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## Individual characteristics, identity styles, identity commitment, and teacher's academic optimism

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### Abstract

The academic optimism construct is an individual belief in teachers consisting of three components: sense of efficacy, teacher trust in parents and students and academic emphasis which through creating an active and positive learning environment leads to the academic progress and success of the students. The aim of this study was to determine the relation between individual characteristics, identity styles, and identity commitment and the teacher's academic optimism. A sample consisting of 303 primary and middle school teachers (172 female and 131 male) were selected by stratified sampling and completed the revised version of Identity Styles Inventory (ISI-4) (Smits et al., Unpublished) and Teacher's Academic Optimism Questionnaire (Woolfolk Hoy, Hoy & Kurz, 2008). The data were analyzed by a stepwise regression analysis and the results indicated that the informational identity style was the main predictor of the teacher's academic optimism.

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*Keywords:* Teacher's academic optimism (sense of efficacy, trust in parents and students, academic emphasis), Identity styles, Identity commitment;

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### 1. Introduction

Teacher's beliefs have a considerable effect on their efficiency and performance in the learning environment. Researchers also found that these beliefs have a great impact on instruction, motivation, and success of the students (Woolfolk Hoy, Davis, & Pape, 2006). Teacher academic optimism is a positive belief that through emphasis on academics and learning, trusting on parents and students to cooperation, and confidence to his/her own capacity to overcome difficulties, can lead to academic progress of students (Woolfolk Hoy, Hoy, & Kurz, 2008).

#### 1.1. academic optimism

Two main theoretical frameworks of this construct are positive psychology and social - cognitive theory. Based on the positive psychology and social – cognitive theory, optimist teachers in class environment tend to focus on positive qualities of students, school and society (Pajares, 2001) and can apply some degree of control on their notion, performance and emotions. In other words, they have an agentic behaviour (Bandura, 2006). According to Bandura's human agency and triadic reciprocal determinism (1977, 1986), we can present three component of academic optimism and their interactions toward creating an active and positive learning environment. Teacher's sense of efficacy is defined as “judgment about their capabilities to achieve desired outcomes in term of student's

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engagement and learning even for those who are hard and unmotivated” (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Teacher efficacy is among few features of teacher which relates to the student achievement. The reason maybe is this fact that if teachers believe they can affect on student learning, then they will set higher educational goals, expectations and do more effort and will be more persistence against difficulties (Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008).

Effective teachers must be able to form trusting relationships with their students. Trust is a main element to promote positive relations between students (Beard et al., 2010). Students discover their abilities and pursue learning when they have a trustworthy relation with their teachers (Flutter, 2007). Effective teachers set higher educational goals for trusted students and rely to the parent supports. Thus academic emphasis represents teacher’s belief about student’s educational achievements and their focus on academic tasks. Academic emphasis also indicates amount of time duration in which students are engaged proactively in academic tasks and is directly related to their learning (Weinstein and Mignano, 2007). Thus the construct of the academic optimism has cognitive (efficacy), affective (trust), and behavioural (academic emphasis) aspects and represents a rich picture of the human agency in these three dimensions (Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008).

### *1.2. Predictors of academic optimism*

Some variables such as dispositional optimism, humanistic classroom management, student-centered teaching beliefs and individual citizenship behaviour are recognized as positive predictors of the academic optimism in the recent findings (Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008). It is expected that some individual attributes like identity styles and identity commitment similar to the theoretical framework (social - cognitive), gender, years of teaching, and academic degree are among other predictors of this novel construct.

