Flipped Learning on Reading and Grammar Achievement at a Language Institute in Kerman-Iran (2021)

Alireza Fardin [1]

Ph.D. Candidate of TEFL, Department of English Language, Kerman Branch, Islamic Azad University, Kerman, Iran

Neda Fatehi Rad (Corresponding Author) [2]

Assistant Professor, Department of English Language, Kerman Branch, Islamic Azad University, Kerman, Iran

Masoud Tajaddini [3]

Assistant Professor, Department of English Language, Kerman Branch, Islamic Azad University, Kerman, Iran

Abstract

This study seeks to explore the effectiveness of flipped instruction on the Iranian intermediate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners reading comprehension and grammar learning. As the participants of the study, 60 Iranian intermediate EFL learners from a language institute in Kerman, Iran, were recruited based on convenience sampling in the form of two intact classes. Then, to conduct randomization, the two classes were randomly assigned to two groups namely, flipping group and control group. Next, the two groups were exposed to 14 treatment sessions in which reading comprehension and grammar were taught to the flipping group through explicit flipped instruction and to the control group through non-flipped mainstream instruction used in the institute. Data collection tools employed in the study included the Quick Placement Test (QPT), Michigan test of grammar, Michigan test of reading, and SPSS 21 software. The results revealed the significant effectiveness of flipped instruction on the Iranian intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension and grammar learning. Accordingly, it is suggested that EFL teachers use flipped instruction if they seek to enhance EFL learners' reading comprehension and grammatical knowledge.

1. Introduction

How is flipped learning defined and used in the process of teaching and learning English language? Teachers make use of different methods based upon the learning situations and one of them could be a flipped approach. The researchers tried to take advantage of this method as an effective teaching practice in the situation of QOVID-

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[1] alirezafardinaf@gmail.com

[2] nedafatehi@yahoo.com

[3] massoud_taj@yahoo.com

19 pandemic, because it had specific attributes which could adapt and manage this problem. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced educational centers to perform online learning, demanding lecturers to create innovative e-learning methods and learners to be ready to adapt and show high interest in learning and, therefore, it brought about changes in teaching methods (Prasetyo, Nurtjahjanti and Ardhiani 2021). Since teachers are not able to use traditional, lecturing, and/or face to face methods in teaching in life-threatening situations, then other practical solutions should be applied. To solve the problem, some changes should be applied to current teaching methods and approaches so that to enhance the educational capabilities. Accordingly, flipped classes were used to adapt the stated circumstances and the objective of the study was to explore the effectiveness of flipped strategy on the reading comprehension and grammar learning of the participants. Within this model, the significance of the study is potential contributions it can make to the fields of online teaching, distance teaching, language proficiency instruction, autonomous teaching and learning, and EFL teaching methods. Similarly, it can generate significant supports to finding practical ways to teach learners with effective teaching approaches in decisive situations like QOVID-19 pandemic conditions. Moreover, it can add substantial experiences to the literature.

In investigating the effectiveness of flipped learning, some scholars employed the issue from different stances. Some more recent studies reviewed on the associated subject. In this relation, some studies reported positive and while other investigations informed negative association between flipped model and EFL learning strategies. Additionally, an issue worth reflection in reviewing the flipped learning was that the increasing trend in the number of proponents of flipped learning and educators showed the positive effectiveness of flipped instruction on EFL learning (Safiyeh and Farrah 2020). On the other hand, some reviewers claimed that there was little evidence for the effectiveness of the method. For instance, Evans et al. (2019) claim that the systematic review of the effects of the flipped classroom approach for the education of health professions learners did not reveal compelling evidence for the effectiveness of the method in improving academic outcomes above that of traditional classroom approaches (Evans et al. 2019). Some other researchers believe in a very little indication of effectiveness (Abeysekera and Dawson 2015). Some research has shown that a flipped classroom does not contribute to higher learning improvements (Jensen, Kummer and Godoy 2015). An early review noted that academic improvement was sometimes accompanied by negative student attitudes (O'Flaherty and Phillips 2015). The results of the aforementioned studies touching the effectiveness of flipped instruction on learning in different fields including EFL learning were not compatible (Moranski and Kim 2016). The other side of problem was scarcity of research on

flipped instruction (Kvashnina and Martynko 2016), at least in the context of Iran. In this research parsimony, the researchers found the volume of studies on reading comprehension and grammar were few. In spite of the fact that grammar learning and reading comprehension are two important and inseparable aspects of EFL learning, which are challenging and complex for many learners.

