

## **The Effectiveness of Self-Encouragement Training Based on Adler's Theory on Psychological Capital and Academic Engagement of Students**

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*Fariborz Dortaj<sup>1</sup>*  
*Zahra Sohrabi<sup>\*2</sup>*

### **Abstract**

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the training of self-encouragement based on Adler's theory of psychological capital and academic engagement of female high school students. This study was a semi-experimental research and used a pretest-posttest design with a control group. The sample consisted of 60 students (30 participants for experimental group and 30 participants control group) who were selected by multi-stage cluster sampling. The experimental group was then educated for self-encouragement for 8 sessions while the control group did not receive any training. The instrument used in this study was Schaufeli & Bakker's (2006) Academic Engagement Questionnaire and Luthan's (2007) Psychosocial Capital Questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data and Multivariate analysis of covariance was used to investigate the research hypotheses. By analyzing the data, results indicated that self-encouragement training increased the academic engagement and psychological capital of female students. Regarding the effectiveness of this training on increasing the academic engagement and psychological capital, this training is evaluated useful for students.

**Keywords:** Self-Encouragement, Academic Engagement, Psychological Capital

### **Introduction**

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1. Professor in Educational Psychology, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran.

2. \*M.A. in Educational Psychology, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran  
z.sohrabi@atu.ac.ir

Positive psychology draws on one of the core principles of humanistic psychology; that our potential is usually greater than commonplace assumptions would have us think (Garbarino, 2011). Positive psychology includes a set of methods. These methods are used to understand and identify personal strengths, to increase positive emotions, to create and achieve personal goals and a meaningful life. Also, the methods help to improve mental health and life (Muro, Soler, Cebolla, & Cladellas, 2018). Psychological capital is one of the concepts of positive psychology that incorporates the positive aspects of human life (Norman, Nimnicht & Pigeon, 2010). Positive psychological resources that make up mental capital include hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism or the HERO (Luthans, & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Psychological capital is a multifaceted construct. Although psychological capital has been recognized recently, it has attracted increasing attention (Mills, Fleck & Kozikowski, 2013). The psychological capital is a multifaceted and interconnected structure that includes four perceptual-cognitive components of self-efficacy, optimism, hope and Resilience. We define the psychological capital in this way: The condition of the positive mental development of the person with whom it is determined 1- Having self-confidence (self-efficacy) to do things, succeed in challenging tasks, to execute the necessary effort. 2- Creating a positive sign (optimism), being optimistic about future and current successes. 3- Trying to achieve goals and if necessary, guiding the directions to goals (hope) for success. 4- (Resilience) to attain success, in the face of problems and difficulties, in order to achieve sustainability and well-being (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2015).

Self-efficacy is the basis of our potential (s) to engage and do things. It is also a drive where we believe we will succeed in our efforts (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007). Researchers have shown the positive effects of self-efficacy beliefs on effort, persistence, goal setting, and performance (Schunk, & Zimmerman, 2012). Self-efficacy beliefs play an essential role in quality of life and in balancing its various dimensions. They also regulate human actions through cognitive, emotional, and motivational processes. Self-efficacy beliefs show the manner of people's thinking, excitement in dealing with problems, perseverance, quality of emotional health, and their vulnerability to depression and stress, and how people make the best decision in a sensitive situation and perform it (Bandura, & Locke,

2003). The optimism of mental capital is flexible and realistic. It should not be displayed as emotive and emotional boosters. Optimism for psychological capital is a strong lesson in individual discipline, probabilistic planning, analysis of past events and preventive care. It also combines multiple facets of optimism and earlier conceptualizations (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007). Effective optimism should not take any extreme. Whether in internalizing success and trying to control various aspects of the work life of a person or in other parts such as eliminating all types of failures, and consequently emanating from the burden of responsibility (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007). Resiliency can also be considered as successful adaptation to adverse conditions (Zautra, Hall, & Murray, 2010). Resilience is conventionally defined as a dynamic process that allows for positive adaptation in a context with significant problems. That is, it should be considered as a personality trait or as a skill. The concept of resilience is also important in terms of public health (Leys et al., 2018). Resilience is a process that allows people to adapt to and improve from adverse conditions. This process has been studied and adverted with individual characteristics that have been investigated in the field of stress, such as: personal control, positive affect, optimism, and social support (Dantzer, Cohen, Russo, & Dinan, 2018). Resilience is formed to achieve success when faced with problems and adversity, sustainability, and health (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2015).

