

# The Role of Religious Orientation, Psychological Well-Being, and Self-Esteem in Iranian EFL Learners' Language Achievement

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The present study aimed at finding the relationship of religious orientation (RO), psychological well-being (PWB), and self-esteem (SE) with language achievement (LA) among Iranian EFL learners. Furthermore, it investigated the predictability of dependent variable (LA) using all independent and predictor variables (RO, PWB, and SE). 126 senior and junior students majoring in English Translation and English Literature at Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman participated in the study. To obtain the required data, three questionnaires were utilized: Allport and Ross's (1967) Intrinsic-Extrinsic Religious Orientation Scale (IEROS) to measure extrinsic and intrinsic religious orientations, Short Measurement of Psychological Well-Being by Clarke, Marshall, Ryff, and Wheaton (2001) to measure psychological well-being, and finally, The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale by Rosenberg (1965) to assess self-esteem. Moreover, participants' GPAs in major courses were used as indicators of their language achievement. For analysis of data, Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Regression analysis were used. The results revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between IRO, PWB, and SE with LA and a significant negative relationship between ERO and LA. Additionally, all the independent variables together could predict LA and accounted for 95 percent of variability of students' GPA.

**Keywords:** Religious Orientation (RO); Extrinsic Religious Orientation (ERO); Intrinsic Religious Orientation (IRO); Psychological Well-Being (PWB); Self-Esteem (SE)

## Introduction

Increasing interest toward language learning has made the parameters determining language achievement more significant. If effective and successful language learning is to be achieved, one solution would be Stevick's (1980) claim about how successful language learning relies less on learning materials, methods, tasks and language study and more on what is within and between learners and teachers. Many factors, internal and external to the learners, could affect their performance. This sheds more light on the significance of parameters resulting in individual differences among learners. Rode et al. (2005) claimed that broader contextual and attitudinal variables might influence student's achievement. Scholars, including psychologists, have conducted many research studies to identify the factors associated with academic performance, among which religious orientation (RO), psychological well-being (PWB), and self-esteem (SE) have been found recognizably important (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2005; Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006; Steiner & Morris, 2001).

Religion has been reported to be effective in the daily functioning of the behavior (Shafranske, 1996) and it plays an important role in understanding a person's psychological makeup (Maltby & Lewis, 1996). Moreover, religion has been shown to influence human decisions, choices, and actions (Giddens, 2002) and to be significant in the develop-

ment of competence and achievement (Hathaway & Pargament, 1990). A study by Astin and Astin (2004) showed that religious factors affect academic performance in college. Jaynes (2002) also reported that religious internalization and schooling are positively effective in academic achievement and also contribute to how one behaves in school.

The well-being of college students has also been reported to be critical to their academic success. Those students with higher psychological well-being typically receive higher grades and are unlikely to experience academic failure (Andrews & Wilding, 2004; Daugherty & Lane, 1999; DeBerard, Speilmans, & Julka, 2004). Many studies have reported that university students' psychological wellbeing is of paramount importance (El Ansari & Stock, 2010; Mikołajczyk et al., 2008).

Self-esteem is perceived as a crucial factor in one's social and cognitive development and is regarded as a predictor of academic performance (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003; Berndt, 2002; Peterson & Barrett, 1987; Peterson & Steen, 2002; Pulkkinen, Nygren, & Kokko, 2002; Wigfield, Battle, Keller, & Eccles, 2002). Researchers such as Coopersmith (1967) and Reasoner (1982) believed that a very important trend in education has been shown to be a consideration of self-esteem. McCroskey, Daly, Richmond, and Falcione (1977) claim that both research and theory confirm that one's perceptions of self have a significant effect on "... attitudes,

behaviors, evaluations, and cognitive processes” (p. 269). They point out the important role that one’s self-concept plays in classroom research.

The importance of self-esteem can be viewed in regard to learning generally and language learning specifically. Brown (2000) claimed that learner’s belief in her/his ability to accomplish a task is central to all learning. Oxford and Ehrman (1995) also stated that learners’ positive/negative beliefs about themselves and their learning ability definitely contribute to their success/failure in learning.