Consequently, three aspects considered in the literature gap: (1) the adaptation and management of a situation that is compatible with COVID-19 pandemic circumstances for distance/ online teaching. (2) the various stances towards the use of flipped learning either positive or negative which shows deficiencies in the literature and (3) the research parsimony around flipped method studies on grammar learning and reading comprehension especially in Iran. Therefore, more tightly controlled and further studies are necessary to clarify the effectiveness and examine the correlation between flipped approaches and learning a language. In seeking to fill the gap, this study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. Does flipped instruction significantly impact the Iranian intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension?
2. Does flipped instruction significantly impact the Iranian intermediate EFL learners' grammar learning?

2. Literature Review
2.1. Flipped Learning Approach

The main perception of the flipped learning tactic is to involve students as much as possible in their learning both inside and outside the classroom. In the following text, flipped model has simply been depicted to follow the definitions, capabilities, and importance of the selected procedure. Meanwhile, in continuation, the related variables and literature have illustrated. The first and most important term reviewed in the literature was flipped learning. What is flipped learning? The succeeding definition pave the road. While often defined simplistically as "school work at home and home work at school," Flipped Learning is an approach that allows teachers to implement a methodology, or various methodologies, in their classrooms and it has four pillars of F-L-I-P which are flexible environment (different settings), learning culture (learner-centered opportunities), intentional content (eclectic materials), professional educator (prominent roles of reflective teachers) (Aaron 2014). Further to this definition, flipped learning is a pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in

the subject matter (Talbert 2017). Basically, flipped learning is a methodology that helps teachers to provide materials and/or tasks to be accomplished by learners at home or outside of class. To this end, instructors make use of different technologies to develop their teaching process. Throughout the past years, there has been considerable attention on the use of educational technology in the teaching of languages.

2.2. Flipped Learning Literature

The utilization of technology in English language learning and teaching dates back to early 1970s and since then, it has found its way into the field rapidly (Elyasi and Pourkalhor 2014). Technology is widely used in the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) (Son 2018). Flipped learning represents a model of learning wherein students first learn the online course materials, then, they ask their questions from their teacher to be answered in the guided discussion and experiments in the class time. Among the influential factors on flipped instruction, the internet and information technology can be mentioned (Lin and Chen 2016). In flipped instruction, teachers are no longer considered as knowledge providers, but they become learning process facilitator and coordinator (Bauer-Ramazani et al. 2016). Similarly, students are not receivers of knowledge but they themselves initiate learning process (Kvashnina and Martynko 2016). The rationale behind flipped instruction is motivating and engaging students to be more interactive and autonomous through providing them with new information outside of class context and directing them towards higher level cognitive learning by the teacher in class (Kvashnina and Martynko 2016).

On the corresponding idea, Lin and Chen 2016 investigated whether flipped classroom impacts the learning effectiveness, taking the mediating role of learning satisfaction into account. Moreover, it was indicated that the instructors and students perceive that learning effectiveness was positively influenced by flipped learning. As the third finding, learning satisfaction mediated the effect of flipped learning on teaching effectiveness. Another related review was understanding four skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing which were of paramount importance in English language instruction especially in flipped model. Consequently, instruction in the form of integration of skills certainly contributes to language Proficiency. One of the supreme approaches in this trajectory is using multimedia interactive technology in a virtual environment. Erbil (2020) acknowledged that in the flipped classroom method, which is accepted as one of the blended learning approaches, the traditional teaching process takes place outside of the classroom through videos. Activities, projects, and homework related to upper-level cognitive field steps were carried out during classroom time. Research and interest in the flipped classroom were increasing

steadily. Employing a cooperative learning method was suggested for using class time in the flipped classroom method. However, there has not been sufficient research on the implemented results of those suggestions. Moreover, there was no clear roadmap on how to incorporate cooperative learning methods into the flipped classroom. This research reviewed theoretical infrastructures of flipped classroom and cooperative learning methods according to the Vygotsky theory and makes various suggestions for implementation and implementers.