#### *1.2.1. Identity styles and identity commitment*

Berzonsky (2004) introduced his theory as social- cognitive model of identity. From his perspective, identity is an individual framework that is used as a resource for interpreting experiences by human. He identified three identity styles for studying similarities and differences of individuals in identity building process. These styles associate with the ways that people use them in the decision making process and could be mentioned as: informational identity style, normative identity style, and diffuse/ avoidance identity style. People with the informational identity style posses problem-centric strategies, have proactive decision making, are committed to their goals and have a sense of integrity. They also have clear career and educational goals and high performance expectation (Berzonsky, Nurmi, & Tammi, 1999). People who have a normative identity style internalize other norms, are not flexible and pay attention to the comments of significant others in the decision making (Berzonsky, 2003). Individuals with a diffuse/ avoidance identity style use emotional strategies, have low self esteem and variable self efficacy, and are unaware about their future ( Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000) . According to Berzonsky (2003), identity commitment creates a referential and directed framework that is used for reviewing, assessment and regulation of behaviours and feedbacks.

#### *1.2.2. Individual characteristics*

Regarding the recent social evolutions and women achievements in career and educational aspects, gender could be considered as another variable that affects the teacher's notion and belief about his/her capabilities . Draling-Hamond (2000) distinguished three factors in studying teacher’s efficacy: years of teaching experience, type of license and highest degree attained. Armor et al. (1989) found that differences in teacher expertise which is composed of three aforementioned factors are the main reason for about 90% of differences in student’s achievement. These variables determine knowledge and skills required for teacher success in 21th century pedagogy. However there is no report of a relation between teacher expertise and teacher academic optimism in some studies ( Kurz, 2006; Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008).

### *1.3. The current study*

Based on what was stated, the aim of this study is prediction of the academic optimism in Iranian teachers based on variables such as individual characteristics, identity styles and identity commitment.

**2. Method**

*2.1. Participants*

A sample population of 303 teachers from district 1 of public schools in Tehran city have been selected by stratified sampling method which consisted of 56% female and 44% male teachers. 40.6% of participants were primary school teachers and 59.4% were middle school teachers. The highest academic degree of participants is as follows: 7.9% diploma, 26.1% college graduated, 56.8% bachelor of science and 9.2% master of science.

*2.2. Instruments*

Two scales, that translated to Persian (English to Persian and Persian to English), were used ; namely, the Identity Style Inventory and Academic Optimism Questionnaire .

a) Identity styles inventory version 4 (ISI-4) (Smiths et al., Unpublished)

This inventory consists of 33 items from which 7 items for informational identity style assessment, 8 items for normative identity style assessment, and 9 items for diffuse/ avoidant identity style assessment. In this inventory there are 9 items for evaluation of identity commitment. Measurements are on 5 point Likert basis from 1: "strongly disagree" to 5: "strongly agree". In current study the internal consistency of factors (cronbach's alpha) for informational, normative, and diffuse/avoidant styles were 0.86, 0.71, and 0.76, respectively.

b) Teacher’s academic optimism questionnaire (Woolfolk Hoy, Hoy & Kurz, 2008)

This questionnaire consists of 24 items; 6 items assess teacher trust in parents and students, 6 items assess academic emphasis, and 12 items assess teacher efficacy. Measurements are carried out using 6 points Likert scale from 1: "strongly disagree" to 6: "strongly agree". Existence of these three subscales is confirmed through exploratory factor analysis. The internal consistency of factors (cronbach's alpha) were 0.85, 0.79, and 0.91 for trust in parents and students, academic emphasis, and teacher efficacy components, respectively.

**3. Results**

The gathered data has been analyzed through stepwise method of multiple regression analysis. The mean, standard deviation and correlation of variables are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation and correlation of variables

variables	M	S D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1.gender	-	-	1											
2.Instruction level (primary or middle school)	-	-	0.27**	1										
3.academic degree	-	-	0.09	0.27	1									
4.years of teaching	6.22	7.51	0.09	0.09	0.19*	1								
5.informational identity style	4.06	0.64	0.28**	0.06	0.16**	0.00	1							
6.normative identity style	3.05	0.64	0.12	0.05	0.21**	0.13	0.19**	1						
7.diffuse/avoidant identity style	2.57	0.64	0.16**	0.06	0.22**	0.15*	0.39**	0.11**	1					
8. identity commitment	3.09	0.61	0.20**	0.00	0.24**	0.02	0.2**	0.27**	0.55**	1				
9. trust	4.19	0.81	0.28**	0.03	0.18	0.01	0.1**	0.11	0.27**	0.38**	1			
10. academic emphasis	3.2	0.37	0.14	0.04	0.06	0.05	0.5*	0.2*	0.1**	0.21**	0.03	1		
11.efficacy	4.84	0.64	0.17**	0.04	0.15*	0.07	0.0**	0.0	0.19**	0.49**	0.47**	0.14*	1	
12.academic optimism	4.07	0.44	0.24**	0.00	0.15*	0.04	0.9**	0.02	0.19**	0.52**	0.83**	0.36**	0.79**	1

