

## **Predictors of L2 achievement: Testing a model based on EFL learners' emotional, social, and cultural capitals**

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The purpose of the present study is to investigate the influence of Iranian EFL learners' previously acquired capitals on their foreign language achievement. For this purpose, the Social and Cultural Capital Questionnaire (SCCQ) and Emotional Capital Questionnaire (ECQ) were administered to 403 participants. Application of structural equation modeling showed that social, cultural, and emotional capitals significantly predict the achievement of the language learners within an Iranian context. Regarding the predictive power of capitals, all the three forms of capital had a medium effect in predicting L2 achievement; however, emotional capital was a stronger predictor of L2 achievement than social capital, followed by cultural capital. Likewise, the comparable predictive powers of subcomponents of social, cultural, and emotional capital were examined. Conclusions are drawn concerning the pedagogical implications of the results and areas for further research.

### **Introduction**

In many second language acquisition theories, most of personality factors are relevant to the individual learner rather than the social context. For instance, in Krashen's (1981) 'affective filter hypothesis', motivation, anxiety and self-confidence are described in relation to the individual learner. Likewise, learners' individual differences including attitudes, identity, field dependency, interest, and motivation are conceptualised unidimensionally in relation to the learner himself/herself. However, Seidlhofer (2003) urged for consideration of the social construction of learners' personality factors which affect learning. He declared that in defining personality traits, many scholars ignored the affective factors that are socially constructed over time and space and through the effect of different power relations.

Similarly, Peirce (1995) called for a need to reconceptualise the notions of motivation and identity in order to explain her findings in relation to second language learners' desire to learn. She applied the concept of investment to emphasise the role of social contexts in shaping learners' identities. She also maintained that affective variables are not fixed, and they frequently change with reference to social relations of power. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) notion of capital, she explained that power relations in a society motivate EFL learners to engage in language learning in order to gain and increase cultural capital and symbolic resources such as prestige, valued social identity, and knowledge.

One major part of learners' individual differences concerns their previous experiences and backgrounds acquired through their earlier living and training in a particular habitus. Different habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) and environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) make people develop certain dispositions. Based on Bourdieu's idea of habitus (1984), individuals' interpersonal dispositions, known as social capital, their cultural habits, called cultural capital, and also their emotional dispositions, known as emotional capital, can influence learners' motivation to focus on the learning goals. According to Nind (2008), students' previously learned dispositions affect their life experiences, especially in the educational context. They can affect many learning variables such as motivation, attitude, attention, strategies, and interpersonal learning skills (Oliveira et al., 2013; Piri, 2016).

Concerning second language learning, students' earlier living in different environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) makes them develop certain social, cultural, and emotional dispositions. In fact, Bourdieu was the first scholar who studied EFL learners' tendency and motivation to learn English in relation to their previously developed dispositions. According to Bourdieu (1984), learners' earlier socialisation through different habitus makes them develop certain dispositions. It also affects their mental set, biases, and causal schemas, as well as their motives, interests, mannerisms, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour (Bourdieu, 1984). Based on Bourdieu's contention, their acquired dispositions make in them a consistent tendency to behave in and react to the environment in a particular way. Consequently, the teacher's strategies or teaching materials and methods can have different influences on learners with different backgrounds.

Although investigating the role of capitals in the realm of language learning is not a new endeavour (see for example, Piri, Rasekh & Pishghadam, 2017; Pishghadam, Zabetipour & Aminzade, 2016; Shahian, Pishghadam & Khajavy, 2017; Soodmand Afshar, Rahimi & Rahimi, 2014), there is a scarcity of research in exploring the relationship among the capitals and the possible influence of their interactive effect in language learning. Therefore, an endeavour to study learners' individual differences regarding their social, cultural, and emotional assets can yield new insights into the way they act in the classroom. Especially, studying the influence of learners' emotional, social, and cultural dispositions on their learning success is a promising area of investigation. It is because most of the subskills of social, cultural, and emotional capitals, unlike some other factors such as intelligence, culture, age, and gender, can be changed in a way that enhances students' learning (Horwitz & Young, 1989).

## **Theoretical framework**

The *Oxford American Dictionary* defines capital as "wealth in the form of money or other assets". There are different classifications of valuable assets other than money. For instance, Mollison (1988) offered five categories of capital: degenerative, generative, procreative, informational, and conservative. Likewise, Goodwin (2003) identified five types of capital: financial, natural, produced, human, and social. In a more comprehensive classification, Roland and Landua (2015) differentiated eight types of capital, including social, material, financial, living, intellectual, spiritual, experiential and cultural capitals.