Based on research, psychological capital has a positive relationship with psychological hardiness and spiritual intelligence (Shakarami, Davarniya, Zaharakar, & Hosseini, 2014), Social Capital (Bahadori Khosroshahi, Hashemi Nosrat Abad, & Babapour Khalil alDin, 2014), Emotional intelligence (Mellão, & Mónico, 2013), Quality of Life (fasihi, & mohammadpour, 2014), and motivational beliefs and educational performance (Soltanizadeh, Mahbobi, Naderi and Badie, 2019).

Research has also showed that there is a relationship between the psychological capital and the dimensions of the educational engagement and Psychological capital is a strong predictor of students' academic engagement (Mohammadi, 2014; Feizolahzadeh & zarei, 2018; Farhadi, saki, Ghadampour, khalili geshnigani, & Chehri, 2016; Sadeghi, aminfalah, Momeni, 2019). Also psychological capital, especially hope and optimism, have important roles in academic

engagement, (Sadoughi, 2019). The results of Datu and Valdezof (2016) research revealed that Psychological Capital positively predicted academic engagement, flourishing, interdependent happiness, and positive affect. The results of Bakhtiyarpour and Saki (2016) also showed that there is a negative relationship between the psychological capital and its dimensions with students' academic burnout. Studies of Datu, King, & Valdez (2018) indicate that Psychological capital was both a concurrent and prospective predictor of autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, academic engagement, and academic achievement. Results of a research by Martínez, Youssef-Morgan, Chambel, & Marques-Pinto (2019) showed a positive relationship between academic engagement, Psychological capital, and academic performance. Results also supported Psychological capitals as a full mediator in the relationship between academic engagement and academic performance.

Another necessary plan to optimize education is to address the factors affecting students' educational progress. Therefore, recognizing these factors is important in the educational process. These factors are many and various but one of them that attracted the attention of researchers is the variety of educational engagement (saber & pasha sharifi, 2013). The academic engagement involves several behaviors such as Participation- the effort and ability to follow the instructions (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). Engagement is a spectrum of student actions that lead to their development (Reeve, 2013). The three areas of academic engagement are emotional, behavioral, and cognitive (Edwards, 2018). The engagement definition includes various types of structures. For example, cognitive engagement includes effort, motivation, and strategy use. Emotional engagement involves values, interests and feelings. And Behavioral engagement involves following the rules and doing the work (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). The goal of engagement is to help students attain academic achievement, satisfy their motivations, and create motivational supportive learning environments for themselves (Reeve, Cheon, & Jang, 2019). The factors affecting the academic engagement include the relationship between teachers and students, the relevance and complexity of the curriculum and the ethnicity of students (Fischer, Bol, Pribesh, & Nunnery, 2013). Also, engagement has four educational, behavioral, cognitive and psychological components. The educational component includes variables such as time spent on assignments,

credits received for grades from a person's point of view and completing homework assignments; the behavioral component includes attention, voluntary participation in the classroom and participation in extracurricular classes. The cognitive component comprises of self-regulation, the value in learning, personal goals and autonomy, and the psychological component consists of a sense of belonging or communication and forming relations with teachers and peers. In addition to the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, there is another dimension called Occupation (Tian, Han & Huebner, 2014).