\*p<0.05                      \*\*p<0.01                      N=303

There is high correlation coefficients between total score of academic optimism and trust component (r = 0.83), teacher’s efficacy component (r = 0.79), and informational identity style (r = 0.69).

Table 2. Brief results of stepwise regression coefficient and analysis of academic optimism with the variables of instructional level and years of teaching experience, academic degree, identity styles and identity commitment

variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	β	t	p
1.Informational identity style	0.69	0.47	271.17	0.47	0.69	16.47	0.001
1.Informational identity style	0.69	0.47	271.17	0.47	0.71	16.87	0.001
2.Normative identity style	0.69	0.49	17.142.75	0.014	0.12	9.283	0.005
1.Informational identity style	0.69	0.47	271.17	0.47	0.60	11.57	0.001
2.Normative identity style	0.69	0.49	17.142.75	0.014	0.15	7.353	0.001
3.Identity commitment	0.71	0.51	142.75	0.02	0.19	3.51	0.001
			102.85	0			0.001
1.Informational identity style	0.69	0.47	271.17	0.47	0.61	11.57	0.001
2.Normative identity style	0.69	0.49	17.142.75	0.014	0.11	7.353	0.001
3.Identity commitment	0.71	0.51	142.75	0.02	0.23	1.72	0.08
4.Diffus/avoidant identity style	0.72	0.51	75.102.85	0.021	0.12	4.11	0.001
			79.1				0.03
			6				5

According to the results, it appears that normative and diffuse/ avoidant identity styles have negligible contribution to academic optimism prediction. Totally, these four variables determine 51% of differences in academic optimism. The informational identity style is the most significant predictor of academic optimism followed by the identity commitment that has less contribution to this topic. The results of data analysis and stepwise regression on the components of the academic optimism are presented here for detailed assessment.

Table 3: stepwise regression coefficient and analysis of trust to students and parents in terms of instructional level and years of teaching experience, teacher’s academic degree, identity styles and identity commitment variables

variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	β	t	p
1.Informational identity style	0.51	0.26	105.68	0.26	0.51	10.28	0.001
1.Informational identity style	0.51	0.26	105.68	0.26	0.49	9.87	0.001
2.Academic Degree	0.52	0.27	8.55.38	0.01	0.10	2.00	0.046

Obtained results from stepwise regression and its coefficients in trust to students and parents indicate that informational identity style and teacher’s academic degree determine 27% of differences in this component.

Informational identity style has the most effect on this prediction and a few contributions belong to teacher's academic degree while other variables have no effect on this component.

Table 4: brief results of stepwise regression coefficient and analysis of academic emphasis in terms of instruction level and years of teaching experience, teacher's academic degree, identity styles and identity commitment variables

variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	β	t	p
1. Diffuse/avoidant identity style	0.21	0.04	13.31	0.04	0.21	3.65	0.001
1. Diffuse/avoidant identity style	0.21	0.04	13.31	0.04	0.46	7.00	0.001
	0.44	0.19	35.19	0.15	0.46	7.39	0.001
2. Identity commitment							

Diffuse/ avoidant identity style determines 19% of differences in academic emphasis component which according to the results is less than contribution of identity commitment to this component.

