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Testing and comparing the causal relationship between spirituality and social skills with adjustment and burnout mediated by psychological capital in male and female students

Azam Manoochehri, Nasser Behroozi *, Manijeh Shehni Yeylagh, Gholamhosein Maktabi

Department of Educational Psychology, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between spirituality and social skills with adjustment and academic burnout mediated by psychological capital in undergraduate male and female students. The study population was undergraduate male and female students. For this purpose, 254 female students and 253 male students were selected by multi-stage random sampling. Data was gathered by spirituality, social skills, academic adjustment, academic burnout, and psychological capital scales. The results showed in both groups of girls and boys, spirituality and social skills predict psychological capital. Psychological capital also predicts academic burnout and academic adjustment. In the case of the differences between the two groups, there was a significant difference between the groups just in the relationship between spirituality and psychological capital.

1. Introduction

Psychologists have focused on the dysfunctional performance for many years, and the positive attributes and abilities have been underestimated. The positive psychology movement rather than focusing on the disorders and its treatment, try to boost capabilities and improve the quality of life in healthy people. The effects of this movement can be seen in academic and applied research (Luthans et al., 2006). Some studies focused on the relationship between psychological capital (as the best and most positive sign of positive behavior in organizational behavior) with variables such as psychological well-being (Datu and Valdez, 2016; Nielsen et al., 2017), academic burnout (Aliyev and Karakus, 2015) and academic adjustment (Liu et al., 2015).

Luthans et al. (2007) defined psychological capital as a positive mental state and a realistic and flexible approach to life, which consists of four structures includes hope (the person's ability to goal setting, imagine the paths necessary to achieve goals, and have the necessary motivation to achieve those goals), Optimism (positive attributions and a way in which people expect positive results), resiliency (the person's capacity to respond and flourish in positive and negative stress conditions) and self-efficacy (one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task), Each of these concepts is considered as a positive psychological capacity, depend on state and ability to grow and related to significant functional outputs (Youssef-Morgan and Luthans, 2015).

The psychological capital plays an important role in promoting psychological well-being in physical, psychological and social aspects (Koller and Hicks, 2016) and as a kind of deep mental ability can help students to have a positive approach to learning and ultimately to achieve academic achievement (Vanno et al., 2014).

Students –during academic life- are faced with many new challenges such as achieving greater autonomy, adapting to a relatively different environment than high school, managing financial issues, finding new friends, adapting to homework assignments, and new tasks and roles (Rahat and İlhan, 2016), which turned this period into a challenging period. The student's inability to adapt to the university can be a source of many psychological problems for him. This set of changes is considered to be a severe and serious stress for some, so that 60% of students leave the university in one or two years without completing the course (Friedlander et al., 2007).

One of the factors influencing psychological capital is spirituality. Tacey (2004) has seen spirituality as a supreme sense that increases the passion, tenderness and tendency of man to justice

* Corresponding Author.
Email Address: behroozyn@yahoo.com (N. Behroozi)
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and connects man with himself and the nature. Participating in spiritual activities, or at least believing in the meaningfulness of life, can increase the likelihood of optimism and positive psychological states in individuals, and enhance hope for the future (Avey et al., 2010). In various researches, the relationship between spirituality and psychological capital has been investigated in the nurses (Baldacchino, 2011; Koren and Papamiditriou, 2013).

Another factor influencing psychological capital is social skills. Social skills are defined as the skills required meeting social needs, as well as maintaining satisfactory interpersonal relationships and ultimately enhancing psychological capital (Gresham et al., 2006; Luthans et al., 2008).

Academic adjustment is a multidimensional and broad concept that is not limited to the success or academic performance of students, but it also refers to their affections, attitudes, relationships, and commitment in a school or university environment (Liu et al., 2015). Students with higher academic adjustment have a positive attitude toward the academic goals, they are well-positioned with the roles and duties that are placed on the university as a social institution, they are struggling to complete their academic needs, have a positive attitude are related to the educational environment and are well suited to solving their educational problems. One of the important reasons for students' success or failure in academic adjustment is their psychological capital. Students who are more hopeful, more optimistic and more resilience have a higher self-efficacy and have better ability to adapt to university life. In fact, psychological capital is a positive source of coping with the stressful events of daily life and positively affects students' academic adjustment. The role of this factor has been confirmed as a protective factor for academic adjustment (Liu et al., 2015).

