramount importance. However, some scholars in the field (e.g. Baumeister et al, 2003; Kohn, 1994) posit that it is students' academic achievement contributing to their high self-esteem rather than the other way around. That is, the more successful they are, the higher self-esteem they possess. This issue can be scrutinized more closely in the Iranian context to ascertain which contributes to which.

The results further revealed that there was a positive significant relationship between self-efficacy and self-esteem. The findings of the study substantiated those of Bahmani Fard (2013). According to Brooks and Noy (2010), self-efficacy and self-esteem are necessary for reaching career and personal goals and their significance in individuals' success are unquestionable.

The findings also indicated that between self-efficacy and self-esteem, the later was a stronger predictor of Iranian EFL students' success; therefore, self-esteem can be regarded an asset for Iranian EFL students. However, no significant correlation was observed between different components of reflective thinking and academic achievement of Iranian EFL students.

Conclusions and Implications

The findings of the study showed that while there was a relationship between self-efficacy, self-esteem and academic achievement of Iranian EFL students, reflective thinking had no relationship with other variables of the study. This can encourage teachers to exert further emphasis on self-efficacy and self-esteem of Iranian EFL students. More specifically, self-esteem was an asset for Iranian EFL students as it was the strongest predictor of Iranian EFL students. Furthermore, it seems reflective thinking was of no paramount importance when it came to its relationship with self-

efficacy, self-esteem, and academic achievement of Iranian EFL students. This can suggest that education system of the country need to turn the spotlight on reflective thinking, and teacher training programs and teachers need to give due attention to this notion.

Limitations and suggestions for further research

Qualitative data collection could have added to the depth and breadth of the findings. That is, the reason behind no relationship between reflective thinking and academic achievement may be illuminated through qualitative data collection. Therefore, future researchers are suggested to employ both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to investigate factors which can contribute to the high self-efficacy, self-esteem and reflective thinking of Iranian EFL students. More importantly, future researchers may need to investigate teachers' understanding of reflective thinking so that they can have a better understanding of the teachers' points of view on the notion of reflective thinking in a given education system, and they can also explore possible factors impeding reflective thinking in the Iranian EFL students. Moreover, the findings suggest that researchers may need to conduct further research on the relationship between reflective thinking and the variables of the current study to come up with further comprehensive findings.

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Understanding Children in Foster Care: Identifying and Addressing What Children Learn from Maltreatment

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Review

Kelly, W. (2017). *Understanding children in foster care: Identifying and addressing what children learn from maltreatment*. Wellington: Palgrave MacMillan.

Children in the protection system is one of the most vulnerable groups in society. These children have typically experienced maltreatment, parental substance abuse or mental health issues, poverty and separation from their families. Although child protection policies are different in each country (in the UK and USA family care is more frequent, but in Spain still prevails residential care), children in care have been usually exposed to several risk factors, including traumatic experiences, disruption of attachment bonds and lack of expectable environments in which the child interacts with others and has sufficient stimulation of the senses.

In the first half of the book, Wendy Kelly provides context in a theoretical discourse on the psychological and attachment difficulties for children in care, including a discussion of maltreatment and foster care. She presents a very complete review focused on the mental health problems that children in care frequently present, but also attachment disturbances and abnormalities in brain functioning. A relevant factor she points out is that children's mental health problems are related to the length of time they spend in the adverse environment, as well as the extent of the maltreatment. This is an important information in order to establish policies to remove children from abusive and neglectful homes.

With a clear style, Kelly states the behavioural difficulties and barriers that children with complex experiences of maltreatment and trauma can present in their new settlement, showing resistant and unpredictable behaviour towards their new caregivers. She emphasizes in different sections of the book how important is to maintain the vision of the uniqueness of

every child's experiences, keeping in mind how their early life adversities have impacted their internal working models of attachment and their current behaviour. Foster care families provide a stable and safe environment for these children, building a supportive and nurturing relationship with the child that is vital to the child's recovery from maltreatment.

In the second part of this book, Kelly introduces the Relational Learning Framework (RLF), an assessment tool derived from her clinical experience to help caregivers to understand and respond empathically to the challenging behaviour presented by these children. RLF assists foster parents, social workers and mental health clinicians to examine what children who have experienced abuse and neglect learn from these experiences about relationships. This tool, grounded in attachment theory, moves the focus from behaviour problems and conflict to the child's perspective, considering the child's current internal working model of relationships to show them another model of how people can be together and how a family works.

The RLF process is based in five steps: review of the child's history and culture, problems and strengths, view of self, view of the others and the world, and what the child needs to learn from relationships. Steps three and four are a visual representation of the child's internal working model, derived from the two first steps; the final goal is design interventions to help parents to provide a secure base for the child's healing and recovery and changing the child's internal working model.

RLF is a method of case conceptualisation, which is not usually subject to empirical study. However, two pilot studies were conducted by the author to evaluate the tool, framed in a psycho-education training program. The intervention showed significant positive effects for children's daily problem behaviour, parent daily stress, overall emotional and behaviour problems (Kelly, 2015), demonstrating promising results for this tool. As a methodology, Kelly uses a variety of practical cases to exemplify and train the RLF including extended case studies, a deeper insight into the complex information about child's experiences, behaviour management for foster parents and trouble shooting.

This book is a highly valuable source for clinical practitioners, social workers and foster parents who want to deepen the complex information about children in foster care to improve their relationships. Furthermore, it

will also provide insight into children in other protection measures, like residential and kinship care and adoption.

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