The examinations showed and suggested that researcher take advantage of flipped learning in different settings with the intention of solving educational problems or at least trying a new method in the area of diverse teaching environments. Therefore, the evidence showed that various studies with different categories and subjects tested and performed in this arena. The current study has also preferred another zone and category in the examination of flipped learning construction. Distance/online learning, language proficiency, multimedia interactive technology, and virtual environment can be the components of Flipped learning methodology which have been considered separately in the reviewed literature. Although learning strategies such as multimedia interactive technologies and virtual environments may include some pitfalls, they definitely work in many critical and sensitive situations. When instructors encounter a crucial situation like COVID-19, they are forced and are being asked to change the technique and method they teach. Teachers may independently make use of different strategies and they unquestionably experience different policies such as multimedia instruction and virtual simulations or they are being forced by the administrators to use a specific media or software during instruction. Consequently, all these choices may lead to a convenient and flexible learning. The present study is different from other research for the mentioned reasons and aims to explore what can contribute to a practical teaching method such as flipped learning. The reviewed literature proposed most research was on the favor of the effectiveness of the flipped learning strategies. In addition, there were just few research on the in investigation of flipped learning and reading comprehension and grammar learning. The examinations suggested there is a possibility for further investigation.

3. Method
3.1. Design

Michigan English Test (MET) (Arbor 2021) was used to be a basis for assessments. A quasi-experimental pre-test post-test control group design was employed in this study (Ary et al. 2018). The settings, participants, sampling, instruments, procedures, data collection, and statistical analyses for the study are all demonstrated in the next

sections. Concerning to the presented items, an overview of the research methodologies presented to reveal the apparent construction and arrangements of the investigation.

3.2. Area of the Study

As the sample of the study, two intermediate EFL classes of male learners (each consisting of 35 learners) were conveniently selected from a language institute in Kerman, Iran. Then, their homogeneity was checked through the Quick Placement Test (QPT). As a result of running the test, 10 learners were excluded from the study. The mean age of the participants was 22. The two classes were randomly assigned to two groups namely, experimental group (N= 30) and control group (N= 30).

3.3. Subjects and Sampling

The participants of the study, 60 Iranian intermediate EFL learners from a language institute in Kerman, Iran, were recruited based on convenience sampling in the form of two intact classes. Then, to conduct randomization, the two classes were randomly assigned to two groups namely, flipping group and control group. Next, the two groups were exposed to 14 treatment sessions in which reading comprehension and grammar were taught to the flipping group through explicit flipped instruction and to the control group through non-flipped mainstream instruction used in the institute.

3.4. Instruments

Three instruments were applied to collect the required data: The Quick Placement Test (QPT), Michigan test of grammar, and Michigan test of reading Appendix 1. The standardized Quick Placement Test (QPT), developed and validated by Oxford University Press and the Cambridge (ESOL) Examination Syndicate, was utilized to check the homogeneity of the participants in terms of their English language proficiency. It consists of 60 multiple-choice items on grammar, vocabulary and cloze test items. The Michigan test of grammar includes 40 multiple choice items which are used to examine the participants' knowledge of grammar. The test consists of sentences with blanks, each followed by three options. In the continuation of the process, 20 items were randomly selected and used as the pre-test, and the remaining 20 items were taken as the post-test as to find out the learning progress. The obtained scores on each test, which ranged from 0 to 20, showed the participants' grammatical knowledge after the implementing the flipped instruction. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability of the test was 0.81. This test was used as the pre-test and post-test to measure the participants' grammar learning. The Michigan test of reading, which includes 20 multiple choice items, was used to examine the participants' reading comprehension. This section of the test consists of four passages each followed by five multiple choice questions which

learners were asked to answer. The obtained scores on this test, which ranged from 0 to 20, showed the participants' reading comprehension ability after the execution of flipped strategies. The reliability of the test was 0.74.