One of the constructs that are affected by psychological capital is academic burnout. Research shows that academic burnout in educational settings is characterized by features such as feeling exhausted (fatigued), having a pessimistic and negative affect about homework (lack of interest), and lack of competence (low efficiency) (Zhang et al., 2007). Students are engaged in homework and are prone to exhaustion. Students with severe emotional fatigue may be irritable and frustrated and have lower academic performance (Yang, 2004). Academic burnout is one of the problems of the educational system at all levels of education, which causes the loss of human resources and costs. Burnout, in addition to the short term negative effects has other long-term effects. Students who are burned during education are less likely to dominate their job tasks in the future and tend to leave more jobs after employment (Rudman and Gustavsson, 2012). Psychological capital is one of the psychological features that appear to increase individuals' ability to cope with stress and exhaustion. Aliyev and Karakus (2015) conducted a study to investigate the effect of psychological capital and negative emotions on violent tendencies of high school students. The results showed that there is a significant relationship between students' psychological capital and academic burnout.

There is also a contradiction in the difference between the academic burnout and the psychological capital of women and men. In a research aimed at examining the effect of gender on the psychological capital and personal well-being of male and female teachers, Singh and Garg (2014) showed that there is a significant difference between psychological capital and the well-being of male and female teachers. That is, in both variables, female teachers were at a higher level.

This research was conducted to examine the relationship between spirituality and social skills with academic adjustment and academic burnout mediated by psychological capital in male and female students. The conceptual model is shown in Fig. 1.

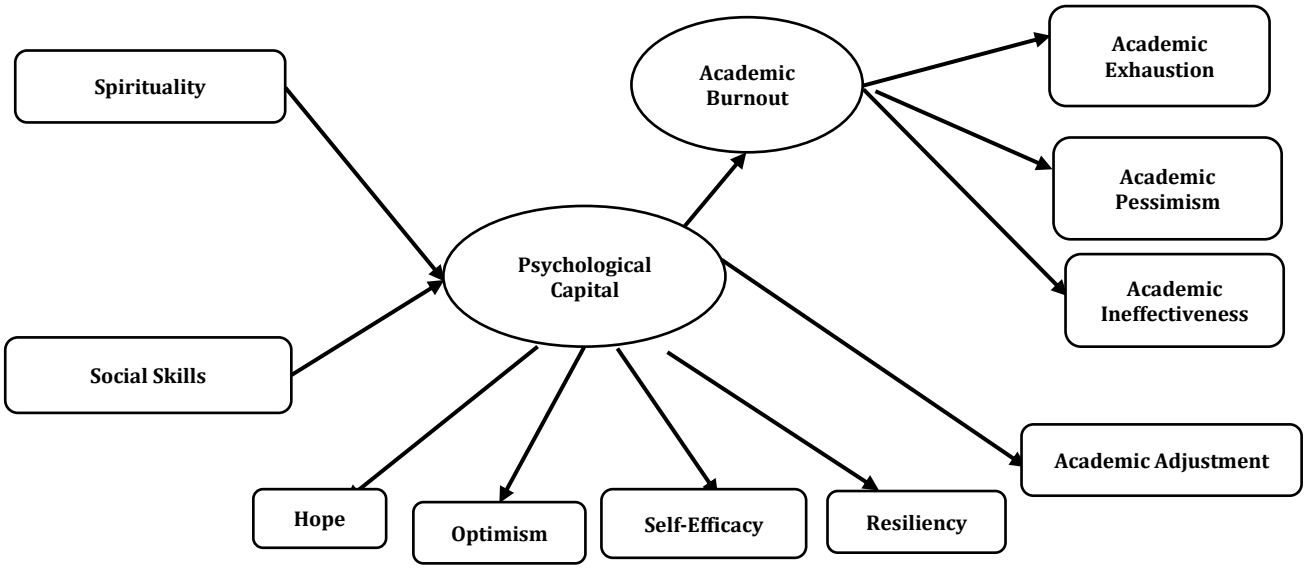

Fig. 1: Causal relationship between spirituality and social skills with adjustment and burnout mediated by psychological capital

2. Methodology

The method of this research is correlational. The statistical population of this study included all male and female students of Shahid Chamran University of Ahwaz, Ahwaz, Iran. The sample was selected by multi-stage random sampling. A total of 540 students (268 girls and 272 boys) were randomly selected and responded to the questionnaires. Finally, by deleting incomplete and misleading questionnaires, the final sample included 507 students (254 girls, 253 boys).

2.1. Measuring tools

2.1.1. Psychological capital questionnaire

To measure psychological capital, psychological capital questionnaire (Lorenz et al., 2016) has been used that measures hope, optimism, resiliency and self-efficacy subscales. This scale contains 12 items. Lorenz et al. (2016) confirmed the validity of it by using factor analysis. In this study, in order to determine the validity this questionnaire, the confirmatory factor analysis method was used and its validity was confirmed. The reliability coefficients of the subscales - hope, optimism, resilience and self-efficacy - were 0.71, 0.75, 0.62, and 0.73 respectively. The reliability coefficient of whole scale was 0.87.

