

The Factors Affecting Moral Competency of Iranian Undergraduate Students Majoring in English Language and Literature: Investigating the Role of Applied ELT in Iranian Collectivist Culture

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Abstract

In a broad dichotomy, cultures are divided into collectivists and individualists. This difference between cultures is manifested in educational settings and the way students and teachers approach educational tasks and activities (Hofstede, 1986). This study investigated the way the dominant culture can affect the cognitive and affective load of classrooms and eventually account for the development of students' moral judgment. To this end, 400 Iranian university students majoring in English language and literature were asked to complete FAMC test (Javadimehr et al., 2015a). This test measures the role of four factors of "focus, sharing, challenge and support" in the development of moral competency. The results revealed that there was a growth in the pattern of affective and cognitive factors from the first to the last year of studying in this major. The results also indicated that "challenge" was the least attended cognitive factor but "support" was always the most prevalent factor in all academic years. The findings are then discussed by taking into account the findings of other related studies conducted in individualist and collectivist societies.

Keywords: Collectivist Cultures, Cognitive and Affective Factors, Individualist Cultures, Moral Competence

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1. Introduction

In a general categorization, cultures are divided into the ones related to collectivist and those related to individualist societies (Hofstede, 1986). This dichotomy has attributed specific features including various aspects of peoples' life from their daily interactions to government's large-scale social policies to each of these two cultures. One aspect which is influenced by the dominant culture of the society is pedagogy. In fact, culture can shape people's attitude toward education in different ways. For instance, obtaining academic degree can be considered as either merely a tool to gain social prestige as is the case in collectivist cultures or improving one's economic worth and self-respect in individualist societies (Hofstede, 1986, Hoff, Kshetramade, Fehr, 2011). Another example is the way these cultures can form people's views about educational certificates. In collectivist cultures, certificates are important and are displayed on walls, however, they have only symbolic values in societies with individualist cultures (Hofstede, 1986). There are ample examples of these differences to be convinced that this dichotomy between cultures can account for differences between educational achievements. Today transformative pedagogy with change as its ultimate goal is the subject of interest among the practitioners of the field of education (Tylor, 1997, Mezirow, 1997). This change can occur in both personal and social levels (Freire, 1970) and can affect many human traits. One of humanitarian impacts of transformative pedagogy is students' moral competency.

Moral competency has a long history both in psychology and education as many research studies have revealed that education has a strong effect on the development or even regression of moral judgment (Cummings & Maddux, 2001, Kohlberg, 1969; Lind, 1985, 2012; Modgil & Modgil, 1976; Räder & Wakenhut, 1984; Wakenhut, 1984). In other words, proper education can tap

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the factors affecting moral judgment of students and hence helps the growth of moral judgment. Factors affecting moral judgment can best be fostered in democratic situations where people have the chance to express their ideas freely without any fear to lose their face and the discipline of English language and literature is assumed to be one of such contexts (Miller, 1987).

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1. Collectivist Vs. Individualist Societies and Transformative Pedagogy

Transformative view of education dismisses the earlier banking view of education with its emphasis on teachers as a source of knowledge, and instead aims at empowering learners by fostering their personal abilities and psychological potentials and hence pursues a more holistic view about learning (Freire, 1970). Many advocates of transformative pedagogy have proposed “change” as the ultimate aim of education rather than solely assimilating new materials into students’ cognitive system (Mezirow, 2003). By change they mean alteration in people’s personality, thought and attitudes as well (Mezirow, 2003). Clearly, these changes happen in such diverse aspects of human traits that any investigation into these changes should be conducted considering the dominant cultural norms within which transformative pedagogy is practiced. In fact, cultures influence not only people’s attitude toward education, but also people’s opinion about their favorite educational tasks and activities. Culture can even determine the pattern of student-teacher interaction (Hofstede, 1986). While individualism lays emphasis on personal achievements such as scientific innovations and every action which helps one to find outstanding place compared to others, collectivist societies emphasize the larger group existence (Hofstede, 1986). Independence, autonomy, self-reliance, uniqueness, achievement and competition are related to

individualistic societies. In contrast, sense of duty toward one's group, interdependence with others, desire of social harmony & conformity are associated with collectivism (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler & Tripton, 1985, Hofstede, 1980, 2001, Kim, 1994, Markus & Kitayama, 1991, Oyserman et al., 2002). Different cultures can lead to the formation of different perceptions of Self that is formed in relation with others and becomes the basis of human behavior (Greif, 1994) which in turn affects other aspects of human life (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

2.2. Factors Affecting Moral Judgment and English Language and Literature

Moral judgment is defined by Kohlberg as “the capacity to make decisions which are moral and to act in accordance with such judgments” (1984, p. 523). Lind (1988) completed the definition by providing the dual aspect theory of moral judgment which comprises of two layers of affect and cognition which are distinct but inseparable.

