Original Papers

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Factors Influencing the Hope Level of Iranian English Major Students

Abstract: This study aimed to measure the hope level of Iranian English-major students and also to find out if their gender, academic degree, years spent in a program, and GPA were associated with their hope level. To reach these aims, the Integrative Hope Scale developed by Sharpe, McElheran, and Whelton (2017) was modified, checked for validity, and piloted. Then, it was distributed among 206 English-major students doing their BA, MA, and PhD in different universities of Iran, chosen through random and snowball sampling. The analysis of the data through non-parametric tests showed that although undergraduate and postgraduate students enjoyed a higher level of hope, there was no significant difference in the students' hope level based on their academic degree. Furthermore, no significant relationship was found between students' levels of hope, on the one hand, and their GPA and the number of years spent in a program, on the other hand. However, there was a significant difference between male and female students, with males having a higher level of hope.

Keywords: *academic hope, agent, English-major, hope, Iranian*

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, hope has been an influential concept in mythology, philosophy, and religion. In the 1950s, it was verified as an integral part of psychiatry urging people to initiate curative changes, to learn, and to move toward personal well-being (Schrank et al., 2012). It is among the top twenty-four main character features since it demonstrates the best possible outcome for people's expectations and the actions to achieve it (Peterson & Seligman, 2004 as cited in Yotsidi, Pagoulatou, Kyriazos, & Stalikas, 2018). It has recently been identified as one of the determining elements of positive psychology. Hope informs individuals of upcoming events, releases energy, provides people with meaningful choices to increase their expectations of positive outcomes, and this activates thoughts and emotions. Besides, hope plays a central role in recovery from mental diseases, either as a trigger or maintaining factor of the recovery process (Schrank et al, 2012). To put it in a nutshell, a hopeful person is happier, more optimistic, and less anxious and depressed.

Hope theory was first introduced by Snyder (1999), an American expert in positive psychology. In his theory, Snyder views hope as cognitive skill and a mechanism in psychotherapy helping people overcome the lack of motivation to achieve or set realistic goals. Later, Herth (1992) introduced another theory for hope, which considers hope necessary for initiating and maintaining actions toward goal attainment. He believed that since a person most probably does not have direct control over the future, establishing realistic goals in this situation is difficult. However, the boundaries between these two theories were not so clear-cut. Nonetheless, they resulted in defining hope from two different views. From the emotion-based point of view, hope is an emotion that occurs when people focus on an important future outcome. This emotion, although, leads to a strong desire for creating conditions different from the current ones, allows little control over the outcomes, and makes people unable to take action to achieve the goals (Barzegar et al., 2018; Sun & Shek, 2012). From the cognitive motivation-based view, hope is not considered an emotion but a dynamic and useful motivational condition that consists of an interactively derived sense of successful goal-oriented energy and planning which is done to meet objectives (Snyder et al., 2002; Yotsidi et al., 2018).

Snyder's hope theory (1999) consists of three main cognitive components: Goals, agency, and pathways (Barzegar et al., 2018; Sun & Shek, 2012). Described as anchors of hope, *goals* are worthy elements that provide

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guidance and an ending for hopeful thinking. *Agency* refers to the motivation and the perceived capacity for undertaking the routes towards targeted goals (Yotsidi et al., 2018; Hanson, 2009). *Pathways* reflect the instruments and methods to reach one's objectives and entail the thoughts of creating practical ways to meet the desired goals. As the goals progress toward goal attainment, pathways become increasingly refined and precise (Snyder et al., 2002). *Barrier*, which can be considered as the fourth component of hope, blocks our achievement of the goals. While facing a barrier, people usually give up or employ appropriate pathway thoughts to create a new path.

The Adult Dispositional Hope Scale developed by Snyder, et al. (1991) was the first measurement tool designed to evaluate hope in different classes of individuals e.g., undergraduate students, patients needing psychological treatment, and even war veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. The most recently developed hope scale, the Revised Domain-Specific Hope Scale, measures hope in nine different life areas i.e., family life, work, social-peer, romantic relationships, physical and psychosocial health, religion, academics, and sports. However, the scale that may interest educational activists the most is the Academic Hope Scale. This is the point where hope finds its way into learning. Since intelligence is no longer the only determinant of students' achievements (Snyder et al., 2002), positive psychology research has been carried out in schools and universities to complement learners and teachers' experiences with positive topics such as "hope, courage, well-being, optimism, creativity, happiness, resilience, strengths, wisdom, health and laughter with the aim of enhancing learners' linguistic progress" (Dewaele, et al., 2019, p. 2).