2.1.2. The daily spirituality questionnaire

This scale was designed to measure spiritual and religious experiences of individuals' personal lives in confronting various challenges. This scale is a self-reporting tool with 16 items. Validity and reliability of this tool have been confirmed in various studies (Underwood, 2002). In this study, to validate the structure of the daily spiritual experience questionnaire, the confirmatory factor analysis method was used and its factor structure confirmed. The reliability coefficient of this questionnaire in this study was 0.95.

2.1.3. Social skills questionnaire

Kikuchi's Scale of Social Skills developed based on the list of social skills of youth. This scale has 18 items. According to Takahashi et al. (2013), this scale has one-factor model with good test-retest reliability. In the present study, to validate the structure of the social skills questionnaire, the confirmatory factor analysis method was used and its factor structure confirmed. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire in this study was 0.91.

2.1.4. Academic burnout questionnaire

Burnout Inventory includes three components of academic burnout, namely, academic exhaustion, pessimism, and academic ineffectiveness. The questionnaire has 15 items. The reliability of the questionnaire subscales has been reported by its creators of 0.70, 0.82 and 0.75 respectively (Bresó et al., 2007). In the present study, to determine the validity of this questionnaire, the confirmatory factor analysis method was used and its factor structure confirmed. The reliability coefficient of this questionnaire subscales (academic exhaustion, pessimism, and academic ineffectiveness) in this study was 0.77, 0.81, 0.78 and 0.84 for the total scale, respectively.

2.1.5. Academic adjustment questionnaire

The University adjustment inventory is a self-reporting tool developed by Baker and Siryk (1989) with 67 items and 4 subscales of academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional compatibility and attachment to the institution / university. In the present study, the academic adjustment subscale was used. Lanthier and Windham (2004) in their study obtained internal stability coefficients for the subscales between 0.86-0.96. In this study, to determine the validity of this scale, the confirmatory factor analysis method was used and its factor structure was confirmed. The reliability coefficient of this questionnaire in the present study was 0.92.

3. Results

The path analysis was used to test the proposed model. The correlation coefficients showed that all the research variables have a significant correlation with each other. Table 1 presents descriptive findings related to the research variables.

In Fig. 2, the research model has been shown. The coefficients in parentheses are related to female students, and the numbers out of parentheses, are coefficients related to male students.

Results related to indirect coefficients show that all of them in male and female students were significant. Comparing the girls and boys groups showed there was just a significant difference between the two groups in spiritual to psychological capital path. Table 3 shows the comparative standard coefficients and the critical ratio in multi-group comparisons.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between spirituality and social skills with adaptability and academic burnout mediated by psychological capital, as well as comparing these relationships in male and female students. The findings showed that the spirituality affects psychological capital. This finding of this study is related to studies such as Mohammadi et al. (2015) and Golparvar (2014). In explaining this finding, it can be said that spirituality can enhance the psychological capital and increase hope, optimism,

self-efficacy and resilience by creating a sense of bond with the universe and a broad perspective on life. In this regard, Glover-Graf et al. (2007) emphasized the "meaningfulness of life" effect on resilience and coping to problems. This means that increasing the level of spirituality in life not only helps one to overcome problems, but also can lead to life satisfaction. The greater the meaningfulness of life in students, the more hope and happiness will follow, and the factors mentioned will be effective in increasing mental health in students.

Table 1: Descriptive findings for research variables

Variable	Gender	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Spirituality	Girl	66.85	13.18	32	94
	Boy	64.01	13.23	31	94
	Total	65.43	13.27	31	94
Social Skills	Girl	70.54	10.47	44	90
	Boy	69.17	11.16	43	89
	Total	69.86	10.83	43	90
Psychological Capital	Girl	50.85	7.88	31	68
	Boy	50.85	7.62	31	69
	Total	50.85	7.74	31	69
Hope	Girl	11.92	2.72	5	18
	Boy	11.88	2.55	5	18
	Total	11.90	2.63	5	18
Optimism	Girl	13.42	2.82	6	18
	Boy	13.35	2.68	6	18
	Total	13.38	2.75	6	18
Self-Efficacy	Girl	12.87	2.23	7	18
	Boy	12.77	2.28	7	18
	Total	12.82	2.25	7	18
Resiliency	Girl	12.66	2.26	7	18
	Boy	12.87	2.22	7	18
	Total	12.76	2.24	7	18
Academic Burnout	Girl	46.50	8.98	21	71
	Boy	49.76	10.89	21	73
	Total	48.12	10.10	21	73
Academic Exhaustion	Girl	14.81	4.12	5	25
	Boy	16.13	4.63	5	25
	Total	15.47	4.43	5	25
Academic Pessimism	Girl	11.51	3.86	4	20
	Boy	12.98	4.01	4	20
	Total	12.24	4	4	20
Academic Ineffectiveness	Girl	20.16	4.52	8	29
	Boy	20.64	4.73	7	30
	Total	20.40	4.63	7	30
Academic Adjustment	Girl	90.89	14.09	57	118
	Boy	88.05	12.42	60	122
	Total	89.48	13.35	57	122