Studies on the situations and tasks improving people's moral judgment have shown that education plays a significant role (Kohlberg, 1984). It should be noted that teaching moral judgment does not mean teaching “morally conformist” behavior. In contrast, this type of pedagogy is interested in improving students' analytic understanding which is needed to live in democratic societies (Kohlberg, 1978).

Lind (2002) asserted that the following factors are assumed to play crucial role in fostering students' morality: role taking and good reflection. Role taking is one of the factors which can help the development of social interaction. Social interactions give people the opportunity to take social roles to understand themselves and others better and realize that others have the same expectations and desires (Kohlberg, 1984). This way, any increase in the

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number of one's social roles will directly lead one to higher levels of moral competence. This growth of moral competence is based on the higher stages of role taking and type of situations that society should provide for people to help their improvement. Academic contexts can considerably develop moral judgment by offering contexts in which one is required to participate in some social events (Lind, 2001).

Guided reflection is another concept related to the development of moral competence in educational. While scholars like Piaget and Kohlberg assume social role taking as the most important factor in developing one's moral judgment, other scholars such as Sprinthall & Reiman (1996) hypothesized that guided reflection is equally important in fostering moral development. In this context, Sprinthall, Reiman (1996) and Reiman (2000) have conducted field-based research that proved role-taking and guided reflection as two key conditions for psychological and moral growth.

In a different vein, a study conducted by Javadimehr et al. (2015a) revealed that presence of four factors of focus, sharing, challenge and support in educational settings accounts for higher moral judgment attainment. Three factors of focus, sharing and challenge are related to cognitive side of moral judgment and support is related to the realm of affect. It is said that factors affecting moral judgment are present in democratic situations (Javadimehr et al., 2015b) where students have the opportunity to express their opinions. Miller (1987) assumes that literature exposes one to many situations where he can freely express himself and have the chance to identify with different characters.

Therefore, this study aimed at investigating the transformative power of pedagogy in Iranian collectivist society. This study aimed at answering the following questions:

1. Do the courses covered in each academic year affect cognitive and affective factors underlying MJ of students majoring in English language and literature differently?
2. What is the pattern of changes of the cognitive and affective factors underlying MJ in the four academic years for students majoring in English language and literature?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Four hundred undergraduate students participated in this study. They were from two universities of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad and Shahid Beheshti University of Tehran. To have a balanced design, some participants were randomly omitted from each group to have 100 students in each academic year.

3.2. Data Collection and Procedure

Students filled the FAMC test (factors affecting moral competency test) (Javadimehr et al., 2015a). They rated all the courses they had passed in previous academic semesters as well as the courses that they were to pass in that academic semester. FAMC was constructed on a 5-point Likert scale from 1(never) to 5(almost always) and validated through factor analysis model and estimation of criterion related validity with validated and reliable moral judgment test (MJT) (Lind, 1998). Items of this questionnaire were developed based on the dual aspect model of Lind (2002) which defines moral competency in terms of two domains of affect and cognition. It assesses the role of 3 factors of Focus, Sharing and Challenge influencing cognitive domain and Support as one major factor influencing affective domain. After collecting the

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tests, they were scored and the data obtained were the basis for the comparison of academic years in terms of their cognitive and affective loads.

4. Results

4.1. FAMC in Academic Year 1

To investigate the effect of four academic years on the four factors underlying moral judgment growth, One-way ANOVA test was used. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics and table 2 shows results of One-way ANOVA for year 1 of studying English language and literature at university.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Subcomponents of Moral Competency in the Academic Year1

Factor	year	N	Mean	Std.	Minimum	Maximum
Focus	1	100	44.89	3.12	20	100
Share	1	100	30.12	3.45	20	99.12
Challenge	1	100	24.98	2.12	20	42
Support	1	100	84.35	2.10	20	100

As table 1 displays, the highest mean was for support which was 84.35%, showing that educational setting could help students enjoy emotional support in their classrooms. The lowest mean, 24.98%, was related to challenge indicating that students did not have enough chances to challenge others' ideas or being criticized by others. Focus, 44.89%, was the second factor present in year-1 classes and the third important factor was sharing, 30.12%.