Regarding the importance of self-esteem in the process of language learning specifically, Brown (1977) mentioned that a person with high self-esteem is able to act more freely and to be less reserved while learning a language. Such a person, because of his self strength, sees the indispensable mistakes in the process of learning not a threat to his identity and self.

### Religious Orientation

It was since the time of Freud when the religious concept has been presented in the realm of psychology but psychology of religion has been studied empirically only since the mid fifties. From then on, psychologists began to acknowledge the crucial role of religion in “historical, cultural, social and psychological realities that humans confront in their lives” (Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 1996: p. 2). Early works on religiosity viewed it as a unidimensional concept (Freud, 1907; James, 1902; Jung, 1952; Pratt, 1920) and the ideas about it were reached only by the retrospective observation of isolated and extreme individuals, and were not supported empirically.

But in the latter half of the twentieth century, the psychology of religion became a salient subject of study and developed by empirical evaluation. In all these studies religiosity as a multi-dimensional concept has its own dimensions and components (Hills, Francis, Argyle, & Jackson, 2004: pp. 62-63). Included here are the work of Fukuyama (1960) four dimensions, Lenski (1961) four dimensions, King (1967) ten dimensions, Allport’s intrinsic-extrinsic typology (Allport & Ross, 1967), and Glock’s (1972) five dimensional typology. Although some researchers such as Clayton and Gladden (1974) still argue against multi-dimensionality of religiosity, many others strongly support it (Faulkner & DeJong, 1966; Glock & Stark, 1965; King & Hunt, 1972a, 1972b, 1975; Lenski, 1961).

As mentioned before, Allport (1959) introduced two dimensions for religiosity. At first, Allport (1950) called them “immature” and “mature”, but later on he used the terms “extrinsic” and “intrinsic”, which are the focuses of the current study. To put the distinction in a nutshell, Allport and Ross (1967) stated that Extrinsic use their religion, while Intrinsic live their religion.

Extrinsic see religion as a source of “security and solace, sociability and distraction, status and self justification” (Rodriguez & Henderson, 2010: p. 85). For extrinsically oriented individuals, religion acts as a means to achieve some self-serving end.

In contrast, individuals with intrinsic religious orientation view their needs and wants as of less significance and make them compatible with their own religious beliefs and directions. Intrinsic’ find their master motive in religion (Rodriguez & Henderson, 2010: p. 85). For the intrinsically inclined, religion itself is the eventual end and guideline of life (Allport, 1966).

### Psychological Well-Being

Concept of well-being has long been under investigation since ancient Greece by philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle who attempted to define the essential constituents of positive human experience leading to the furtherance of pleasure and happiness. Aristotle, one of those philosophers, was the first one who mentioned two distinct dimensions of wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2001). In his view, well-being can be divided into two components; Hedonistic and Eudaimonic. Recently, hedonism is operationalized as subjective well-being (SWB), and eudaimonism as psychological well-being (PWB).

Keyes, Shmotkin, and Ryff (2002) elaborate on the distinction between SWB and PWB and state although both evaluate well-being, they highlight different characteristics of well-being. “SWB involves more global evaluations of affect and life quality, whereas PWB examines perceived thriving vis-à-vis the existential challenges of life” (Keyes et al., 2002: p. 1007). The second conceptualization of well-being is the focus of the current study. PWB pertains to a constructive and socially beneficial functioning which leads to personal growth.

In eudaimonism, well-being is a result of an endeavor for being perfect which is to fulfill one’s true potential (Ryff, 1995: p. 100). In other words, happiness or well-being is a product of full engagement and optimal performance in existential challenges of life (Keyes et al., 2002). Ryan and Deci (2001) state that eudaimonim well-being constitutes the realization of one’s daimon or true nature.