However, Bourdieu's (1986) identification of four major forms of capital (i.e. economic, symbolic, cultural, and social capitals), is the most frequently cited classification in the field of education. In his classification, economic capital refers to money or other financial assets, whilst symbolic capital refers to a very broad category which includes a wide range of resources available to a person such as honour, prestige or recognition, etc. (Waquant, 2008). Among Bourdieu's four kinds of capital, economic and symbolic capitals are not within the focus of this study because of their broad classification. However, the following sections explain social and cultural capitals, and emotional capital, as an extension to Bourdieu's classification, in more detail.

### **Social capital**

Social capital is a relatively new term which refers to relations and networks in the community. Several previous studies contributed to the prevalence of the concept of social capital (e.g. Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Fukuyama, 2000), but each tried to define this new term in a relatively new and distinguished way.

For instance, Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 51). However, Coleman (1990) defined social capital in the educational context as resources that exist in relations in family and social communities and are necessary for an individual's cognitive and social development. More recently, Fukuyama (2000) saw social capital as informal cultural norms that enhance cooperation between people.

In all the definitions of social capital, social relations are considered as a stock which is valuable for group members in order to reach their goals. According to Geys and Murdoch (2010), if members' goals are in accordance with each other, they lead to more cooperation among members (known as bonding social capital) or collaboration with non-members (called bridging social capital). In this regard, Sue (2002) used the economic metaphor of capital formation in implying that social bonds add value to the functions of individuals and organisations. His assertion underlined the significant role of social connections in facilitating effective collaboration and communication.

In the realm of education, numerous studies also attempted to show the paramount importance of social capital in different dimensions of education (e.g. Israel & Beaulieu, 2004; Jager & Holm, 2007, etc.). These authors studied the influence of social capital in education through exploring the learner's interactions within different social networks. For instance, family relations and parents' expectations of education, connection between family and school, academic environment in educational institutes, and the social values of the society which encourage or discourage educational efforts are among the factors they have confirmed to contribute to a student's academic success.

## **Cultural capital**

In the early 1960s, Bourdieu argued that economic barriers alone could not account for the differences in the educational achievement of individuals from different social classes. He criticised functionalists' emphasis on economic capital as the only human capital affecting academic ability. He was the first who employed the concept of cultural capital to explain that cultural dispositions are primarily important in individuals' educational success (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979).

Among Bourdieu's propositions of different forms of capital, cultural capital is his most well-known theory. He proposed a new conception of culture that has certain properties of economic capital. In his view, cultural dispositions can produce profits and they can be transmitted from one generation to the next (Lareau & Weininger, 2003).

Bourdieu (1986) classified cultural capital in three types:

- *Embodied cultural capital* consists of long-lasting dispositions of body and mind being developed over time in the form of one's habitus. For instance, disposition to appreciate cultural goods.
- *Objectified cultural capital* consists of cultural goods whose appreciation involves special cultural abilities; for example, paintings, works of art, dictionaries, writings, monuments, pictures, books, television, radio, the Internet, mobile phones, etc.
- *Institutionalised cultural capital* consists of educational credentials, qualifications, experiences, and competencies.

Bourdieu (1986) maintained that academic achievement is not merely the effect of talents; the capital learners bring to the class can influence their academic success. According to him, cultural capital is the most valuable capital and academic achievement is dependent on cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973).

Inspired by the work of Bourdieu, many researchers employed the concept of cultural capital in different discourses mostly in relation to education. Some scholars used the term as a framework for their research. Others attempted to expand Bourdieu's theory and still some others tried to propose an alternative theory. For instance, a very large body of empirical studies clearly showed that the disparities in students' educational performance can be explained using the notion of cultural capital (e.g., Merenluoto, 2009; Wells, 2008, etc.).

## **Emotional capital**

As emotional skills can promote better health, wellbeing, and relationships through managing and fostering appropriate behaviours, they can be viewed as a kind of capital (Nowotny, 1981). Although Bourdieu's (1986) pioneering research introduced the influential concept of capital into the sociology of education, he never mentioned emotional capital explicitly. Nevertheless, through the concept of cultural capital, he

highlighted the centrality of the affective role of the mother in the critical sphere of family. In fact, the term *emotional capital* was first introduced by Nowotny (1981) to refer to a special form of social and cultural capitals which is generated through affective relations, and especially in the family. She theorised emotional capital as the “knowledge, contacts and relations as well as access to emotionally valued skills and assets, which hold within any social network characterized at least partly by affective ties” (p. 148). However, the concept of emotional capital has only recently received significant attention. In the realm of education, Reay (2001, 2004), made significant contributions to the exploration of the notion of emotional capital. For him, emotional capital is a “heuristic device” referring to “the emotional resources passed on from mother to child” (Reay, 2001, p. 284). He could successfully demonstrate a close relationship between educational success and emotional capital by focusing mainly on the mother’s emotional contribution to child’s education.