Academic hope, which explains how students use the educational pathways, agent, and motivation to achieve the educational goals, is one of the essential factors that happen to have a dramatic impact on learning. It is, however, less addressed among psychological factors (Ghadampour, et al., 2018; Kali Soyer & Kirikkanat, 2019). If academic achievement is assumed to be a goal, hope is an adaptive goal-specific behavior that leads to a positive outcome of those achievements (Day et al., 2010). Without hope, even talented students may fail to attain their potential levels, lower their academic expectations, and not go to college. These 'lost talent' students are at a distinct disadvantage in today's difficult job market (Snyder et al., 2002). Whereas, students with high hope level will not be disappointed easily even if they do not experience immediate success. A positive relationship was found between hope and self-efficacy, self-esteem, empowerment, and social support (Schrank et al., 2012) that may enable students to meet the increased requirements of the school environment; set appropriate goals; find the means to achieve these goals, and prepare to achieve them. In a study conducted by Day et al (2010), hope predicted objective academic achievement above intelligence, personality, and previous academic achievement. Examining the hope level among university students is more needed because, on the one hand, moving to college may trigger extended hope for better opportunities in a new academic environment (Rosenstreich et al., 2015) and on the other hand, college students, besides their commitments and responsibilities for the family while doing undergraduate education, are forced to manage several stressful situations and academic demands (e.g., class assignments, examinations, and evaluations) that may let them down and lead to burnout . Therefore, it is important to understand the factors that help students move on and follow their educational goals (Snyder et al., 2002).

A large body of research has focused on the relationship between hope and high school students' academic achievements or children and elementary school students. There exist other studies which addressed college and university students' academic hope (Day et al., 2010; Ebrahimi, Sabaghian, & Abolghasemi, 2011; Ghadampour et al., 2018; Kali Soyer & Kirikkanat, 2019; Rosenstreich, et al., 2015). Most of these studies focused just on undergraduate students and ignored to compare the hope level of these students from freshman to senior or compare their hope level with those of postgraduate students. Among the studies though, Kali Soyer and Kirikkanat (2019) investigated if constructs like hope, academic self-efficacy, and goal orientations would change due to the demographic variables i.e., gender, age, and class level. Ghadampour et al. (2018) explored the roles that academic hope and emotional support play in predicting the academic well-being of students in medical fields (both male and female). The researchers have also investigated the gender differences concerning the level of hope, but they could not find any significant differences. Dewaele et al. (2019) conducted a review study on the development of positive psychology, not hope in particular, in foreign Language teaching. However, none of the above-mentioned studies have focused on English-major university students of different genders and the number of years spent in a program.

Due to the gaps observed in the studies concerning academic hope such as lack of examining hope among English major students, comparing the hope level of undergraduates with postgraduate students, making a comparison between students of different levels, or even students of different universities, the current study seeks to examine the hope level among English-major students according to their: 1) the number of years spent in a program (from the first year to the fourth year); 2) academic degree (from undergraduate to postgraduate students); 3) gender; and 4) GPA. Thus, the research questions are:

Research Question One: Is there any significant difference between levels of hope of Iranian English-major students with regard to the number of years they spent in a program?

Research Question Two: Is there any significant difference between levels of hope of Iranian English-major students with regard to their academic degree?

Research Question Three: Is there any significant difference between levels of hope of Iranian English-major students with regard to their gender?

Research Question Four: Is there any significant relationship between levels of hope of Iranian English-major students and their GPA?

The results of this study fills the research gap mentioned above regarding hope and the possible factors affecting this important varible in the Iranian educational setting. Since this is the first study conducted in this area in the Iranian universities and gathers data from several universities with participants coming from different educational and perosnal backgrounds, the results of the study gives future researchers and currept university teachers a better understanding of the hope level among students. The results can also inform university authorities, specially those responsible for the students' affairs, of the possible problems students encounter in universities and guide them in planning and organizing extra curriculuar activities to bring hope to students' lives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical framework

Hope has been defined, operationalized and as a result measured in several different ways in education and psychology research studies. However, all the researchers have followed either a unidimensional approach or a multi-dimensional approach (Sharpe, McElheran, & Whelton, 2017). Several researchers contend that hope is a unidi-mensional concept, either a cognition or an emotion (Breznitz, 1989; Lazarus, 1999). One of the most widely used and mostly researched theories following this approach is Snyder's Hope Theory (1995), which initially considered hope as a cognitive process, but emotion was included in this theory later. On the other hand, Farran, Herth and Popovich (1995), Scioli, Ricci, Nyugen, and Scioli (2010), and Schrank, Woppmann, Sibitz, and Lauber (2011) believed that hope is a multidimensional concept, consisting of several factors.

Following a multidimensional approach, Schrank, Woppmann, Sibitz, and Lauber (2011) combined all the existing hope scales at that time and produced a 60-item bank. Then, they ran repeated factor analyses on the responses of 489 subjects in Australia and developed a 23-item scale called, Integrative Hope Scale, enjoying a high reliability index of 0.92. This scale was the main basis of the questionnaire used in the current study. This scale consisted of four factors, namely, trust and confidence, lack of perspective, positive future orientations, and social relationships and personal value.

This four-factor model was later compared with a one-factor model by Schrank, et al (2012), and the four-factor model was described as moderate. Although hope was shown to be multidimensional in nature, the researchers using the Integrative Hope Scale have mostly reported only the total score of the participants, neglecting the scores of the subscales (e.g. Akin & Akin, 2014; Jaeger, Konrad, Rueegg, & Rabenschlag, 2013; Rumpold et al., 2016; Schrank, Amering, Hay, Weber & Sibitz, 2014; Saricam, 2015; Schrank et al., 2016; Schur et al., 2014; Schur et al., 2015; Wciorka, Switaj, & Anczewska, 2014).