3.5. Data Collection and Procedure

Data collected from different sources such as libraries, web sites, articles, and the like. Then the required sample selected based on the information gathered. Next, the sample divided into two groups, experimental and control, and they were exposed to 14 treatment sessions in which reading comprehension and grammar were taught to the flipping group through explicit flipped instruction and to the control group through non-flipped mainstream instruction routinely used in the institute. In this construction, data gathering and analysis conducted based upon a quasi-experimental approach using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 21. The statistical analysis with normality test, descriptive statistics, independent samples t-test, and other pertinent tests implemented in order to determine the desired conclusions. The investigation intended to find out participants' learning using flipped learning strategy.

As the first step of data collection, the sample selection and randomized assignment of the sample into two groups (i.e., experimental group and control group) were done, observing research ethics by ensuring the sample about anonymity and confidentiality of their personal information. Next, the homogeneity of the selected sample was checked in terms of English language proficiency through QPT. Then, Michigan test of grammar, and Michigan test of reading were run in the two groups as the pre-test in 20 minutes in two separate days for the convenience of the participants. The next step involved participation of the two groups in 14 instructional sessions so as to be prepared for the pre-test and post-test assessments. These instructions contained English reading comprehension and grammar based on the content of Top-Notch book which is already worked in the institute wherein the study was conducted. During the sessions, the experimental group was provided with flipped instruction. To be more specific, the researcher as the teacher of the group, prepared video-recorded lectures on the reading comprehension and grammar content of Top-Notch book and sent them to the students before the classes. Also, included in video-recorded files, some demonstrations were shown in which the teacher taught the students how to answer reading comprehension items and how to use grammatical rules when answering the questions in separate assessment sessions.

The researcher made some PowerPoint files containing instructions on reading comprehension and grammatical points and distributed them among the experimental

group before the classes. Indeed, the learners watched and read the received files before coming to the classes. During the assessments and based on the instruments, the researcher checked the students' feedback on what they watched and read and what they learned from the files. Moreover, the participants were guided on the test outcomes and received feedback on the problems they had. The feedbacks were the attitudes that diverse raters (authors) provided on the test results. Contributors were expected to recover their tasks and tests in future examinations. The author/teacher used different Michigan English Tests all through his classes that their reliability has authenticated by the university of Michigan.

Conversely, the control group just enjoyed the mainstream instruction on English reading comprehension and grammar. That is, in the class sessions, to provide the students with the placebo, the teacher taught reading comprehension through the mainstream method by reading the texts, translating them into Persian sentence by sentence, and asking the students to answer the questions posed after each text. In the case of grammar, the grammatical rules covered in Top-Notch book were taught deductively in the control group. Ten days after the end of the treatment period, Michigan test of grammar, and Michigan test of reading were run in the two groups as the post-test in 20 minutes within two separate days. The tests were graded and collected from different Michigan English Tests similar to the sample test in Appendix 1 and finally, the results were gathered and analyzed.

4. Results

The assessment was based of Michigan English Test (MET) (Arbor 2021). The treatment or experimental group received the assessment battery. However, both experimental and control groups were probated for not being familiar with the flipped learning method so that the unwanted effects on results be omitted. Then, the tests were conducted both for reading comprehension and grammar. To assess the participants' reading comprehension and grammar knowledge a pre-test and post-test performed. The grammar section contained 20 items with four options. An incomplete sentence is followed by a choice of four words or phrases to complete it. Participants were asked to read the question which contains one blank and to fill in the blank with one of the four options. The test type was a multiple-choice task. The reading section contained two sets of three thematically passages were each followed by ten questions. Test-takers were asked to read the texts and then answer the items provided.