However, Gendron (2004) defined emotional capital in terms of emotional intelligence. His definition is contrary to what Bourdieu illustrated in his work. For Bourdieu, success or failure cannot be attributed to any kind of intelligence. He clearly explained the significant difference between the established concept of emotional intelligence and the relatively new concept of emotional capital. According to him, the prominent property of emotional capital is the management of desirable and undesirable emotions through acquiring proper emotional competencies. According to Goleman (1998), “the emotional competencies are linked to and based on emotional intelligence. A certain level of emotional intelligence is necessary to learn the emotional competencies” (p. 3). Accordingly, the original meaning of the term emotional intelligence proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990) was further expanded by Goleman (1998) to include several personal and social emotional competencies as following.

#### *Personal competencies*

- *Self-awareness* refers to knowing, identifying, and naming one's internal emotional states while appreciating the interconnection of emotions, thought, and action. It contains three components: *emotional awareness* (i.e. identifying one's own emotions); *self-assessment* (i.e. determining one's own strengths and weaknesses); and *self-confidence* (i.e. having a sense of self-worth).
- *Self-regulation/ self-management* concerns managing and controlling ones' internal emotional states, especially in adverse stressful circumstances. It contains six sub-skills: *self-control* (i.e. keeping emotions in control); *trustworthiness* (i.e. retaining honesty); *conscientiousness* (i.e. taking responsibility for one’s own actions); *adaptability* (i.e. having adjustability to changes); *achievement orientation* (i.e. trying to excel); and *initiative* (i.e. having ambition to engage in difficult activity).
- *Motivation* involves the internal emotional forces driving us to be successful.

#### *Social competencies*

- *Social-awareness* concerns awareness of others’ feelings and perspectives and apply this understanding to interactions with them. It contains three components: *empathy* (i.e. being sensitive to others' feelings), *organisational awareness* (i.e. analysing groups’ emotional states and examining power relations), and *service orientation* (i.e. meeting others’ needs).

*Social skills*

This refers to skills associated with developing and maintaining appropriate interpersonal relationships. This group of skills includes the following components: *developing others* (i.e. strengthening others' abilities to make them develop); *leadership* (i.e. guiding other people); *influence* (i.e. using effective strategies for persuading others); *communication* (i.e. listening well and sending effective messages); *change catalyst* (i.e. managing changes); *conflict management* (i.e. dealing with conflicts); *building bonds* (i.e. developing relationships); and *teamwork and collaboration* (i.e. working with others).

**Social, cultural, and emotional capitals and foreign language learning**

One of the most influential recent studies regarding EFL learners' social capital and their language achievement was conducted by Pishghadam, Noghani and Zabihi (2011a; 2011b). Through validating a questionnaire of social and cultural capitals, they came up with five sociocultural variables, namely social competence, social solidarity, extraversion, literacy, and cultural competence. The first three factors pertain to social capital and the last two refer to cultural capital. The first factor, social competence, refers to the level of parental involvement, learners' participation in learning, and their ability to ask help from others. The second factor, social solidarity, assesses social relations and ties (for example, by measuring the amount of talk between learners and their parents and peers). The third factor, extraversion, refers to learners' tendency to enjoy interactions and communications. The fourth factor, literacy, examines learners' reading ability and their knowledge of literature. Finally, the fifth factor, cultural competence, refers to cultural activities such as listening to classical music, visiting museums, and attending concerts.

Likewise, Dabaghi and Mohammadi (2012) examined the relationship between EFL learners' social and cultural capitals and their use of language learning strategies. They concluded that literacy, social solidarity, and extraversion can predict 50% of the variances in EFL learners' use of language learning strategies.

Clemente (2007) showed the effect of cultural capital on EFL learners' enthusiasm and interest in learning a new language. She explained that working-class students do not consider learning English as important for their future life, career, and education and consequently, they do not attend effectively to classroom activities. This, in turn, leads to their lower accomplishments as compared to middle-class students.

Seo (2010) used mixed methods research to study the effect of cultural capital on EFL learners' language performance. He concluded that cultural capital has a significant effect on the performance of learners from high-income families. He found that as the grade level increases, the effect of cultural capital on learners' performance decreases.