Table 5: brief results of stepwise regression coefficient and analysis of teacher efficacy in terms of instructional level and years of teaching experience, teacher's academic degree, identity styles and identity commitment

variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	β	t	p
1. Informational identity style	0.70	0.48	283.	0.48	0.69	16.8	0.00
			97			5	1
1. Informational identity style	0.70	0.48	283.	0.48	0.72	17.3	0.00
2. Normative identity style	0.71	0.50	97	0.01	0.13	9	1
			151.	7		3.16	0.00
			21				2
1. Informational identity style	0.70	0.48	283.	0.48	0.65	12.5	0.00
2. Normative identity style	0.71	0.50	97	0.01	0.15	3.6	1
3. Identity commitment	0.71	0.51	151.	7	0.13	2.4	0.00
			21	0.00			1
			104.	9			0.01
			28				8

Informational identity style, normative identity style, and identity commitment variables determine 51% of differences in the teacher efficacy component among them informational identity style has the most effect followed by normative identity style and identity commitment has less contribution.

## Discussion

As the results of the research yield, teachers with an informational identity style are more successful in trust in students and parents and efficacy components and finally to prediction of academic optimism. Thus the information oriented teachers due to the ability of tolerate and more acceptance for people and situations and opening to the new ideas (Berzonsky, 1992, 1994; Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000) can make a proactive interaction with students and their parents to give them the required information and make them to have a safe feeling such that they share their information and provide freedom in access to the learning opportunity for the students. Berzonsky and Kuk (2000) believe that information oriented identity people have a growing interpersonal relation and these open and honest relations enable them to establish and maintain supportive and positive social connections. These teachers tend to work and help all students due to their self reasoning, and clear and consistent academic and career goals

(Berzonsky & Kuk, 2005; Berzonsky et al., 1999). According to Bandura (1997) the sense of efficacy is a regulating mechanism that affects the cognitive, motivational and decision making processes. Therefore such teachers believe that they can achieve desired outcomes and organize the learning process in a manner that maximizes the learning of all students. Hejazi et al. (2009) in their study found that there is a positive association between academic self-efficacy and informational identity style. According to the reciprocal determinism principle, of course the components of academic optimism can lead to setting higher academic expectations that totally have the most contribution to predicting of the academic optimism. The relation between normative identity style and teacher's efficacy is not so significant. Such teachers try to meet the expectations of significant others (principal and the other managers of school) and try to perform an efficient teaching due to their loyalty but they are not successful in term of trust in parents and students and focus on academic achievements because of their self protection in relation establishment. There is a negative association between diffuse/ avoidant identity style and academic achievement. Berzonsky and Kuk (2000) findings indicate the negative relation between this style and purposefulness academic independence. Also the diffuse/ avoidant identity style associate with decrease in sense of efficacy and task avoidance (Nurmi et al., 1997). Thus there is no relation between this identity style and teacher's sense of academic optimism and only have a small contribution to academic efficacy component. Teachers who have diffuse/ avoidant identity style only rely to academic tasks in an imperious manner due to their lack of ability to establish trustful relations. This finding also is alongside with the Hejazi et al. (2009) study which confirms no relation between self - efficacy and diffuse/ avoidant identity style. The identity commitment has less influence on academic optimism than the information oriented identity style but yet can predict it. The identity commitment is defined as making a purposeful framework for audit and controlling the behaviours. So commitment associates with creating a serious learning environment (academic emphasis) and can relate to teacher's self efficacy component according to Bandura (1994) that recognize goals, feedbacks, self assessments as factors of self efficacy. As finding showed, only teacher's academic degree has a little influence on predicting trust in parents and students. Teacher's academic degree assures parents and student about the capability of teacher to apply his/ her knowledge and skills for academic achievements of students through creating a proactive learning environment. Kurz (2006) and Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008) found that there is no relation between academic optimism and teacher's expertise including years of teaching experience, type of license and the highest academic degree attained. Overall the informational identity style has the most effect on prediction of academic optimism and this influence is more significant when considering together with the identity commitment. The informational identity style can make a positive feedback on career perception which is a valuable social attribute and with increasing the sense of efficacy and trustworthy relation will lead to the academic achievement of students.

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