To resolve this issue, Sharpe, McElheran, and Whelton (2017) compared the efficacy of three different form of HIS; one-factor model, oblique model, higher order model, and bifactor models. They strongly suggested future researchers use the total score of Integrative Hope Scale, and if need be report the score for the Lack of Perspective subscale. Following this approach, the current study just focused on the total score of the Iranian students and did not report the score for its subscales. The researcher decided to do so since this was of the first and few studies done in this area, and the researchers did not aim to focus on the details or the subscales of hope.

Related studies

Thus far, several studies have been done on hope regarding learning and education, and they have mostly focused on evaluating the correlation between hope and academic achievements of students in high school, college, or university (Chen, Huebner, & Tian, 2020; Day et al., 2010; Hojati & Abbasi, 2013; Kali Soyer & Kirikkanat, 2019; Mohammadipour & Rahmati, 2016; Rosenstreich, et al., 2015; Snyder, et al., 2002; Van Ryzin, 2011). Almost all these studies indicated that hope displayed a positive association with academic successes. In the most recent study, Chen, Huebner, and Tian (2020) focused on elementary students and used behavioral engagement as a mediating variable between students' hope and their academic achievement. They chose this technique since they believed that hope is a psychological construct that might be ignored by teachers easily. Participants were 322 third-graders, 316 fourth graders, and 311 fifth graders. The results indicated that hope, behavioral engagement, and academic achievement were all significantly related, and the non-significant difference between them suggested that the model did not vary by grade level.

In another recent research, Wurdinger, Newell, and Kim, (2020) determined variations among math, reading, self-direction, collaboration, and hope scores in eleven schools with students attending a project-based learning program that lasted two years. Then, they measured the correlation among these variables in order to determine correlational relationships between two variables at a time. (e.g., hope and math, hope and reading, hope and self-direction, hope and collaboration, and so on). Results revealed that growth in all five variables during two years and the corresponding changes in scores were statistically significant. Moreover, the results showed that the *r* values for all correlations except hope and reading were statistically significant.

There are a few studies conducted in this area in Iran, but focusing on areas or fields different from this study. Ebrahimi, Sabaghian, and Abolghasempoor (2011) inves-tigated the relationship between hope and academic achievement of 381 Iranian university students studying humanities, engineering, and basic sciences. They used " the Adults Dispositional Hope Scale" for data collection and chose these participants through stratified random

sampling. They came to the conclusion that there was a positive relationship between hope and academic achievement, hope and academic fields, and hope and academic degree. They also found that educational hope, as one of the six subaspects of hope had the highest relationship with academic success, which was based on students' GPA like the current study. Finally, participants doing their education in arts and humanities sciences and MA students were the most hopeful students.

Alizadeh Aghdam (2013) investigated the hope level among 403 Iranian university students and the reasons affecting it, and the participants were chosen through cluster sampling at the University of Tabriz. They found no significant difference between the hope levels of boys and girls and concluded that Associate degree and PhD students were the most hopeful students. They also found that religiosity and hope level were positively related, and social and cultural capital influence the hope level of students to a great extent.

Mohammadipour and Rahmati (2016) predicted the Iranian high school students' burnout based on social adjustment, academic procrastination, and academic hope. Participants were 350 female high school students. An academic hope questionnaire was employed to assess students' hope levels. The results showed statistically significant correlations between burnout scores and academic hope scores. Also, the findings indicated that students' burnout was predicted by social adjustment, academic procrastination, and academic hope.

Ghadampour et al. (2018) conducted research on the role of academic hope and perceived emotional support in predicting the academic well-being of Iranian medical students. The participants were 352 students of Medical Sciences. The findings showed that among variables like hope to get opportunities, hope to acquire life skills, hope for the benefits of university, hope for earning merits, academic hope, emotional support, and mental well-being, there existed a positive and significant correlation between academic hope and emotional support and educational well-being. The emotional support variables, hope to get opportunities, hope for the benefits of university, and hope for earning merits predicted variance of educational well-being respectively. The researchers found significant differences between genders regarding perceived emotional support, the difference between male and female students in the amount of their academic hope was not remarkable, though.

Rosenstreich et al. (2015) compared the development of hope, loneliness, and optimism among students with and without learning disabilities after participation in a single-session hope workshop and after the first month of college. Participants were 335 first-year undergraduate students. The State Hope Scale was used to assess levels of hope. Students completed questionnaires three times i.e., just before the workshop (first week in college), immediately following the workshop, and finally one month after the workshop ended. After participating in a single-session hope workshop, both groups reported increased hope and optimism, as well as a lower degree of loneliness.

A comparison of hope scores in the no-learning disabilities group showed a significant increase in hope scores from immediately before the workshop to immediately after the workshop, with gains remaining for a month. In the learning disabilities group, the comparison of hope immediately before the workshop and after a month did not yield significant differences.