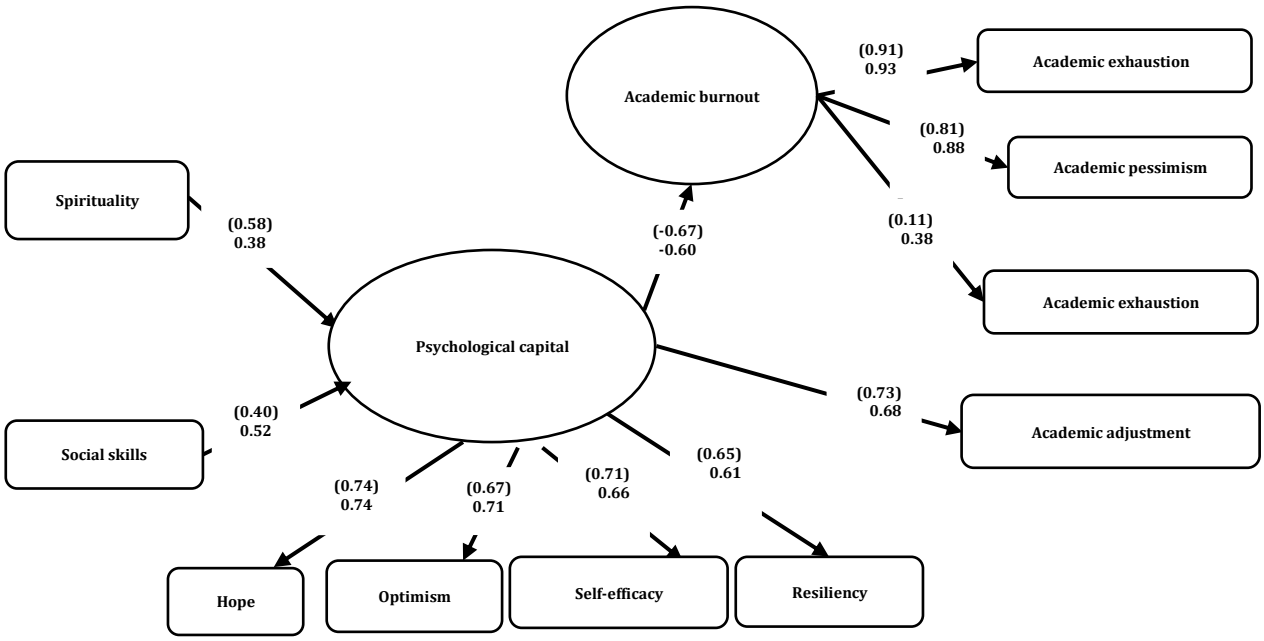

Fig. 2: Analyzed model

In the case of social skills and psychological capital relationship, the findings show that students' social skills directly affect their psychological capital. This finding of this study is related to studies such as

Bayrami and Movahedi (2015). This finding is also related to studies that examine the relationship or the effect of social capital on the components of psychological capital, such as hope (Cotton Bronk et al., 2009). In explaining this finding, it can be said that all human beings when experience the problems and troubles need to support on behalf of their friends and to feel safe. A person who has a high self-efficacy establishes a better relationship with others and mutually supports them and feels more efficient. On the other hand, increasing communication, the ability to create and maintain a relationship are important factors in increasing resilience. The resilient person has more social contact with others and when he is in conversation with his friends and relatives, he somehow confide with him, he is expecting to receive support and, when he receives this support, becomes more consistent and better suited to situations Tensor collides. The lack of social bonding and social networking through the strengthening of negative psychological states leads to mental illness and decreases in psychological capital.

