

**In the Name of God**



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**Significance of Religious Orientation, Eudemonic  
Constructs, and Self-Evaluation in Iranian EFL Learners'  
Achievement**

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**Dedicated to:**

*“My loving parents”*

My eternal source of inspiration...

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## **Abstract**

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). Participants of this study were 126 Iranian EFL students English Translation and English Literature at Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman. In order to obtain the required data, three questionnaires were utilized: Allport and Ross's (1967) religious orientation scale (ROS) to measure RO, Short Measurement of Psychological Well-Being by Clarke, Marshall, Ryff, and Wheaton (2001) to measure PWB, and finally, The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale by Rosenberg (1965) to determine SE. Moreover, participants' GPA in special lessons was used as an indicator 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 each pair of these variables: IRO, PWB, SE, and LA. Furthermore, there was a significant negative relationship between ERO and each of three variables, PWB, SE, and LA. Additionally, the Multiple Regression was significant and all predictor variables explained 95 percent of variability of students' GPA.

**Key words:** Religious Orientation (RO), Extrinsic Religious Orientation (ERO), Intrinsic Religious Orientation (IRO), Psychological Well-being (PWB), Self-esteem (SE).

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL.....	English as a Foreign Language
ERO.....	Extrinsic Religious Orientation
ESL.....	English as a Second Language
EXT.....	Extrinsic
FL.....	Foreign Language
GPA.....	Grade Point Average
IEROS.....	Intrinsic/Extrinsic Religious Orientation
INT.....	Intrinsic
IQ.....	Intelligent Quotient
IRO.....	Intrinsic Religious Orientation
LA.....	Language Achievement
LP.....	Language Proficiency
NA.....	Negative Affect
PA.....	Positive Affect
PWB.....	Psychological Well-Being
R.....	Religiosity
RLI.....	Religious Orientation Inventory
RO.....	Religious Orientation
ROS.....	Religious Orientation Scale
RSES.....	Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale
S.....	Spirituality
SE.....	Self-Esteem
SPSS.....	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SWB.....	Subjective Well-Being
WB.....	Well-Being

# **Chapter one: Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, an overview of the present study has been presented to provide the necessary background to turn the pages of this investigation. Statement of the problem, objectives of the study, significance of the study, theoretical background of the current investigation, as well as, research questions, limitations of the study, and definition of key terms are provided in this chapter.

## **1.2. Overview**

Student performance is a function of many factors within and external to the classroom. Broader contextual and attitudinal variables might influence student achievement (Rode et al., 2005). Psychologists and others have expended much research energy on identifying the factors associated with academic performance (e.g., Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2005; Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006; Steinberg & Morris, 2001) and numerous individual different factors of importance have been identified, namely, religious orientation, eudaimonic constructs (psychological well-being) and global self-evaluation (self-esteem).

Although the religious theme has been present in the realm of psychology since the time of Freud, the empirical psychology of religion has been in existence only since the mid fifties (Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 1996), when psychologists began to acknowledge that religion plays a crucial role in “historical, cultural, social and psychological realities that humans confront in their lives” (Hood et al., 1996, p. 2). Since learning, especially language learning, is a phenomenon influenced by cultural, social and psychological realities, religion has been reported as a factor to have influence on academic achievement by many researchers. For example, Jeynes (2002) reported that “religious schooling and religious commitment each have a positive effect on academic achievement and school-related behavior” (p. 27).

Moreover, religiosity, in general, has been reported as having an advantageous effect on mental health, well-being, and life satisfaction (Ross, 1990; Shkolnik, Weiner, Malik, & Festinger, 2001). Previous studies have found that religious individuals tend to have a more positive sense of well-being than non-religious persons (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Hong & Giannakopoulos, 1991).

Beside the importance of religiosity and its effect on learners’ achievement and well-being, concept of well-being itself has been reported

as critical to academic success. Researches show that students with high sense of well-being receive better grades and are less likely to fail in college (Hysenbegasi, Hass, & Rowland, 2005; Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, & Perry, 2002). Psychologists see WB as the result of cognition and emotion.