In the realm of education, Gendron (2004), Gendron and Haenjohn (2010), Reay (2001, 2004), and Zembylas (2007) made significant contributions to the exploration of the notion of emotional capital. Reay (2001) focused mainly on mothers' emotional contributions to children's education and demonstrated a close relationship between educational success and emotional capital. Gendron (2004) indicated that emotional

capital helps individuals generate, accumulate, and exploit human, social, and cultural capitals. Her suggested model of emotional capital could adequately demonstrate that differing degrees of students' academic achievement, individuals' occupational success, different job choices of men and women, and the ultimate success of organisations are due to their varied emotional resources. Similarly, Zembylas (2007) insisted on retaining Bourdieu's idea regarding the rebuttal of the attribution of success or failure to any kind of intelligence. He acknowledged that conceptualising emotional capital in relation to political, social, and cultural practices deepens our understanding of the power relations in society, and of teachers, parents, and administrators' practices in rechanneling individuals' emotional resources. In addition, Gendron and Haenjohn (2010) claimed that emotional capital can be improved by strengthening emotional competencies through formal programs (rather than informal learning). They declared that improving emotional capital can contribute to the development of citizenship, social cohesion, efficient interpersonal relationships, and future life success.

Since the importance of emotional capital has been recognised in various aspects of human life (e.g. education, work, life satisfaction, health, citizenship, etc.), a need is felt to more seriously study its contribution to second/foreign language learning. As no research has been conducted to date (to our best knowledge) to operationalise the concept of emotional capital in the realm of language learning, this study attempts to examine the role it plays in EFL learners' achievement.

## **Purpose of the study**

This study aimed at examining the role of three kinds of assets which learners bring to the class for EFL learning. It tries to find answers to the following questions:

1. Can Iranian students' EFL achievement be predicted by their (a) emotional capital; (b) their social capital; and (c) their cultural capital?
2. How useful is the proposed model of EFL achievement based upon emotional, social and cultural capital for EFL teachers and students in Iran?
3. Do emotional, social and cultural capital and their subcomponents have different effects upon EFL achievement?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants in the study comprised 403 EFL learners in the intermediate level recruited from Iran Language Institute in Zanjan. Convenience sampling was used to include 177 (43.9%) male and 226 (56.1%) female learners. Their ages ranged between 16 and 32 ( $M = 21.35$ ,  $SD = 2.72$ ). 31% of the participants were high-school students, 40% university students in a BA or MA program, and 29% graduates. They were all selected from the same institute to control for their proficiency levels. To insure some uniformity in proficiency levels, intermediate learners' scores in their final and midterm exams for

three successive terms were averaged. Those whose scores were within one and a half standard deviations of the mean ( $M = 77.44$ ,  $SD = 14.00$ ) were included in the study. It means learners with the average scores below 55 or above 98 were exempted from the study.

## Instruments

In the current study, two questionnaires (in Persian) were used to collect data. The participants' emotional capital was measured using the *Emotional Capital Questionnaire* (ECQ) designed and validated by Piri (Piri, 2016; Piri, Pishghadam & Rasekh, ahead of print), and the *Social and Cultural Capital Questionnaire* (SCCQ) which was designed and validated by Pishghadam, Noghani and Zabihi (2011a). In designing ECQ, the most relevant indicators of emotional capital were elicited by reviewing the related literature (e.g., Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1998; Reay, 2004; Gendron, 2004). Then, four specialists in the field of psychology of education approved the five-factor model of emotional capital which includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, social awareness, and social skills. For each indicator, 8 to 10 items were constructed, revised, and then piloted. The final version of the questionnaire (see Appendix I for some sample items) comprises 40 items which measure learners' level of emotional capital through a five-point Likert scale.

Table 1: Composites of variables with Cronbach alpha coefficients, means, standard deviations, minimum, and maximum

Scale	Subscale	No. items	Cronbach's alpha	Mean	Std. dev	Min.	Max.
Emotional capital		40	.81	135.35	26.22	89	180
	Self-awareness	8	.91	26.61	7.33	8.00	39
	Self-regulation	9	.90	30.77	7.07	17	45
	Motivation	7	.83	21.37	5.19	11	34
	Social-awareness	7	.82	24.97	4.95	10	35
	Social skills	9	.91	31.62	7.50	17	44
Social capital		29	.88	90.32	14.86	54	117
	Social competence	15	.91	45.89	10.15	19	70
	Social solidarity	11	.94	34.75	9.48	14	54
	Extraversion	3	.79	9.67	2.24	4	15
Cultural capital		13	.93	39.21	11.93	16	63
	Literacy	6	.93	18.92	7.35	6	30
	Cultural competence	7	.90	20.29	6.07	7	34
L2 achievement				77.44	14.00	26	100

The participants' social and cultural capitals were measured using the *Social and Cultural Capital Questionnaire* (SCCQ). It is based upon a five-factor model of social and cultural capitals which includes social competence, social solidarity, and extraversion as the sub-scales of social capital and literacy and cultural competence as the sub-scales of cultural capital. The questionnaire (see Appendix II for some sample items) comprises 42 items which measure learners' level of social and cultural capitals through a five-point Likert-

type scale. 13 items measure learners' level of cultural capital and 29 items measure their social capital. All the mentioned scales and their subscales enjoy acceptable reliability rates ranging from .79 to .94 (see Table 1).