Kali Soyer and Kirikkanat (2019) investigated if university students' learning approaches (deep or surface approaches) were influenced by their achievement goal orientations, academic self-efficacy, and hope. Furthermore, they aimed to see if demographic variables like gender, age, and class level impacted these psychological constructs considerably. The class level included two categories: junior and senior. About 300 undergraduates from two different universities participated in the study. Using Dispositional Hope Scale for the data collection, the researchers concluded that there were no significant differences in both hope and academic self-efficacy variables for male and female students. The results also showed that there were no significant differences in the scores of learning, performance-approach, performance-avoidance, goal predispositions, academic self-efficacy, hope, considering the class levels. Moreover, the researchers investigated if degrees of achievement goal orientations varied in accordance with the students' age groups. Results showed that there was a significant difference in the levels of learning goal orientation for 20-22 aged and 23-25 aged groups. Younger students showed higher levels in learning goals than older ones.

Reviewing all the studies discussed above shows that most of the relevant studies have been done in colleges and universities where the hope level among students is less predictable. However, most of the studies at this level focused solely on a particular group of students, for instance, newly admitted college freshmen (Snyder et al., 2002), students with learning disabilities (Hojati & Abbasi, 2013; Rosenstreich et al., 2015), students of medical science (Ghadampour et al., 2018), social and natural sciences, or volunteered university undergraduate students from different ethnicities (Day et al., 2010). Furthermore, there exists little research is done on this topic in Iranian universities (Ghadampour et al., 2018; Rahpeima, Barani, & Khormaee, 2020), thus this study aims to fill this gap in the literature.

METHOD

Design

This study is quantitative and non-experimental in data collection and analysis. To be more exact, it is a descriptive, cross-sectional, comparative, and survey research. The data was obtained quantitatively by using an existing but validated and reliable questionnaire. No experimental or control group or any treatments were present. The researchers aimed to measure the levels of hope among EFL students with different demographic features. To this end, students' hope level was considered as the only dependent variable, and variables like the

number of years spent in a program, academic degree, gender, and GPA were considered as independent or predictor variables. The difference between the hope levels of students, which is a continuous variable, with regard to these demographic variables, which were nominal, was determined via comparison. Besides, the relationship between the levels of hope and GPA (both continuous variables) was determined by the correlation coefficient.

Participants

The sample of the study consisted of a total of 206 English-major Students, with 151 students (73.3 %) males and 55 students (26.7 %) females. Some 176 of them (more than 85%) were undergraduate students, 25 ones (12 %) were graduate students, and 5 remaining ones (2.4%) were PhD students. Among undergraduates, 31 students were freshmen, 51 were sophomore, 37 were junior, and 57 were senior. Among graduate students, 8 students were in their first year, 12 were in the second year, 2 were in the third year, and 3 were in their fourth year of education. Among PhD students, 4 students were in their first year and 1 was in the second year of education. These students were doing their TEFL in two different universities of Iran i.e., the Azad University of Esfahan, which is considered a non-state university, and Chabahar Maritime University which is a state university. The educational policies of these two universities are almost the same except that students of Azad University have to pay tuition fees for each semester. The age of the students ranged from 18 to 40 years old.

Instrument

The researchers developed a questionnaire based on the questionnaire translated and validated by Barzegar et al, (2018). Barzegar et al (2018) worked on the hope scale developed by Scharpe, McElheran, and Whelton (2017), a scale for evaluating students' hope level. The reason for choosing this version from among all the other options avaialble was that this version of integrative hope scale was validated and translated into Persian by Iranian researchers Barzegar et al. in 2018, and it was more suitable for the Iranian context. Furthermore, it was piloted with 230 Iranian university students and enjoyed a high reliability index (0.83), and validity of the scale was reported as 0.72. The last reason is since there was no study done on the hope level of Iranian English-major students, the main aim of this study was to investigate the general hope level of these students as a unidimensional variable and to find the effect of or the relationship between hope level and demographic features. Future researchers can delve into the details of categories or aspects of hope, looking for the relationship between these aspects and educational attainment. Having chosen this version, the researchers deleted and paraphrased some of the items and made some statements shorter. Finally, three other statements were added to the list. To make the questionnaire more comprehensible for participants, the researchers asked a PhD in translation studies to translate the new items into Persian and check the translation of

previous items. The researchers then checked the validity of the questionnaire by sending it to five experts in psychology and TEFL. The final version of the questionnaire consisted of four personal questions (i.e., number of years students spent in a program, academic degree, GPA, and gender) and 23 short statements to assess students' hope level. Answering the questions was not optional, and students were required to answer all of the questions. To encourage students to reply honestly and at ease, the researchers persisted that students' answers to the questions will be confidential and would be used only for research purposes. Participants read and answered each statement carefully using a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. If, for instance, for answering this question "I believe that each day has a potential", if they completely disagreed, they would choose option one. If they had no idea, they would choose three. And if they completely agreed, they would select option five. In the end, when they answered all the questions, they hit "submit" to submit the questionnaire. However, it must be mentioned that before the students could see the questions, a text appeared in which the student could accept or reject the invitation. This was done for ethical reasons, and in fact, it was used as the digital consent form.