Findings from Afzali and Ismaili (2019) shows that the goal orientation of mastery and avoidance is directly related to academic engagement (through educational mediation). Also school engagement also improves the student's relationship with his or her school and leads to gaining higher grades (Sciarra, & Seirup, 2008). Academic psychological capital and academic engagement mediate the relationship between positive emotions and academic performance. Also the promotion of positive emotions in students is a relevant challenge for principals, teachers, and parents in attempting to build academic psychological capital and academic engagement, which in turn may lead to higher academic performance (Carmona-Halty, Salanova, Llorens, & Schaufeli, 2019).

One of the psychological approaches is Adler's Individual Psychology Theory which discusses the interpersonal interactions and the role of these interactions in the mental health of individuals. In line with these interactions, the necessity of encouragement is announced as merely a sign of being human (Bright, 2018). Encouragement is somehow giving courage to a person to change. When we dare people, we actually bring hope to them and we help them believe in themselves and their abilities. We are preparing them to stand against many storms in life. Components of encouragement or assertiveness are: 1) Acceptance: this means separating the act from the actor and the behavior from the personality; 2) Showing faith and belief in a person by accepting a person as he or she is, you can then show him / her that you believe in his or her ability to behave differently; 3) Expanding communication with others; 4) Empowering and highlighting the positive points: The more emphasis on positive points, the less mistakes will be seen. Mistake should be considered as an opportunity to learn and perfect ourselves (Salimi, 2010). Adler's encouragement is to see

the positive and negative aspects of the phenomena and, at the same time, the focus, is the consciously selective attention to the positive and negative aspects of phenomena while paying attention to positive aspects through selective attention (Hersini, Barajali, & Pakdaman Savoji, 2015). Furthermore, encouragement is the process by which one focuses on the assets of themselves to create self-esteem, confidence, and sense of value in himself (Eckstein, Belongia, & Elliott-Applegate, 2000). By encouragement we do not mean the courage and daring in bold actions but rather the courage and encouragement of confronting the constant challenges of life (Alizadeh & Sajjadi, 2010). The Four Essential Protecting (Emergency Need) In Encouragement are: 1. Permanent need to belong 2. Need to develop competence and feel able 3. The basic need for being important is the belief that a person will be considered 4. The ever-growing need for encouragement (Alizadeh & Sajjadi, 2010). People who evaluate others positively and are optimistic, hold high levels of dignity in others and are more friendly and popular with others. They believe they can control major life events because they expect a positive outlook from their work. When they face obstacles, they try to preserve the different situations until they succeed, because they believe that they will eventually succeed (Afkhimi Aghda, Rahmati, & Fazilatpour, 2016). They cite, for example, from Adler's (1956) language that encouragement should be used in all treatments. Adlerian also urge all patients not to be frustrated and discouraged, so it is not surprising that they always emphasize encouragement and support in treatment approaches. Encouragement is both a type of attitude and a way to become from Adlerian's point of view (Carlson, Watts, & Maniacchi, 2006). Investigations on self-encouragement included Amiri's research (2017), which showed that self-encouragement education increases self-confidence and hope and can improve motivation and academic performance of female students. Karbala'i Majid's research (2016) showed that education based on Adler's individual psychology theory is effective on students' academic eagerness and will increase it. Zare and mehman navazan (2015) concluded in their study that self-encouragement education would promote general self-efficacy and resilience. The results of research by Aslani Far, Bahrami, & Asadzadeh (2017) showed that self-encouragement training can promote resilience and self-esteem. Also self-encouragement education as a skill can enhance daring and general self-efficacy skills (koohestani Parizi, Razavi, & Nematollahi, 2017).

Other effects of self-encouragement training also include positive effects on self-esteem, psychological well-being, positive adapting with problems, reduced physical and psychological complaints, reduced levels of experienced anxiety in social situations and increased frequency of some social behaviors (Bahlmann, & Dinter, 2001), increasing resilience and optimism (Afkhani Aghda, Rahmati, & Fazilatpour, 2016), increasing mental health and quality of life (Farkoravand, 2014), increasing social self-efficacy of students (Yari, 2012), reducing students stress, reduced Procrastination and increase in Academic Achievement of Students (Keshavarz Nazari, Zahra Kar, & Sarami, 2015), (Hersini, Barajali, & Pakdaman Savoji, 2015), increase in their self-esteem (Kang, Park, Han, & Park, 2012).