## Procedure

The purpose of the study was explained to the students in a large language institute in Iran and those who were willing answered the ECQ and SCCQ in about 10 minutes for each. The two questionnaires were simultaneously administered to the participants in the same session during their classes held during June to July, 2016. The scores of these intermediate learners in final and midterm exams for three successive terms were provided by the institute through their system of recording learners' performances. After collecting the questionnaires, learners' total scores on each survey, their scores on each sub-scale, and their average achievement scores were recorded for analysis.

## Results

### Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and also Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability coefficients for the scales and subscales used in the study. As can be seen, social solidarity and extraversion are the most and least reliable subscales with  $\alpha = .94$  and .79, respectively.

### Structural equation modeling (SEM)

A model of L2 achievement based on three forms of capital was proposed. The model was tested to examine the inter-relationships among emotional capital (EC), social capital (SC), cultural capital (CC), and L2 achievement using SEM (see Figure 1).

The proposed model showed good fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 1239.99$ ,  $df = 530$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.33$ ,  $CFI = .91$ ,  $IFI = .91$ ,  $GFI = .91$ ,  $NFI = .93$ ,  $RMSEA = .05$ ). Moreover, Cohen's  $f^2$  was used to estimate the magnitude of effect size (ES). According to the Murphy and Myors (2004), ES is small when  $f^2 = .02$ , medium when  $f^2 = .15$ , and large when  $f^2 = .35$ . Note that the equation for computing  $f^2$  is  $f^2 = R^2/(1 - R^2)$ . Table 2 summarises ES estimates for latent endogenous variables.

Table 2: Standardised parameter estimates for EC, SC, and CC as predictors of L2 achievement

Latent variable	R <sup>2</sup>	f <sup>2</sup>
L2 achievement	.48	.92
Emotional capital (EC)	.37	.58
Social capital (SC)	.40	.66
Cultural capital (CC)	.25	.33