Subsequently, descriptive statistics was run based upon the gathered data. Data analysis started with normality test which proved the normality of distribution of data. The results of descriptive statistics are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of experimental and control groups on reading comprehension

Group		Pre-test	Post-test
Experimental group	N	30	30
	Mean	9.70	16.33
	Std. Deviation	.40	.83
Control group	N	30	30
	Mean	8.00	10.00
	Std. Deviation	.58	.71

The results in Table 1 showed that the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the reading comprehension pre-test were 9.70 and 8.00 respectively. Moreover, the standard deviation scores of the experimental and control groups in the reading comprehension pre-test were .40 and .58. Additionally, as seen in Table 1, the experimental and control groups got the mean scores of 16.33 and 10.00 in the reading comprehension post-test. The results indicated that experimental group surpassed the control group. Then, descriptive statistics was run on the grammar learning consequences. Table 2 shows the results of descriptive statistics.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of experimental and control groups on grammar

Group		Pre-test	Post-test
Experimental group	N	30	30
	Mean	8.90	17.33
	Std. Deviation	.36	.55
Control group	N	30	30
	Mean	7.30	12.90
	Std. Deviation	.30	.41

As indicated in Table 2, the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the grammar pre-test were 8.90 and 7.30 respectively. The standard deviation values in the same test were .36 and .30 respectively. Moreover, the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the grammar post-test were 17.33 and 12.90 respectively. In addition, the standard deviation values of the experimental and control groups in the same test were .55 and .41. Then, at the inferential level, to compare the two groups' mean scores in the pre-test and post-test of reading comprehension and

grammar, four independent samples t-tests were run and the results have shown in Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6. Table 3 shows the results of independent samples t-test for the reading comprehension pre-test.

Table 3. Results of independent samples t-test for the reading comprehension pre-test

	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	.08	.64	.33	1	.52	.15

As demonstrated in Table 3, the difference between the experimental and control groups in the reading comprehension pre-test not significant (t= .33, p>.05). In other words, there was not a significant difference between the two groups in terms of their reading comprehension in the pre-test. Next, another independent samples t-test was run to compare the two groups' reading comprehension in the post-test. Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4. Results of independent samples t-test for reading comprehension in the post-test

	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	42.55	.01	5.70	1	.00	2.50

As indicated in Table 4, there was a significant difference between the two groups (t= 5.70, p <.05) in the reading comprehension post-test. Therefore, flipped instruction had a significant effect on EFL learners' reading comprehension. Next, to compare the two groups' grammar pre-test and post-test scores, two independent samples t-tests were run. Table 5 shows the results of independent samples t-test for the grammar pre-test.

Table 5. Results of independent samples t-test for the grammar pre-test

	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	.16	.38	.14	1	.29	.13

As shown in Table 5, the difference between the grammar pre-test mean scores was not significant (t= .14, p>.05). In other words, no significant difference was there between the two groups' grammar scores in the pre-test. Then, to compare the two groups' grammar scores in the post-test, another independent samples t-test was run. Table 6 shows the results.

Table 6. Results of independent samples t-test for the grammar post-test

	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	63.00	.00	1.00	1	.00	.20

Table 6 shows that there was a significant difference between the two groups (t= 21.00, p <.05) in their grammar scores in the post-test. Therefore, flipped instruction had a significant effect on EFL learners' grammar learning; consequently, experimental group.

5. Discussion

The purpose of the study was to explore the effectiveness of flipped approach on the reading comprehension and grammar in the teaching and learning settings. On that account, selected participants were exposed to a flipped instruction method. In the next pace, different assessments were applied to find out the effectiveness of the flipped approach in the process of teaching EFL. In this method, three diverse instruments were used including Quick Placement Test (QPT), Michigan test of grammar, Michigan test of reading. In this process, two research questions put forward in this study. Instructions and assessments were carried out to achieve a new experience. The findings revealed that the stated strategy had an enhanced performance. Investigations on the first research question 'Does flipped instruction significantly impact the Iranian intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension?' displayed that flipped instruction significantly affect the Iranian intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension. To answer the second research question, which dealt with the effect of flipped instruction on grammar learning, the outcomes revealed that Iranian intermediate EFL learners who experience flipped learning surpassed those who had a non-flipped mainstream instruction.