Data collection procedure

The questionnaire was prepared by Google forms. It is a tool by which people can prepare collect and organize a large number of information and send the created link to the participants, especially during the Coronavirus pandemic when accessing people is difficult. The link of the questionnaire was sent to the participants using e-mail and social media. The participants were members of a group in Telegram including English major undergraduate and graduate students of the Azad University of Esfahan, and graduate and postgraduate students of Chabahar Maritime University who were identified through snowball sampling. The link of the questionnaire was shared with them via e-mail and WhatsApp. All the responses were recorded in the Google Forms database for later analysis.

Data analysis procedure

The results of the study were analyzed using the SPSS statistical package (version 23). The data were downloaded from the Google Form database and transferred into SPSS. Then, the variables and statements of the questionnaire were defined in the Likert scales. Statements were scaled from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), the number of years spent in a program from 1 (first year) to 4 (fourth year), an academic degree from 1 (undergraduate) to 3 (Postgraduates), and gender as 1 (male) and 2 (female). For GPA, no scales were defined since the GPA in the Iranian educational system is a score ranging from 0 to 20, thus considered as a continuous variable. Next, the mean scores of all twenty-three statements were computed, divided by 20, and a new variable called "hope" was created (i.e., the mean score of hope for each participant was computed). The data, then, were checked

for normality assumption. The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the variable of hope was not normally distributed. Thus, non-parametric tests were used for measuring this abnormally distributed variable. The Kruskal Wallis Test was administered for answering first and second research questions, as the researchers tended to compare students' hope concerning the number of years they spent in a program with four levels) and their academic degree (with three levels). In order to answer the third question which compares gender differences with regard to their hope, the Mann-Whitney U test was run. Finally, for investigating the relationship between GPA and hope, which were both continuous variables, Spearman's rank-order correlation was administered.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of demographic features of students and their levels of hope. Those students whose mean scores were between one to two were considered hopeless, fairly hopeful students were those whose mean scores were between two and three. Those students whose mean scores were between three and four were considered as hopeful, and finally, very hopeful students were those scoring between four and five.

As can be seen in the table, with regard to the number of years spent in a program, students of the fourth year were the most hopeful students (f=52, 85.2 %), students of the first and second year were the least hopeful ones. Concerning academic degrees, the sums of hopeful and very hopeful frequencies and percentages showed that undergraduates (81.8%) and postgraduates (80%) were the most hopeful students, while graduate students were the least ones. Besides, the sums of hopeful and very hopeful

students revealed that male students seem to be more hopeful than female ones (94.6% vs. 90%).

Investigating the differences with regard to GPA, the results of Spearman's rank-order correlation showed that there was not any statistically significant correlation between levels of hope and GPA (Table 5). But, the results of table 1 showed that more hopeful students had better GPAs i.e., most of the hopeful (54%) and very hopeful (59.3%) students had GPAs around 15 to 17. Fairy hopeless students had the least GPA (25 %) i.e., below 14.5 while the least percent in this category belongs to very hopeful students.

As mentioned earlier, the data were initially checked for normality assumption and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used as this test is more appropriate for large sample sizes. The results confirmed that the data deviated from a normal distribution and non-parametric tests (i.e., Kruskal-Wallis, Mann-Whitney, and Spearman's rank-order) were used to analyze variables.

The first research question looked for the differences between the hope levels of students with different numbers of years students spent in a program. The Kruskal-Wallis test was run to determine if there was any statistically significant difference between students having spent different numbers of years in university. To be more exact, the researchers aimed to find out if the university context increased or decreased the hope level among students. The results of the test showed that there was not any statistically significant difference between students' number of years spent in a program and their hope level (χ^2 (2) = .126, p = .989). That is, according to Table 1, as the years pass, students become more hopeful (i.e., students in third and fourth years were the most hopeful ones), but the differences were not very significant.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Features and Hope

		Hopeless		Fairly hopeless		Hopeful		Very hopeful		Total
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F
Number of years spent in a program	First year	1	2	3	6	32	74.4	7	16.2	43
	Second year	0	0	5	7	44	69.8	14	22.2	63
	Third year	0	0	2	5	33	84.6	4	10	39
	Fourth year	0	0	2	5	52	85.2	7	11.4	61
Academic degree	Undergraduates	1	2	9	5	144	81.8	22	12.5	176
	Graduates	0	0	3	12	13	52	9	36	25
	Postgraduates	0	0	0	0	4	80	1	20	5
Gender	Males	0	0	8	5	117	77.4	26	17.2	151
	Females	1	2	4	7	44	80	6	10.9	55
GPA	10-12	0	0	0	0	1	0.6	0	0	1
	12.5-14.5	0	0	3	25	27	16.7	3	9.3	33
	15-17	0	0	5	41.6	87	54	19	59.3	111
	17.5-20	1	100	4	33.3	46	28.5	10	31.2	61
Total		1		12		161		32		206