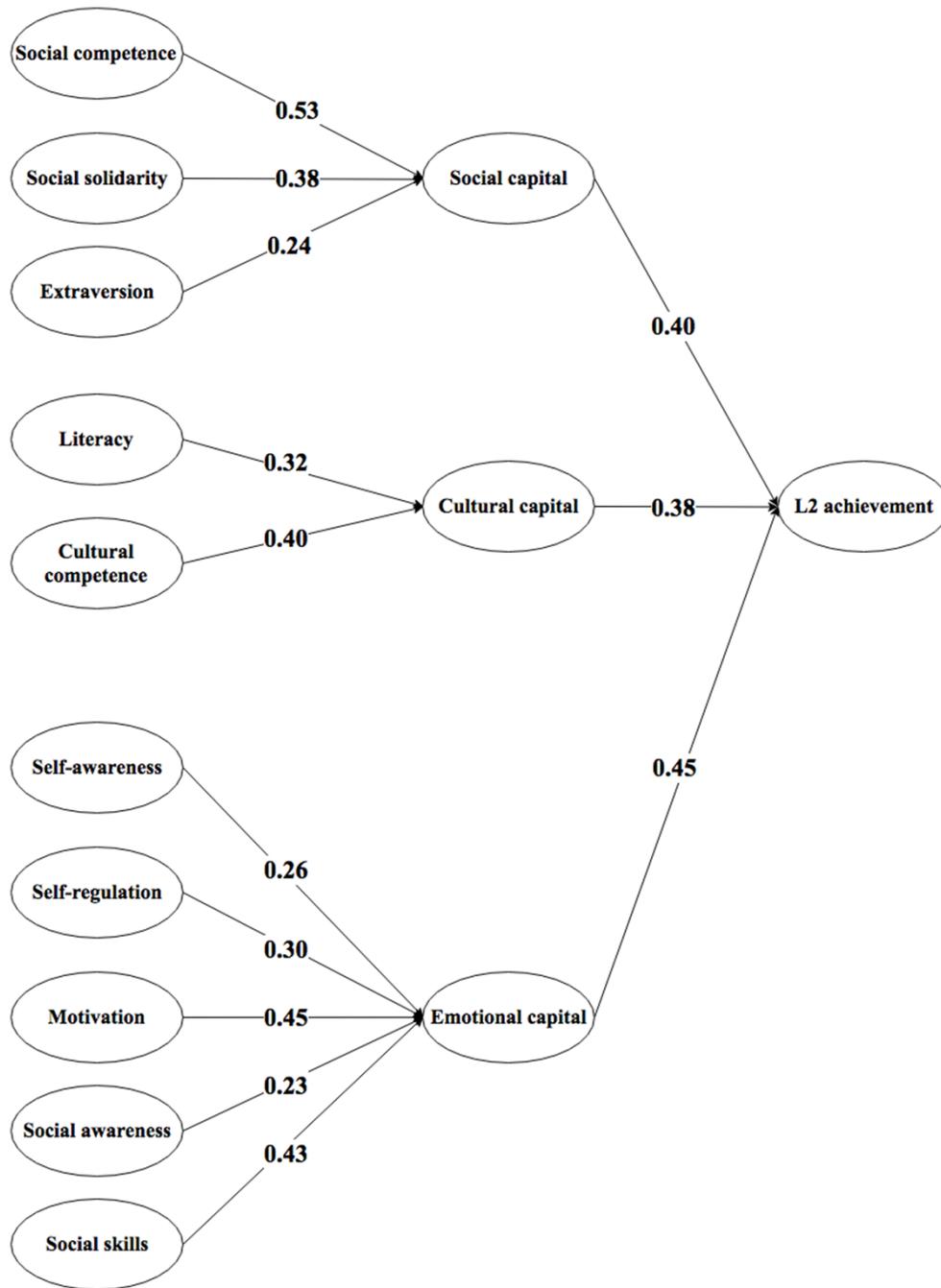


Figure 1: Three forms of capital as predictors of L2 achievement

As can be seen in Table 2, this model accounted for 48% of the variance in L2 achievement and  $f^2 = .92$  shows a large effect size (ES). In addition, the model accounted for 37 % of the variance in EC ( $f^2 = .58$ , large ES), 40% of the variance in SC ( $f^2 = .66$ ,

large ES) and 25% of the variance in CC ( $f^2 = .33$ , medium ES). This shows that this model explains the variance of L2 achievement based on EC, SC, and CC.

Further exploration of the model showed that EC ( $\beta = .45$ ,  $R^2 = .20$ ,  $f^2 = .25$ , medium ES,  $p < .05$ ) was a stronger predictor than SC ( $\beta = .40$ ,  $R^2 = .16$ ,  $f^2 = .19$ , medium ES,  $p < .05$ ), followed by CC ( $\beta = .38$ ,  $R^2 = .14$ ,  $f^2 = .16$ , medium ES,  $p < .05$ ). In addition, motivation ( $\beta = .45$ ,  $R^2 = .20$ ,  $f^2 = .25$ , medium ES,  $p < .05$ ) was a stronger predictor than social skills ( $\beta = .43$ ,  $R^2 = .18$ ,  $f^2 = .22$ , medium ES,  $p < .05$ ), self-regulation ( $\beta = .30$ ,  $R^2 = .09$ ,  $f^2 = .09$ , small ES,  $p < .05$ ), self-awareness ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $R^2 = .06$ ,  $f^2 = .06$ , small ES,  $p < .05$ ), and social awareness ( $\beta = .23$ ,  $R^2 = .05$ ,  $f^2 = .05$ , small ES,  $p < .05$ ), respectively.

Likewise, social competence ( $\beta = .53$ ,  $R^2 = .28$ ,  $f^2 = .38$ , large ES,  $p < .05$ ) was a stronger predictor than social solidarity ( $\beta = .38$ ,  $R^2 = .14$ ,  $f^2 = .16$ , medium ES,  $p < .05$ ), followed by extraversion ( $\beta = .24$ ,  $R^2 = .05$ ,  $f^2 = .05$ , small ES,  $p < .05$ ). Regarding CC, cultural competence ( $\beta = .40$ ,  $R^2 = .16$ ,  $f^2 = .19$ , medium ES,  $p < .05$ ) was stronger than literacy ( $\beta = .32$ ,  $R^2 = .10$ ,  $f^2 = .11$ , small ES,  $p < .05$ ) in predicting CC.

## Discussion

In this study, a model of L2 achievement based on three forms of capital was proposed. The model was tested to examine the interrelationships among emotional capital (EC), social capital (SC), cultural capital (CC), and L2 achievement using SEM. The proposed model showed a good fit to the data. Three forms of capital were examined as predictors of L2 achievement. Results showed that EFL learners' social, cultural, and emotional capitals could predict their L2 achievement.