Table 2: Fitting indicators of the proposed model in male and female students

Fitting indicators	CMIN	Sig.	df	CMIN/DF	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA
Female	89.37	0.001	33	2.70	0.94	0.90	0.91	0.94	0.94	0.92	0.08
Male	58.34	0.004	33	1.76	0.95	0.93	0.94	0.97	0.97	0.96	0.05

Table 3: Comparison matrix of standard coefficients of similar paths in model of male and female students

Path	Gender	Standard coefficients	critical ratio
Spiritual-Psychological Capital	Female	0.58	-2.89*
	Male	0.38	
Social Skills- Psychological Capital	Female	0.40	1.04
	Male	0.52	
Academic Burnout- Psychological Capital	Female	-0.55	0.77
	Male	-0.60	
Psychological Capital-Academic Adjustment	Female	0.73	-1.26
	Male	0.68	

*p < 0.05

The results showed that psychological capital directly affects academic burnout. This finding of this study is related to studies such as Aliyev and Karakus (2015). This finding can be explained by Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 2002). According to this theory, the lack of sufficient psychological resources and resources for academic tasks can lead to exhaustion. In other words, when there are many academic tasks and students do not have enough resources to carry out, they experience a high level of tension and decreases their ability and motivation to accomplish these tasks and assignments. In this case, students will protect themselves by equipping their positive resources (such as psychological capital) as a coping strategy (according to Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory) (Bitmiş and Ergeneli, 2015).

The results showed that psychological capital directly affects academic adjustment. This finding of this study is related to studies such as Liu et al. (2015). People with higher psychological capital can easily adapt to the university environment. In fact, psychological capital is a positive source of coping with the stressful events of daily life and positively affects students' academic adjustment (Liu et al., 2015). Students with higher psychological capital perceive the university environment as a positive environment that contributes to their overall well-being. For example, despite to experience a stressful environment, an optimistic, hopeful, effective and resilient person believes that he has enough resources to prevent distress and experience weakening neurologic pressure (Riolli et al., 2012).

In addition, the findings showed that the spirituality variable indirectly affects the academic burnout through psychological capital. There are not similar researches in this field. In explaining this finding it can be said that if the belief in God and spirituality in the students is strong and the ability to deal with problems and love and interest in life and study increase, their academic burnout also decreases. Whatever the spirituality of a person increases, hope, optimism, self-efficacy, and the power of his coping to the problems increase, and consequently, academic burnout decreases.

The findings of this study showed that social skills indirectly affect the academic burnout through psychological capital. Findings show that on one hand, increasing social skills can lead to increase hope (Cotton Bronk et al., 2009) and resiliency (Seevers and Jones-Blank, 2008) and on the other hand, developing and increasing personal resources (psychological capital) can be useful for decreasing burnout and increasing adjustment (Herbert, 2011). It can be argued that people who have positive expectations and positive psychological capital and keep their confidence in the future, even when faced with distress and trouble, do not see the activities and tasks boring and do not feel exhausted. In general, they believe that events are intrinsically good, so that the majority of stressful situations and conditions are finally resolved at the end, which leads to less stress and exhaustion (Sabaitytė, 2014).

The findings showed that the spirituality indirectly affects academic adjustment through psychological capital. There are not similar researches in this field, but these findings can be concluded from some researches. In explaining this finding, it can be said that spirituality (which includes beliefs and behaviors) affects all aspects of life, has a profound impact on the way of thinking about problems, and thus coping with problems and

improving individual adjustment. Therefore, the high level of spirituality in students makes it possible to maintain their self-esteem, keep their hopes, and, by trusting in God and optimism, they can find meaning in the suffering and the problem they are involved in, and successfully solve it and achieve adjustment.

The results also showed that the social skills indirectly affect academic adjustment through psychological capital. In explaining this finding, it can be said that since social needs are variable and dependent on their particular social context, it is necessary for individuals to create a mechanism for socially rational responses in order to adapt themselves to situational needs. Failure to change behavior in relation to changing needs usually results in impaired functioning. Therefore, poor social skills lead to the lack of acceptance of the individual by others and adjustment, but learning and enhancing social skills increases the psychological capital and, consequently, increases the adaptability of individuals.

Finally, results showed differences between two groups were significant in multi-group comparisons just in the path of spirituality - psychological capital. In explaining these results, it can be said that the High spirituality in female students causes them to feel in touch with and support God and their friends. Therefore, a feeling of support from God increases the sense of empowerment and enhances self-efficacy, optimism and positive orientation in life.

This research has some limitations. The limitations of the sample and the use of structural equation method are the most important limitations. Since path analysis is a correlation method, caution should be taken in deducing the causal relationships.

Testing the suggested model of the present study in other educational levels as well as in other university students can increase the generalizability of the model. Doing this is recommended to other researchers. It is suggested that demographic variables such as socioeconomic status, type of residence (urban or rural, dormitory or non-dormitory), age, field of study, and cultural values should also be considered in relation to the suggested model of research.

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