Results of One-way ANOVA test (Table 2), illustrated that there is a significant difference between the scores of focus, sharing, challenge and support in year 1 of studying English literature ($p < 0.05$).

Table 2. One-way ANOVA between sub-Components of Moral Competency in the Academic Year1

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	12254.89	3	3063.72	9.08	.000
Within Groups	55147.005	96	112.11		
Total	67401.94	99			

To have multiple comparison of the cognitive and factors and investigate if the difference between them is significant Scheffe test was employed. Table 3 reports the findings of Scheffe test.

Table 3. Scheffe Test for Multiple Comparison of Subcomponents of Moral Competency in the Academic Year 1

Year	Mean difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Focus & share	-3.14	2.67	0.24
Focus& challenge	-4.56	2.67	0.00
Focus & support	-3.16	2.67	0.00
Share & challenge	6.72	2.67	0.00
Share & support	5.45	2.67	0.00
Challenge& support	-6.35	2.67	0.001

4.2. FAMC in Academic Year 2

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Subcomponents of Moral Competency in the Academic Year 2

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Focus	100	50.12	1.12	20.12	100
Share	100	49.13	2.13	20.34	97.13
Challenge	100	22.50	3.17	20.01	52.3
Support	100	90.53	3.40	20.52	100

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Table 4 reveals that students' mean of focus increased from 44.89% in the first year to 50.12% in the second academic year. The same growing pattern is also witnessed for sharing and support reaching 49.13% and 90.53% respectively. Challenge scores saw a decrease by 2.48% from the year 1 to year 2. In the second year, like the first year, emotional support was the most prevailing factor and challenge was the least attended factor. Like the first year focus was the second prevalent factor, but sharing, unlike the first year, is closer to focus in the second year, the gap between them decreased from about 14% in the year 1 to 1% in the second year. The results of one-way ANOVA test (Table 5) showed that there is significant difference between four factors of focus, sharing, challenge and support in the second academic year ($P < 0.05$).

Table 5. One-way ANOVA between Subcomponents of Moral Competency in the Academic Year 2

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	17970.28	3	4492.57	6.78	.000
Within Groups	71880.2	96	112.11		
Total	89850.48	99			

Table 6 presents the results of Scheffe test for multiple comparisons of these four factors.

Table 6. Scheffe Test for Multiple Comparison of Subcomponents of Moral Competency in Academic Year2

Year	Mean difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Focus & share	-2.13	3.14	0.02
Focus & challenge	-4.56	3.14	0.01
Focus & support	-2.10	3.14	0.00
Share & challenge	8.12	3.14	0.10
Share & support	6.81	3.14	0.00
Challenge & support	-8.60	3.14	0.001

Scheffe test showed that focus and share are insignificantly different ($p>0.05$) but all other cognitive and affective factors are significantly different from each other in the second year of studying English language and literature to answer the research question 1 and to investigate the cognitive and affective factors affected in the third year of studying English literature at university, the scores of students for all these four factors were measured. The descriptive statistics are provided in table 7. It should be noted that, there was increase in all cognitive and affective factors. The factor of focus grew from 50.12% from the year two to 63.84% in the year three. Share increased from 49.13% to 60.11%, support which was the highest score in previous years witnessed rise from 90.53% in the year two to 91.29% in the year three which is the highest score among all four factors and challenge increased from 22.50% to 29.49% in the third academic year.

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4.3. FAMC in Academic Year 3

Table 7. *Descriptive Statistics for Subcomponents of Moral Competency in the Academic Year 3*

	N	Mean	Std.	Minimum	Maximum
Focus	100	63.84	1.45	67.12	100
Share	100	60.11	3.16	56.16	100
Challenge	100	29.49	3.46	25.3	50.01
Support	100	91.29	4.67	69.2	100

To explore if the difference between these four factors is significant in the year three, one -way ANOVA was run the results of which are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. *One-way ANOVA for Subcomponents of Moral Competency in the Academic Year 3*

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	29468.8	3	2113.2	7.89	.000
Within Groups	117875.2	96	723.11		
Total	147344	99			

Table 8 displays that there is a significant difference between four factors of focus, sharing, challenge and support in the year three.

Table 9. Scheffe Test for Multiple Comparison of Four Factors in the Academic Year 3

Year	Mean difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Focus & share	-4.16	2.12	0.15
Focus & challenge	-3.52	2.12	0.00
Focus & support	-1.34	2.12	0.00
Share & challenge	-3.72	2.12	0.00
Share & support	8.65	2.12	0.00
Challenge & support	-6.78	2.12	0.00

To have detailed multiple comparison of these factors, Scheffe test was run (table 9).