Regarding the predictive power of capitals, all three forms of capital had a medium effect in predicting L2 achievement. Social capital as the feeling of belonging to a group, compliance with the norms of the group, and interaction with the members of the group can contribute to EFL students' learning success. This claim is in line with the findings of Horvat, Weininger and Lareau (2003), and Khodadady and Ashrafborji (2016) regarding higher achievement of students with more access to network resources. They also mentioned family structure, family size, marital status, and parents' communication with other students and school personnel as significant factors in developing learners' social capital.

On the other hand, EFL learners' cultural capital, which is mostly based on their social-class positions can influence their access to cultural resources, and this can affect their educational success. Other studies (e.g., Merenluoto, 2009; Wells, 2008) confirmed the significance of learners' social-class positions, dispositions to engage in cultural activities, and access to cultural goods for their success in education. Similarly, Clemente (2007) and Seo (2010) showed the effect of cultural capital on EFL learners' enthusiasm and language performance. They maintained that learners' social-class positions affect their views about the necessity of learning English as a second/foreign language and this can influence their motivation and ultimate accomplishment. The relationship between EFL learners' social and cultural capitals and their language achievement was also investigated by Pishghadam,

Noghani and Zabihi (2011a, 2011b). Through designing a questionnaire of social and cultural capital, they confirmed the importance of social and cultural capitals in language achievement of Iranian EFL learners.

Furthermore, the effective management of emotional competencies is crucial for an individual's cognitive, personal, and social development (Oatly & Nundy, 1996). Likewise, in learning a second/foreign language, emotion is vital to the development of learners' sociocultural competence (Dewaele, 2005), motivation (Schumann, 1998), and ultimate language achievement (Fahim & Pishghadam, 2007). Previous studies (e.g., Trentacosta & Izard, 2007) considered emotional competencies as predictors of academic performance. Though, the role of different social, cultural, and political contexts has been ignored in studies on the role of emotional intelligence and emotional competencies in learning. However, by introducing the concept of emotional capital, we could explore the development of emotional competencies under the effect of different environmental systems. Our emphasis on the role of emotional capital in language learning is consistent with the findings of studies on the importance of emotional capital in education such as Manion (2007), O'Brien (2008) and Reay (2001, 2004), though they viewed emotional capital as affective resources which developed only within the family. Likewise, Gendron (2004), Gendron (2008), Gendron and Haenjohn (2010) and Zembylas (2007) found similar associations between emotional capital and different aspects of academic achievements.

The results of the study also showed that emotional capital was a stronger predictor of L2 achievement than social capital, followed by cultural capital. A possible explanation for this finding is that emotional capital comprises several sub-skills that are all known to be influential in the process of language learning. For instance, the role of motivation in the success of EFL learners has been well documented by many researchers (e.g. Dörnyei, 1998; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985, 2000). The significance of interpersonal skills in language achievement of EFL learners is also well established (e.g. Gass, 2002; Long, 1996). The effective role of empathy in second/foreign language learning success was confirmed by many studies (e.g. Aguilar, 2001; Chen, 2013) as well. Moreover, many research findings have emphasised the significant role of self-regulation strategies in the success of EFL learners (e.g. Oxford, 1999; Rose & Harbon, 2013). The importance of self-awareness skills (e.g. self-confidence) in second/foreign language learning also has been shown, for example by Brown (1994), and Zárte and Monserrat (2014).

In addition, the capitals together could predict 48% of the variance in L2 achievement, showing their large composite predictive power. One possible reason for getting such a large effect is that different dispositions (including social, cultural, and emotional tendencies and interests) which students have acquired through their socialisation process can influence their educational behaviour (Bourdieu, 1986). According to Bourdieu (1986), what causes inequality in society is not only material assets; several other forms of assets, such as symbolic, cultural, and social capitals are equally important sources of inequality.

The comparable predictive powers of subcomponents of emotional capital were examined. While motivation and social skills had medium effects, self-regulation, self-

awareness, and social-awareness had small effects in predicting EFL learners' emotional capital. However, the subskills together can predict 37% of the variance in EFL learners' emotional capital, showing their large composite predictive power. A possible reason for the highest predictive power of motivation is that when learners' motivation is promoted via their socialisation process, their achievement drive is also fostered, and this, in turn, creates strong commitment, creativity, enthusiasm, flexibility, and optimism (McClelland, 1987). Therefore, it is not surprising to see that motivation to learn a foreign language is the most influential asset in EFL learners' emotional capital. Similarly, the high predictive power of social skills is justifiable considering that social skills comprise valuable emotional subskills which help us easily influence others, enthuse, communicate, handle disagreements, and build bonds with them (Christie, Jordan, Troth & Lawrence, 2007).