Table 2. Hope Level of Students according to the Number of Years Spent in a Program

	Hope
Chi-Square	.126
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.989
a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
b. Grouping Variable: Level	

Table 3. Differences between Hope Level of Students with Different Academic Degrees

	Hope
Chi-Square	5.228
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.073
a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
b. Grouping Variable: Degree	

Table 4. Differences between Males and Females' Hope Level

	Hope
Mann-Whitney U	3.882E3
Wilcoxon W	5.422E3
Z	-.715
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.474
a. Grouping Variable: Gender	

Table 5. Correlation between Student's GPA and their Hope Level

			Hope
Spearman's rho	GPA	Correlation Coefficient	.031
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.655
		N	206

The second research question looked for the differences between the hope levels of students having different academic degrees (i.e., undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate students). Kruskal-Wallis test was run to determine whether there were any statistically significant differences in this case or not. The results of the test showed that there was not any statistically significant difference between academic degrees and the hope level (χ^2 (2) = 5.228, p = 0.073).

The Mann-Whitney U test was run to compare differences between two groups (i.e. males and females) with regard to the dependent variables (i.e. hope level). Table 4 provides the test statistic, U statistic, and the asymptotic significance (2-tailed) p-value. It can be concluded that males and females were significantly different in their hope levels (U = 3.882E3, p = .474), with males being more hopeful than females according to the statistics mentioned before in Table 1.

For answering the last research question and finding out any relationship between Iranian students' hope level and their GPAs, a correlation test was run, the results of which are presented in Table 5. A Spearman's rank-order correlation shows that although there was a positive relationship between the GPA of the students and their hope level, that is, more hopeful students had better GPAs, this correlation was not statistically significant (r_s(8) = .031, p = .655).

Discussion

The current study investigated the difference between students' levels of hope concerning the number of years they have spent in a program, their academic degree, gender, and GPA. The results showed that students of the last two years were the most hopeful students, whereas the second-year students were the least ones. The results are in line with Wurdinger, Newell, and Kim's (2020) study which also indicated that hope was high in the first-year students. They stated that in the first year, the achievement is usually the largest because students begin to see that college is no longer a usual school, but it is a school that emphasizes autonomy, mastery goal orientation, and support for individual efforts. Moreover, Snyder (2002) and Snyder, et al., (1991) argued that hope correlates surely with superior academic performances e.g., higher semester and overall GPAs for college students. Van Ryzin, (2011) believed that when students gradually gain more perceptions of their school environment, they engage more in learning. This, in turn, changes hope and academic achievement over time. In the same vein, in the current study, the hope level of the students dropped at the beginning by 5%, however, this level increased to 84% and 85% in the third and fourth years. This trend was also repeated with regard to the academic degree, where the hope level decreased from BA to MA level, but experienced a climb in the PhD level. The reason for this disappointment and reduction of hope, as mentioned earlier, might be that college students should gradually take some responsibilities during their education and manage several stressful situations and academic demands that may disappoint them, and partly because most of them have not dealt with strict academic courses before, they lost their interest in English-major that lead to burnout. McCulloch (2006) added that students in the first years of the university may be overly optimistic and their views of academic performance may not be realistic. The result may be a lower end-of-term GPA in the next semesters. A further reason might be that due to the Coronavirus pandemic, freshmen might have been shocked by the

amount of homework and assignment, new methods of teaching, and the assessment procedures applied by university professors. This was exacerbated by the fact that the freshmen students did not even visit the university and did not see their professors face to face this year and did all the registration affairs online. Still, another reason is that the students of last years might be encouraged by the fact that they are going to graduate soon, get accepted at the MA level, or be employed, thus starting a new phase in their academic or personal life. Last, but not the least, is that making progress and observing this progress is much easier at the beginning stages of language learning, but while students reach the intermediate level, they do not notice this progress in language learning, which might be another source of demotivation and lack of hope among English-major students.

Concerning differences between the hope levels of students with different academic degrees, the results of the study illustrated undergraduates and postgraduates were the most hopeful students while graduate students were the least ones. The findings are inconsistent with Kali Soyer and Kirikkanat (2019) and Ebrahimi, Sabaghian, and Abolghasemi (2011). Regarding the fact that under-graduate students indicated higher levels of hope than the other ones, they maintained that undergraduate students are more concerned about having higher GPAs in order to be part of a graduate program as they move forward in their academic pathway. Postgraduate students, on the other hand, are engaged more with project-based learning and research. Project-based learning, according to Wurdinger, Newell, & Kim (2020), allows students to solve problems; be creative in thinking; learn important life skills, e.g., self-direction and collaboration; and work with their hands creating meaningful projects. This process assists creative thinkers and encourages students to learn. It is effective at raising hope scores, life skills, and test scores, but students at this level do not care much about GPA since one of the main factors for getting accepted in PhD exam is research ability and publication record, not mere GPA. Ebrahimi, Sabaghian, and Abolghasemi (2011) found that MA students were more hopeful than BA students, which is opposite to the results in this study. The reason for this difference might be that the participants in that study came from different disciplines, but all the participants came from one major in this study. Still, another reason is that while having a BA through undergraduate studies is essential and enough for finding average employment opportunities in Iran, continuing at the MA level does not offer much more chance of finding a better job. In fact, most Iranian students prefer to find a job after their BA and continue their studies while they are employed and financially independent. This might be due to the fact that the salary of the employees having an MA degree is just 17% higher than those with a BA degree, which cannot encourage students to a great extent to have their MA ("BA or MA?", n.d.). Postgraduate students (in this study, PhD students) are, on the other hand, much more hopeful since they are most likely to find the job and position relevant to their expertise. On the contrary, these results are in line with those of Alizadeh Aghdam (2013), indicating that the lowest level and highest academic degree students were the most hopeful students (Associate degree and PhD students in their study).