As it is shown on table 9, the difference between focus and share is not significant in the year three ($p>0.05$). However, there are significant differences between focus and challenge, focus and support, share and challenge, share and support, and challenge and support ($p>0.05$).

4.4. FAMC in Academic Year 4

Table 10. Descriptive Statistics for Four Factors in the Academic Year 4

Focus	100	74.05	3.56	50.2	100
Share	100	66.59	3.87	65.1	100
Challenge	100	41.99	2.46	30.4	56.5
Support	100	91.06	4.21	75.6	100

As table 10 shows the same rising trend which was seen in the previous years is also evident in the year four. Three cognitive and affective factors of focus, sharing and challenge saw growth. Focus rose from 63, 84% in year three to 74.05% in the year four, sharing from 60.11% to 66.59%, challenge from 29.49% to 41.99%. However, support decreased from 91.29% to 91.06%.

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One way ANOVA was run to investigate if these changes have led to a significant difference between the factors in the year four (Table 11).

Table 11. One-way ANOVA for FAMC in the Academic Year 4

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	34300.1	3	9000	2.45	.01
Within Groups	137200.1	96	2248		
Total	171500.2	99			

As the results of table 11 Show, there is significant difference between these factors in the year four (P<0.05).

Table 12. Scheffe Test for Multiple Comparison of FAMC Scores in Year4

Year	Mean difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Focus & share	2.13	3.12	0.01
Focus & challenge	3.45	3.12	0.00
Focus & support	-1.31	3.12	0.00
Share & challenge	-2.34	3.12	0.00
Share & support	6.62	3.12	0.00
Challenge & support	-5.78	3.12	0.00

Scheffe was used to explore the differences (table 12). The results of multiple comparison (table13) indicated that there was significant difference between all cognitive and affective factors constituting FAMC scale. It showed that in spite of the fact that though a growth was seen in cognitive and affective factors affecting students' MJ scores, they did not develop similarly in all of these factors.

Figure 1 shows the overall changes of four factors of focus, sharing, challenge and support during the four-year period of academic study.

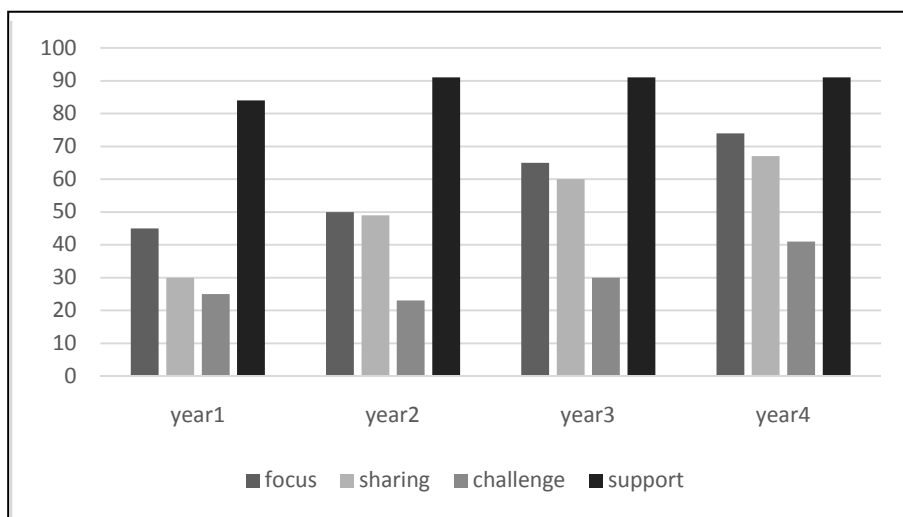


Figure 1. Comparison of Cognitive and Affective Factors of FAMC From Year 1 To 4

As it is clear from the figure1, support was the dominant factor in all four years with a small growth from year 1 to year 4. The second level belongs to focus which gradually increased from year 1 to year 4. Share factor maintained the third place. It also experienced gradual rise during this period, only becoming equal to focus in the year 2. The least attended factor during this period was challenge. It saw a decline from year 1 to 2, in other academic years it could have some increase but quite negligible in comparison with other factors.