Ryff’s (1989b) psychological well-being model (PWB) was among the first to adopt the concept of *eudaimonia*. In his model, PWB includes six dimensions: Self-acceptance, Positive Relations with Others, Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life, and Personal Growth.

### Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is one of those factors internal to the learner and crucial to the learning process. It is viewed as the image one forms of himself or the way he perceives himself. One’s self-esteem is determined by evaluation of that self (either negatively or positively). Self-esteem refers to the way individuals assess their various capabilities and characteristics. Rubio (2007) describes self-esteem as “a psychological and social phenomenon” (p. 5) in which one assesses his/her competence and own self based on some principle. This evaluation may lead to various emotional states, and becomes growingly stable but still subject to change depending on personal conditions.

Rosenberg’s (1965) definition of self-esteem is the most broad and frequently cited one which described it as a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the self. Coopersmith (1967) described self esteem in this way:

By self-esteem we refer to the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself; it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy (pp. 4-5).

He added that self-esteem shows how a person judges his worthiness and what attitudes he has towards himself. Self-esteem as a subjective experience is conveyed by the individual to others through verbal and nonverbal behavior.

## Literature Review

### Religious Orientation and Language Achievement

Researchers have found that religiosity is positively correlated with language achievement. For example, Hathaway and Pargament (1990), using a largely middle-aged sample, point out the important role that religiosity plays in the development of competence and achievement. Researchers have found that religiosity is positively correlated with grade point average (Walker & Dixon, 2002; Zern, 1989). Many other studies confirm these findings (Abar, Carter, & Winsler, 2009; Brown, Ndubuisi, & Gary, 1990; Gary, 1990; Jeynes, 1999; Muller & Ellison, 2001; Trusty & Watts, 1999; Sikkink & Hernandez, 2003).

### Psychological Well-Being and Language Achievement

Concept of well-being has been reported as critical to academic success. Researches show that students with high sense of well-being receive better grades and are unlikely to drop out of college (Hysenbegasi, Hass, & Rowland, 2005; Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, & Perry, 2002).

While some claim that more proficient people experience well-being during their life (Bowling & Windsor, 2001; Saunders, 1996), many others show the exact opposite (e.g. Tsou & Liu, 2001). Recently, lots of studies have detected that proficiency has a small and positive partial effect on well-being (Chow, 2005; Easterlin, 2001; Rode et al., 2005; Steinberg & Darling, 1994).

### Self-Esteem and Language Achievement

A considerable amount of research has studied the role of self-esteem in the process of language learning and it has been found to be related to academic performance (Beane & Lipka, 1984; Chapman, 1988; Hansford & Hattie, 1982; Harter, 1983; Marsh, Byrne, & Shavelson, 1988; Wylie, 1979). Many studies show that Self-esteem influences achievement; and a positive correlation is found (Byrne, 1984; Covington, 1989; Klein & Keller, 1990; Solley & Stagner, 1956). Oxford and Ehrman (1995) asserted that learner's positive beliefs about himself and his learning ability would definitely contribute to learning success.

Conversely, other studies view self-esteem as the result of achievement (Calysn, 1971; Hoge, Smit, & Crist 1995; Ross & Broh, 2000; Schmidt & Padilla, 2003). Notably, Helmke and Van Aken (1995) acknowledge that academic achievement is more a cause of self-esteem than its outcome.

However, some researchers report a negative or no correlation (Mecca, Smelser, & Vasconcellos, 1989). Baumeister et al. (2003) concluded that self-esteem has no relationship with subsequent achievement. Additionally, Crocker and Luhtanen (2003) reported that self-esteem cannot be a reliable predictor of academic achievement among college students.

## Methodology

### Participants

The participants of this study were 126 male and female junior and senior students majoring in English Literature and English Translation at Shahid Bahonar university of Kerman. Random sampling was employed in the present study as in this

procedure "all members of the population have an equal and independent chance of being included in the sample" (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1972: p. 162).