The results of the study confirmed that males and females were significantly different in their hope levels, and males showed more hopeful than females. Corrobor-ating this finding, Van Ryzin's (2011) made a comparison between these genders and concluded that girls were much more negatively influenced by the perceived performance goal orientation than boys. Giti Ghoreishi (2009) also found that Iranian last year boy students doing their BA in psychology were more hopeful than girls. In contrast, Kali Soyer and Kirikkanat (2019) believed that the female students' learning goal inclinations were higher than those of the male students. It can be reasoned that as males and females take different approaches for achieving their goals e.g., females depict their achievements in terms of lots of endeavors, while males describe their attainments based on their skills and competencies; it seems more likely that females stick to their goals. Another possible reason that should be taken into account is the cultural effect. Kali Soyer and Kirikkanat's (2019) study was done in Turkey in which, as researchers mentioned, there are high expectations for female students whose perceptions of success open a new way to build their academic and social status. In Iran, where the current study has been done, females are less optimistic for the future education and profession because, in comparison with males, higher education may not lead to finding a better job or earning more money for them. The number of employed women is 50% in comparison to men, and out of 2800 job opportunities, 2284 is just for men, 16 devoted to women, and 500 job opportunities dedicated to both of them. This is while in the employed sector, the number of women with high educational degrees is more than that of men ("Why 2284 men and 16 women?", 2015). Thus, women come to the conclusion that education, even at its best state, may not lead to the expected outcomes.

Investigating the relationship between hope levels and students' GPAs, the researchers concluded that more hopeful students had better GPAs, this correlation was not significant, though. In studies done by Snyder (1999), Gallagher, Marques, and Lopez (2016), and Yotsidi, et al, (2018), however, hope scale scores significantly predicted higher GPAs, higher graduation rate, and lower attrition. Snyder (2002) believed one reason that hopeful students have high GPAs is they may find multiple pathways to desired educational goals, which can motivate one to go after those goals. He added that high-hope students tend to stay on task and attend to the appropriate cues in particular learning and testing environments. "In other words, high-hope, as compared to low-hope students, should not be prone to become sidetracked by self-deprecatory thinking and counterproductive negative emotions"(p. 259). Be-sides, as mentioned before, this outcome may confirm that the students are more worried about gaining better GPAs to be part of a graduate program, and this leads them to

prefer performance goals to learning goals. Higher hope scale scores predicted higher GPAs, a higher graduating chance from college, and a lower likelihood of being dismissed because of poor grades (Snyder, et al., 2002). Confirming the results of this study, Faria (2017) stated that although experiencing more hope may greatly benefit people, levels of hope were not related in any way to GPA, and students would not necessarily gain academic benefits through positive psychology e.g., hope. Still, it can be maintained that hope improves happiness and social relationships, thus improvement in these areas of people's lives may be more beneficial than improving the single aspect of GPA. The students' GPA in diploma accounts for 30% of their admission to univeristy, their GPA in BA levels forms 20% of their acceptance chance in MA, but it plays a very marginal role in PhD acceptance. Thus, it can be seen that as the students enter university, the importance of GPA decreases, which might be the reason they do not care much about their GPA at tertiary levels.

CONCLUSION

This research sought to explore two main purposes: first, the difference between levels of hope of Iranian English-major students with regard to demographic and educational variables: the number of years they spent in a program, their academic degree, gender, and secondly, the relationship between English-major students' level of hope and their GPA. Results of the study suggested that there were not any significant differences between the hope levels of students according to the number of years they spent in a program and those holding different academic degrees. In addition, the researchers did not find any relationship between students' hope level and their GPAs. However, males and females showed a significant difference in their hope levels, with males showing more hope than females. In the meanwhile, the findings of the study confirmed that more hopeful students had better GPAs.