In regard to the research done on self-encouragement and its effect on academic performance, self-esteem, hope, self-effectiveness, psychological wellbeing and in general better quality of life, educating self-encouragement can be useful for all individuals in society especially students. With respect to the findings and research literature, no study was found to examine the effectiveness of self-encouragement education on psychological capital and academic engagement. Therefore, due to the importance of further scientific research, the present study seeks to investigate the effectiveness of self-encouragement on the psychological capital and academic engagement of students. The hypotheses of this research were:

1. self-encouragement training impacts the students' psychological capital.
2. self-encouragement training is effective on the academic engagement of female students.

## **Method**

According to the purpose of this study, the effectiveness of self-encouragement training on the psychological capital and academic engagement of female students was carried out using a semi-experimental method and a pre-test and post-test design with a control group. The statistical population of this study consisted of all female high school students of the second grade of public schools in Tehran, who were studying in 2017-18. Since this research is part of a semi-experimental research, the sample size was 60 (30 participants for each experimental and control group). In this research, multi-stage cluster

sampling was used, so that a list of all public secondary schools in the district was prepared. And then a school was randomly selected among them. Then, 60 students were selected and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups and were asked to complete the questionnaires of psychological capital and academic engagement. The experimental group was stimulated by training for 8 sessions of 90 minutes (weekly one session), While participants in the control group did not receive any training. Later both groups took a post-test. At the end of the training sessions, self-encouragement was measured using a questionnaire of psychological capital and academic engagement from participants in the post-test. To analyze the data, the descriptive statistics indices and also the multivariate covariance analysis method was used to investigate the research hypotheses. The questionnaires used in this study include:

Psychological Capital Questionnaire. This scale is designed to measure the psychological capital by Luthans (2007). The questionnaire has 24 questions and 4 components of hope, resilience, optimism and self-efficacy and examines psychological capital based on the Six Option Likert Spectrum. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient calculated in this study (Bahadori Khosroshahi, Hashemi Nosrat Abad and Babakpour Khalil-al-Din, 1391) for this questionnaire was higher than 0.7. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient calculated of psychological capital questionnaire in this research was calculated as 0.90.

Educational conflict questionnaire. Is made by Schaufeli & Bakker (2006). This scale has nine grades and three components of empowerment, commitment, attraction, which measures academic engagement with a five degree (never to always) Likert scale. In the research of (Seyf, 1396), the reliability of the questionnaire was obtained by Cronbach's alpha method above 0.70. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to be 0.87 in this research.

In accordance with principles of ethical research, participants all signed a lease of consent to take part in the study. They were also assured that all personal information will remain confidential.

In this study, self-encouragement training was performed based on Schonaker's self-encouragement training program (1980). The following is a summary of the self-encouragement training sessions.