Currently, the two major conceptualizations of well-being are subjective well-being (SWB) and psychological well-being (PWB). As pointed out by Keyes, Shmotkin, and Ryff (2002), “although both approaches assess well-being, they address different features of what it means to be well: SWB involves more global evaluations of affect and life quality, whereas PWB examines perceived thriving vis-à-vis the existential challenges of life” (p. 1007). The second conceptualization of well-being which is the focus of the current study, also known as eudaimonic well-being, involves acting in a way which is constructive, socially beneficial, and leads to personal growth.

From a eudaimonic point of view (Waterman, 1993), well-being is seen as a product of “the striving for perfection that represents the realization of one’s true potential” (Ryff, 1995, p. 100), hence happiness is a result of full engagement and optimal performance in existential challenges of life (Keyes et al., 2002).



In addition to religiosity and well-being as factors contributing to learning achievement, there can be no doubt today about the importance of affect for learning. As Rodriguez, Plax, and Kearney (1996) explain, “Affect is by definition, an intrinsic motivator. Positive affect sustains involvement and deepens interest in the subject matter” (p. 297). It can lead to more effective learning and, in fact, may be essential for learning to occur.

This often quoted phrase show the importance of the area of affect in language learning and teaching. It can be considered that there are two main aspects, the *inside*, or internal characteristics which are a part of the learner’s personality, and the *between*, or the relational factors which focus on learners and teachers as participants in an interactional situation (Arnold & Brown, 1999). Among the learner internal factors, of central importance is the image one forms of himself, his self-concept. Human beings, at all times and in all places inevitably form an image of self. How one evaluates that self—negatively or positively—will determine his 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. One’s sense of self worth, or self-esteem as an affective

factor, can have a strong influence on behavior, competency, and overall socio-emotional development and psychological adjustment. Lots of studies have tended to show that self-esteem is related to academic performance (Hansford & Hattie, 1982; Wylie, 1979).

Self-esteem is also related to religiosity and well-being. Self-esteem has been examined and discussed, leading to the supposition that religious organizations and communities provide one with positive self-reflective appraisals that lead to a more positive self-image (Regnerus, 2003). Moreover, well-being includes outcomes measured as life satisfaction, happiness, self-esteem, and positive mood.

### **1.3. Statement of the Problem**

At the close of the 20th century, the literature concerning the relationship between religiosity and academic performance remained largely underdeveloped (Trusty & Watts, 1999). However, since that time, several studies have been conducted examining the role of religiosity in the academic achievement of students. Religiosity is a complex concept that comprises various aspects of belief, behavior, and intelligence (Holdcroft, 2006).

Examining religious orientation and religiosity has been cited as one of the most persistent problems in literature (Levin & vanderpool, 1987). The difficulty in exploring these terms lies in how we define them and the measurement chosen to gauge them. Individuals espousing similar religious views may, nonetheless, behave in highly variable and, at times, in consistent ways. While Nyborg (2009) demonstrated that IQ negatively correlated with the reported denominational affiliation of students, several other studies have demonstrated that religiosity and academic achievement are positively correlated (Walker & Dixon, 2002).

Moreover, these studies have been done among populations of different religions. So the problem lies in the fact that there is discrepancy between results of different researches and those results cannot be generalized to other different religious populations. Therefore, new researches are needed to account for other religions and learning contexts.

Some research showed that university students reported more health complaints than their working peers (Stewart-Brown et al, 2000; Vaez, Kristenson, & Laflamme, 2004). A high prevalence of such complaints has also been documented in university students from different European countries (e.g., Stock et al., 2003, 2008). University students represent the future of families, communities, and countries. They also face the stresses of

achieving success in their academic goals despite the financial constraints that many students report (El Ansari & Stock, 2010).

The perceived burdens of university students includes the challenges of achieving good grades and competition, career and future achievements, the many demands and deadlines of course works and academic assessments, as well as the financial and health-related burdens (Lee, Kang, & Zum, 2005). Recent research concluded that perceived burdens were positively associated with higher depression scores among students (Mikolajczyk et al., 2008).

Clearly, students vary greatly in their ability to cope with and adjust to these new challenges, and some students face far more challenges than others. Those who adapt effectively to their new social and academic environment are much more likely to persist in college and ultimately earn a degree (Tinto, 1993). A potentially important resource for successfully accomplishing this life transition is positive psychological functioning, known as psychological well-being (PWB).

Because of individuals' above mentioned differences, it cannot be predicted how different students would act in the face of these challenges in different learning contexts. Hence students' PWB becomes an area to be