### Instruments

In order to obtain data on the variables, three questionnaires were administered:

- 1) Intrinsic-Extrinsic Religious Orientation Scale (IEROS, Allport & Ross, 1967).
- 2) Short Measurement of Psychological Well-Being (Clarke et al., 2001).
- 3) The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965).

### Intrinsic-Extrinsic Religious Orientation Scale (IEROS, Allport & Ross, 1967)

Intrinsic-Extrinsic Religious Orientation Scale was developed by Allport and Ross (1967). There are two distinctive subscales in this questionnaire, namely extrinsic orientation and intrinsic orientation. This instrument consists of 20 items and based on its original construction, nine items are related to intrinsic and 11 items represent the extrinsic subscale. IEROS is based on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). The separate summation of scale items yields score ranges of 11 - 55 and 9 - 45 for the extrinsic and intrinsic subscales, respectively.

The Religious Orientation Scale has demonstrated good psychometric properties, with high internal consistency for both subscales (Hill & Hood, 1999). Hill and Hood (1999) noted that the intrinsic subscale has been found to be more internally consistent than the extrinsic, with  $\alpha > 0.80$  and  $\alpha > 0.70$ , respectively. Validity and reliability in this self-report scale were acceptable by Taylor and Mac Donald (1999).

### Short Measurement of Psychological Well-Being (Clarke et al., 2001)

PWB was operationalized with a short version (18 items, 3 for each construct) of Ryff's (1989a) Measure of Psychological Well-being. Items are rated on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) Likert scale. The scale is presently regarded as the best objective measure of psychological well-being (Conway & Macleod, 2002) and has received extensive cross-cultural validation (Staudinger, Baltes, & Fleeson, 1999).

The combined scores can also provide an overall well-being total. Higher values for the whole scale correspond to higher levels of well-being, the values ranging between 18 and 126. Its validity and reliability were extensively measured and accepted in a study by Sirigatti et al. (2009).

### The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES, Rosenberg, 1965)

Self-esteem was assessed by the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), which is a 10-item self-report measure of global self-esteem thereby providing good indication of general rather than specific views of the self (Baumeister et al., 2003). Each item is answered on a 4-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). The scores can range from 10 (low level of self-esteem) to 40 (high level of self-esteem). The scale consists of five positively-worded and five negatively-worded items.

The RSES has good levels of reliability and validity (Kong & You, 2011; Zhao, Kong, & Wang, 2012). The reliability index of the scale is  $\alpha = 0.79$ . This scale has been used in various populations and has excellent reliability and validity (Baumeister et al., 2003; Corcoran & Fischer, 1987). It “has received more psychometric analysis and empirical validation than any other self-esteem measure” (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001: p. 151).

Additionally, In order to evaluate the participants’ language achievement, their GPAs were used based on their major courses, not counting the general courses. Rolfhus and Ackerman (1999) have pointed out that grades represent a better predictor of knowledge acquisition than any ability test. Therefore, they should be considered a variable and valid measure of potential achievement.

## Procedure

The present study was carried out during the class time in the second semester of the academic year (2012). The questionnaires for the measurement of RO, PWB, and SE were given to the subjects, simultaneously. During the completion process of the questionnaires, the researcher was present physically to monitor and also to provide the respondents with accompanying instructions whenever needed. Respondents were informed that the information they gave would be kept confidential and be used for research purposes only.

Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was used to seek any meaningful relations between the independent variables and dependent variable. Moreover, Regression Analysis was used to measure the predictability of LA using ERO, IRO, PWB, and SE.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

The descriptive statistics of the variables of the study, namely extrinsic and intrinsic orientations, psychological well-being, self-esteem, and language achievement (GPA) have been presented in **Table 1**.

In order to find any possible relationship between each of independent variables (ERO, IRO, PWB, and SE) and the dependent variable (GPA), Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was conducted (**Table 2**).