In conclusion, according to Snyder (2002), although hope is a rather stable trait of personality, there is evidence that efforts to enhance hope can be successful. Lack of hope is identified as the main reasons for academic procrastination, subsequent academic failure, and burnout. Based on these results, the cultivation of hope in students could be beneficial in special needs education. Considering the fact English major students were enthusiastic in the first year of their program and gradually lost their interest, it is essential that students take academic courses in this regard. University professors, authorities responsible for educational and students affairs need to pay due attention to students' well-being and needs in order to at least maintain the hope level students possess at the beginning of their education. Adding some project-based learning courses, especially for undergraduate students, may improve meaningful learning and encourage students to learn important life skills and to be creative thinkers and problem solvers. Another option is to add more practical and job-related courses to the syllabus of the students so

that they not only become familiar with the realities of their job in the future but also make them more interested in their course and fields of study. Furthermore, to help female students be as hopeful as male ones, female students need opportunities in which they can grow and discover their particular skills. Some career planning and financial literacy programs which are usually the areas that females are naïve and less experienced in, as well as structured programs in sport and art might help them reinforce their hope for finding a better job and future. These programs also improve their attendance at school, participation in-class activities, and decision-making abilities. Although it turned out that GPA may not be related to positive psychological concepts including hope very much, as hope may improve other aspects of students' lives such as social relationships, increasing people's experiences of hope could be indirectly beneficial and may be generalizable to multiple aspects of students' lives.

The researchers encountered several limitations in conducting this study. Given that data collection was done during the outbreak of COVID 19 via Google form, accessing participants through phone numbers and emails was hard and time-consuming. Besides, participants needed to have the internet to be able to fill out the questionnaire. Therefore, some students could not participate in the data collection process because of the internet inaccessibility in some parts of the country, the rural and village areas. The insufficient number of PhD students seemed to be another limitation of the study, so the results related to academic degree questions must be interpreted cautiously. Finally, although researchers ensured participants that their answers would be strictly confidential, participants' responses to the questionnaire might have not been very accurate, especially about reporting their GPA which they were not sure about or they considered it as a personal question and refuse to report exact GPA.

Further research can be done on English major students' hope level in different universities with different policies e.g., State versus Azad universities in which students have to pay tuition fees for each semester; conventional vs. virtual classes; or comparing English major students with other fields in arts and humanities. A comparison can also be drawn between students in different countries to see how societal and cultural factors can affect levels of hope in English major students around the world. Finally, a qualitative study based on interviews with teachers and students can be conducted on the reasons of hopefulness or lack of hope among English major students, coming up with practical ways to increase the hope level of the students.

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APPENDIX

This questionnaire consists of 23 items in which you have to carefully read each item and check what best describes you. Please complete personal information first and then respond to each statement by marking a circle to indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement (1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5= strongly agree).

Personal information
Semester or years you studied in this program:
Gender:
GPA:
Degree:

ENGLISH	PERSIAN	
I have deep inner strength.	.من قدرت درونی عمیقی دارم	1
I believe that each day has potential	.باور دارم که هر روز برای من یک فرصت جدیداست	2
I have a sense of direction.	.از توانایی انتخاب اهداف مناسب برخوردارم	3
Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem.	حتی زمانی که دیگران دلسرد می‌شوند، می‌دانم که می‌توانم راه‌حلی را برای مشکلم پیدا کنم.	4
I feel my life has value and worth.	.حس می‌کنم زندگی‌ام مهم و ارزشمند است	5
I can see possibilities in the midst of difficulties.	.می‌توانم در بحبوحه مشکلات، فرصت‌ها را ببینم	6
My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.	.تجارب گذشته‌ام من را به خوبی برای آینده آماده کرده است	7
I have a faith that gives me comfort.	.ایمانی دارم که به من آرامش می‌دهد	8
I have been pretty successful in life.	.تا حدی در زندگیم موفق بوده‌ام	9
It is hard for me to keep up my interest in activities I used to enjoy.	به سختی می‌توانم علاقه‌ام را نسبت به فعالیت‌هایی حفظ کنم که در گذشته برایم لذت‌بخش بوده‌اند.	10
It seems as though all my support has been withdrawn.	.به نظر می‌رسد همه حامیان خود را از دست داده‌ام	11
I am bothered by troubles that prevent my planning for the future.	.از مشکلاتی که مانع برنامه‌ریزی برای آینده می‌شوند، رنج می‌برم	12
I am hopeless about some parts of my life.	.در مورد برخی مسائل زندگی‌ام، احساس ناامیدی می‌کنم	13
I feel trapped, pinned down.	.احساس می‌کنم در دام افتاده و گیر کرده‌ام	14
I find myself becoming uninvolved with most things in life.	.اخیراً خودم را درگیر خیلی از مسائل زندگی نمی‌کنم	15
There are things I want to do in life.	.در صدد انجام کارهای خاصی در زندگی‌ام هستم	16
I look forward to doing things I enjoy.	.مشتاقانه منتظرانجام کارهایی هستم که از انها لذت می‌برم	17
I make plans for my own future.	.برای آینده خودم برنامه‌ریزی می‌کنم	18
I intend to make the most of life.	.تصمیم دارم از زندگی خود بیشترین بهره را ببرم	19
I feel loved.	.احساس می‌کنم دیگران من را دوست دارند	20
I have someone who shares my concerns.	.کسانی هستند که دغدغه‌هایی مشابه با من دارند	21
I am needed by others.	.دیگران به من نیاز دارند	22
I am valued for what I am.	.به خاطر آنچه هستم، برایم ارزش قائل می‌شوند	23