Over all, it is clear from the data that challenge was the least improved factor but support was the most developed one in the four-year period of academic education of English language and literature students.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

As the aim of this study was to investigate the pattern of factors affecting moral competency in Iranian collectivist society, it would be clarifying to compare the

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results with individualistic culture. It is assumed that presence of these factors leads to higher moral judgment attainment therefore the researcher explored any possible norm for the growth of moral judgment in individualistic societies. Lind (2002) proposed that university students in Germany have the average impact of 3.5 C-points per year on students' moral competency. The same gain has been found for other European countries (Lind, 2008a). In other studies, Lind (2000) and Schillinger (2006) showed that the average growth was 4 C-score in moral judgment per academic year. Almost the same results was gained by Javadimehr et al. (2015b) and students' mean of C-scores increased 3.25 C-scores from the year 1 to 2. It was 3.56 C-scores from the year 2 to 3 and 5.04 from the year 3 to 4. These findings revealed that in both collectivist and individualistic societies, schooling could help the development of moral judgment by providing cognitive and affective situations leading to higher moral judgment attainment.

Regarding the cognitive and affective factors underlying MJ, a pattern of growth was seen for each of the factors of focus, share, challenge and support. The findings of the present study showed that undoubtedly support was the dominant factor in all four years of studying but challenge is the least scored factor. Focus and sharing were always mid-level factors. In FAMC test, challenge was defined as the ability to challenge others, to be able to analyse problems from different aspects and to contrive more than one solution to a single problem (Javadimehr et al., 2015a). Reviewing the literature on the comparison of individualistic and collectivist, it was found that people in individualist societies are more apt to voice their own opinions and are more opinionated than those living in collectivist cultures (Davidson, 1998). This difference in expressing one's opinions can take its roots from different perception of "Self" developed in these two types of cultures (Markus &

Kitayama, 1991). People from independent cultures are more direct in expressing their ideas, whereas individuals living in interdependent cultures tend to de-emphasize the role of individuals and hence avoid directly expressing their ideas especially when it disagrees with the rest (Davidson, 1998). Many studies have been conducted to show the linguistic differences between independent and interdependent societies. Kashima & Kashima (1998) found that people from individualistic cultures commonly use the pronoun “I” & “you” which are widely removed from the speech of people from collectivist societies. Another study conducted by Ma & Schenmann (1997) indicated that 48% of American college students tended to use self-description statements to describe themselves which for Kenyan it was only 2%. Kenyan showed tendency to describe themselves by statements including information about their roles and memberships but only 7% of American students did so. These studies clearly show that interdependent cultures train people to use linguistic devices in a way to emphasize conformity with the group to which they belong and as is the case in the present article, challenging others is not among the immediate interests of people from collectivist cultures. In contrast, the considerable amount of support available in classrooms can be attributed to the need for a sense of belonging to the group. The factor of support in FAMC was defined as emotional support individuals receive in terms of praise and sense of humor (Javadimehr et al., 2015a). People from collectivist cultures are interested in maintaining harmony and conformity in their relationships with others (Schwartz, 1994, Bond & Smith, 1996). To be conformist member of a society, people should be constantly in a state of “objective self-awareness” (Greif, 1994) which is related to one’s “self-knowledge” (Greif, 1994). People from independent societies gain their self-knowledge through an inner search but those in interdependent cultures

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acquire this knowledge through evaluation of others. Therefore, it seems natural that individuals living in collectivist societies become more hesitant to express their ideas freely and not to be willing to challenge others which brings with itself the risk of being wrongly evaluated by others. Hein et al. (2008) showed that putting American and Japanese students in mirror room in an exam session could have strong effect on the performance of American students but no significant effect was reported for Japanese students. American students became more self-critical of their behaviors but as Japanese students were constantly in a state of objective self, the mirror did not have such an effect. Kanawaga, Cross & Markus (2001) asserted that students from collectivist cultures had varying levels and types of self-descriptions in front of different persons. This tendency in interdependent societies to maintain harmony goes so far that they encourage people to apologize in situations when independent cultures require people to express their gratitude (Kumatoridani, 1994, Coulmas, 1981, Long, 1998, Nakata, 1989). The reasons for this matter lies in the fact that expressing gratitude is basically highlighting the role of "Self" by thanking for the pleasure gained from the behavior or action of others but apology emphasizes the importance of others and is an effort to maintain conformity to the expense of de-emphasizing "Self"(Davidson, 1998).

The above-cited findings suggest that as collectivist societies have more holistic world view, they are less opinionated as is the case in individualistic cultures (Davidson, 1998). These findings provide ample evidence for the lower status of challenge factor and higher status of support in the Iranian collectivist society.

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