According to **Table 2**, there is a significant negative relationship between ERO and LA ( $r = -.619$ ). Concerning the relationship between IRO and GPA, a significant positive relationship was found ( $r = .774$ ). There is also a significant positive relationship between PWB and GPA ( $r = .934$ ). Finally,

**Table 1.**  
The descriptive statistics of the variables.

	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD
ERO	126	21	22	43	34.19	7.42
IRO	126	18	12	40	23.45	10.21
PWB	126	55	55	110	84.74	20.80
SE	126	23	14	37	24.63	8.76
GPA	126	6.02	13	19.02	16.56	2.13

**Table 2.**  
Correlations of the dependent variables and language achievement.

	ERO	IRO	PWB	SE
	GPA			
Pearson Correlation	-.619**	.774**	.934**	.962**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	126	126	126	126

Note: \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

concerning SE and GPA, a significant positive relationship was found ( $r = .962$ ).

In order to answer the second research question, concerning the predictability of GPA by using predictor variables (ERO, IRO, PWB, and SE), Regression Analysis was used.

The regression variance analysis of GPA in relation with predictor variables (**Table 3**) showed that  $R^2 = .959$  ( $R^2$  is the common variance between GPA and independent variables) and  $P = .000$ . Since  $R^2 > 0$  and  $P < .05$ , the Multiple Linear Regression is significant. The R-squared is .959, meaning that approximately 95% of the variability of GPA is accounted for by all other variables.

With regard to the linear relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable, the regression coefficient for each variable of ERO, IRO, PWB, and SE has been presented in **Table 3**. The coefficients for each of the variables indicates the amount of change one could expect in GPA given a one-unit change in the value of that variable, given that all other variables in the model are held constant. For example, considering the variable SE, we would expect a decrease of .282 in the GPA score for every one unit increase in SE, assuming that all other variables in the model are held constant.

In order to compare the strength of coefficient of one variable to the coefficient for another variable, we can refer to the column of Beta coefficients, also known as standardized regression coefficients. The beta coefficients are used to compare the relative strength of the various predictors. In a descending order, SE ( $\beta = .282$ ), IRO ( $\beta = -.108$ ), ERO ( $\beta = .052$ ), and PWB ( $\beta = .018$ ) have the largest to the smallest Beta coefficients.

## Discussion

The aim of the present study was to examine the relationship of extrinsic and intrinsic religious orientation, psychological well-being, and self-esteem with language achievement among EFL learners in Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman.

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients suggest that there are a negative relationship between ERO and LA and a positive significant relationship between IRO and LA. This can be explained by the fact that Intrinsic may benefit from experiencing less academic stress and better well-being while attending college. So they can perform better academically in comparison with extrinsic counterparts. Along the same way, Jaynes (2003) found that urban high school students reporting high religiosity achieved higher performance on standardized academic measures. This is in line with findings by Lehrer (1999), Regenerus and Elder (2003), and Loury (2004).

Moreover, a positive significant relationship between PWB

**Table 3.**  
Regression analysis for GPA using each of the predictor variables.

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	F	P	R	R <sup>2</sup>
	B	Std. Error							
Constant	12.017	.926	-	12.974	.000				
ERO	-.041	.021	-.142	-1.960	.052				
IRO	-.108	.020	-.515	-5.425	.000	716.059	.000	.980	.959
PWB	.018	.007	.170	2.717	.008				
SE	.282	.019	1.156	14.628	.000				

and LA was found. Findings by Gilman and Huebner (2006), Quinn and Duckworth (2007), Yasin and Dzulkifli (2009), and Yasin and Dzulkifli (2009) support the importance of psychological well-being in academic achievement.

Concerning the relationship between SE and LA, a positive relationship was found. Many studies confirm this finding (Aryana, 2010; Heyde, 1979; Oxford & Ehrman, 1993). Rastegar (2002, 2003) in two separate studies on Iranian EFL students found a substantial relationship between global or trait self-esteem and FL achievement.

The Multiple Regression also suggested that ERO, IRO, PWB, and SE account for unique variance in higher GPA. On the whole, all the independent together variables explained 95 percent of variability of students' GPA.

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