Furthermore, regarding the predictive power of subcomponents of social capital, the results showed that social competence had a large effect, social solidarity had a medium effect, and extraversion had a small effect in predicting EFL learners' social capital. The subcomponents together can predict 40% of the variance in EFL learners' social capital, which shows their large composite predictive power. The priority of social competence in predicting EFL learners' social capital is consistent with the findings of Pishghadam, Noghani and Zabihi (2011a). The results of their principal component analysis and factor loadings revealed that social competence was the first important factor of their newly designed *Social and Cultural Capital Questionnaire*.

With regard to the predictive power of subcomponents of cultural capital, the results revealed that cultural competence had a medium effect and literacy had a small effect in predicting EFL learners' cultural capital. The subcomponents together can predict 25% of the variance in EFL learners' cultural capital, showing their medium composite predictive power. The priority of cultural competence in predicting EFL learners' cultural capital is conceivable by considering the value of cultural activities such as music, theatre, festivals, and shows in promoting the Iranians' cultural understanding. Similarly, Pishghadam, Noghani and Zabihi (2011a) found that cultural competence is more important than literacy in generating cultural capital.

## Conclusion

The findings of the present study lead us to suggest that EFL teachers need to consider learners' social and cultural, and emotional backgrounds in teaching different aspects of language, and try to enhance the sociocultural and emotional resources learners draw on. This implies that teachers should reinforce the skills associated with the possessions of capitals in learners, and in doing so, they should consider the influence of environmental factors in shaping learners' dispositions. For instance, teachers are expected to be aware of the motivational levels of students and consider the motivational effect of their family, friends, school, university, society, and other contexts in order to help fortify their interest in learning. Likewise, learners' self-regulation strategies can be developed by having them do challenging tasks. This skill can be also strengthened by improving the relationship with learner' families and having them affect its development. Concerning social skills of

learners, teachers should engage them in more extensive communicative activities to improve their abilities to deal with others. Their social skills such as conflict management, initiation and maintenance of relations, persuasion, empathy, teamwork, and collaboration can be improved using different interactive activities.

Furthermore, in order to efficiently appreciate the learners' background capital, it might be very useful to conduct further research using qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, focus group, open ended questions, etc.) to catch the learners' opinions and perspectives on the effectiveness of the questionnaires in representing the levels of their different background capital.

In examining learners' backgrounds, the present study focused on investigating social, cultural, and emotional capitals. The role of other forms of capital like symbolic, economical, intellectual, experiential, and spiritual capitals in learning a new language can be explored in future studies. Furthermore, investigating the influence of emotional capital on learning different skills of language can be objectives for future studies.

Finally, in recent years, Iranian people have more access to the Internet and Internet-based social networking (such as *Facebook*, *Instagram*, etc.). These social media provide a context where they can interact and share knowledge with each other and thereby promote their social and cultural understanding and information. However, as the majority of people in Iran cannot communicate in English, their access to Internet-based news and current affairs (e.g. the UK's BBC, Australia's ABC, online newspapers such as *The Guardian*, etc.) is limited. They cannot get information from data sources which are produced in English. That is why the proposed model (with a medium effect of cultural competence and a small effect of literacy) shows a good adequacy for Iranian context. However, with growing interest in learning English among young people in Iran, a need is felt to further the study to focus especially on modern sources of cultural capital such as social media and Internet-based social networks in the coming years.

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## Appendices: Sample items

### 1. From Emotional Capital questionnaire

		Very often 100%	Most of the time 80%	Some-times 60%	Not very often 40%	Rarely 20%
1	My family members help each other identify their strengths and weaknesses.					
2	My friends help me in controlling my behavior and emotions.					
3	The educational system has been successful in creating my motivation to study.					
4	Religious regulations have made me help my fellows as much as possible.					

5	My relationship with friends helps me communicate with others more easily and effectively.					
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After Piri, Pishghadam and Rasekh, (in press)

## 2. From Social and Cultural Capital questionnaire

SD = Strongly disagree; D = Disagree; U = Undecided; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree

No.	Statement	SD	D	U	A	SA
1	My parents used to have a regular connection with my school.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I feel I have strong ties with my peers.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I see my friends weekly.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I enjoy reading literature.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I know all famous music composers.	1	2	3	4	5

After Pishghadam, Noghani & Zabihi (2011a)

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