Consistent with this study, Abaeian and Samadi (2016) investigated the effect of the flipped classroom on reading comprehension performance of Iranian EFL learners and reported the significant impact of flipped instruction on the learners' reading

comprehension. Thaichay and Sitthitikul (2016) investigated the effects of flipped classroom instruction on language accuracy and active learning environment. Also implicitly in line with the findings of the present study, Al-Harbi 2015, Al-Zahrani 2015, Al-Harbi and Alshumaimeri 2016, Ekmekci 2017, Chen et al. 2017, Hung 2017, Amiryousefi 2019, Haghighi et al. 2019, Wafa'A and Altakhaineh 2019, and Alsmari 2020 investigated the effect of flipped classroom on EFL learners' English achievement and showed a positive effect of flipped classroom in this regard. In justifying the findings, it can be argued that since flipped instruction stimulates higher order cognitive processes, critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making, this makes EFL learners more motivated to learn and more reflective on their learning (Bishop and Verleger 2013). This may in turn lead to more engagement and participation among learners, which finally can contribute to higher English achievement (Lai and Hwang 2016).

Another point worth mentioning in justifying the effectiveness of flipped instruction on EFL learners' reading comprehension and grammar learning is that in flipped classrooms, instead of devoting a high amount of class time to teacher lectures, much time is passed on the communicative use of language, discussion and negotiation (Davies, Dean and Ball 2013). This trend increases learner agency in the classroom, whose role in English learning has been repeatedly proved in the literature (Luo 2019). Another possible justification for the findings is that flipped instruction encourages EFL learners' cooperation and collaboration in language learning, and helps them become self-directed learners with high amount of autonomy and independence (Chau and Cheng 2010). Khadjieva and Khadjikhanova 2019 also referred to this potential of flipped instruction. Moreover, as put forth by Jan, Soomro and Ahmad 2017 flipped instruction is of the capability to increase EFL learners' self-esteem which plays a significant role in language learning. Last but not least, the researchers believe that when learners' self-esteem and motivation increase as a consequence of being exposed to flipped instruction, consequently, their anxiety is decreased as a debilitating factor in English learning. This in turn can lead to EFL learners' higher English achievement including reading comprehension and grammatical knowledge.

6. Conclusion

The literature generally supports the notion that the possibility of implementing flipped learning in an EFL English reading comprehension and grammar can contribute to the learning situation. Attained findings similarly reinforced the flipping method action plan which implemented throughout this investigation. The facts demonstrated that the experimental and control groups acquired the mean scores of

16.33 and 10.00 in the reading comprehension post-test. Thus, the values indicated that experimental group surpassed the control group. However, the difference between the experimental and control groups in the reading comprehension pre-test was not significant (t= .33, p>.05), and here, there was a balance between the two groups. In other words, there was not a significant difference between the two groups in terms of their reading comprehension in the pre-test. Based upon another result, the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the grammar post-test were 17.33 and 12.90 respectively, and again, the results signified the preference of flipped instruction to the non-flipped learning method. In consistent with other findings, there was a significant difference between the two groups (t= 5.70, p <.05) in the reading comprehension post-test. Therefore, flipped instruction had a significant effect on EFL learners' reading comprehension. All in all, the investigation proved the practicality of the flipped instruction in the area of teaching and learning an EFL.

According to the obtained results, some concluding remarks can be proposed. First, it can be concluded that English teachers should attempt to use flipped instruction in teaching reading comprehension and grammar. Second, the abovementioned notion suggested that English teachers should try to make majority of learners' perceptions toward flipped instruction positive so that they can benefit more from flipped instruction in reading comprehension and grammar classes. Third, this conclusion is made that authorities in Iran can take appropriate measures to provide suitable conditions for implementation of flipped instruction, at least in teaching reading comprehension and grammar. Generally speaking, it can be interpreted that reading comprehension and grammar knowledge are under the significant impact of flipped instruction. Accordingly, using this instruction method would be helpful in reducing the problems of EFL learners in relation with reading comprehension and grammar learning. However, using flipped instruction in the social-cultural context of Iran requires generating suitable substrates which pave the path for the use of flipped instruction and similar instructional methods. Finally, it should be proclaimed that this study suffered from some limitations which may overshadow the validity of the findings. To solve this problem, future researchers are recommended to replicate the present study with a more diverse and larger sample in terms of age and gender, a broader setting, and so forth.

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