Structure of self-encouragement training sessions	
Session 1	Introducing the concept of encouragement and encouraging behaviors and characteristics and presenting an assignment. Participants learn and discuss behaviors and traits that are encouraging. This involves having participants look at themselves and discover what they like about themselves, their family, and life.
Session 2	Teaching the concept of human behavior purposefulness and presenting an assignment. After teaching the concept of human behavior and practicing it, participants write down their goals. For their homework, they are asked to write down all of their goals and desires and determine the conditions needed to achieve them.
Session 3	Accepting the mistakes, the courage to accept imperfections, and to encourage the superiors. The members accept that all human beings are imperfect creatures and should not blame others for their defects. By accepting the imperfections people make more effort to improve themselves because we are all born imperfect.
Session 4	Learning to thinking kindly and encouraging, the effect of vilifying others on the loss of social interest and creating discouragement. Each member gives feedback to the rest of the group about the assignment of the previous session and tells them about their experiences and about their assignment. Then, learning to think kindly and encouraging is taught.
Session 5	Being self-encouraging and how to build positive relationships with others. The effects of negative talking about people in their absence are debated. Following the session, as a practice, members were asked to express some of the negative effects of vilify people in communication using their experiences and what they learned.
Session 6	building inner speech and expressing encouraging identity statements, examining your role in difficult situations. Describing the previous meeting relationships from this point of view that participants create and develop inner speech and encouraging identity statements. How to speech internally and its effects are debated.
Session 7	Examining your perception of love and sense of belonging to others. Exploring individual dynamisms, recognition and challenges, or major mistakes of life are among meeting goals, introducing basic cognitive mistakes.
Session 8	Reviewing the topics of previous sessions and familiarizing with people's opinions.

## Results

To examine these hypotheses, multivariate covariance analysis was used. In doing so the underlying assumptions of this method were studied.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics table of variables of academic engagement and psychological capital in terms of group

variables	group	Frequency of subjects	Post-test	
			mean	Standard deviation
Learning academic	Self-encouragement	30	31/43	6/70
	control	30	26/9	8/37
psychological capital	Self-encouragement	30	108/73	14/21
	control	30	97/16	18/64

Levine's test was used to examine the assumption of the variance of academic engagement and psychological capital variables among the experimental and control groups. The value of F Levin's statistic for academic engagement and psychological capital variables was 0/273 and 0/519 respectively, which is not statistically significant at the level of 0/05 ( $P < 0.05$ ). therefore, the assumption of the variance of variables of research variables among the groups under consideration is respected.

Table 2. The table of inter-group effects tests variables of academic engagement and psychological capital variables among the test and control groups

Change resource	Dependent variable	df	Average squares	F	sig	ETA coefficient
group	academic engagement	1	363/09	21/47	0/001	0/27
Covariate (pre-test of academic engagement)		1	1607/18	95/06	0/001	---
group	psychological capital)	1	2541/5	28/29	0/003	0/33
Covariate (pre-test psychological capital)		1	6214/83	69/18	0/001	---

The results in the above table shows a comparison between the subjects for the variables of academic engagement and psychological capital.

In explaining the first hypothesis, it can be said that the F-value for the study of the difference between the experimental group and the control group on the academic engagement is 21.41 and is statistically significant at the level of 0.01 ( $P \leq 0/01$ ). According to descriptive statistics, it can be concluded that the level of academic engagement in the experimental group is more than the control group. In addition, based on the correlation coefficient of ETA, 0.27% of variance of the

academic engagement variable was explained by the independent variable of the research. It should also be noted that the effect of the variance of covariates (pre-test of academic engagement) to control the initial differences between the experimental and control groups is not statistically significant at the level of 0.01 ( $P < 0.01$ ).

In explaining the second hypothesis, it can be said that the F-value to examine the difference between the experimental group and the control group about the psychological capital is 29/28 and statistically significant at the level of 0.01 ( $P \leq 0/01$ ). According to descriptive statistics, it can be said that the level of psychological capital of the experimental group is more than the control group. In addition, based on the correlation coefficient of ETA, 0.33% of the variable variance of the psychological capital is explained by the independent variable of the research. It should also be noted that the effect of the covariate (pre-test of psychological capital) to control the initial differences between the experimental and control groups is not statistically significant at the level of 0.01 ( $P < 0.01$ ).

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of self-encouragement training on psychological capital and academic engagement. The results of the data analysis showed that self-encouragement training is effective in increasing the psychological and capital academic engagement of students. Among the researches that are consistent with the results of this study, the research of Aslani Far, Bahrami and Asadzadeh (2017), Afkhami Aghda, Rahmati and Fazilatpour (2016), koohestani Parizi and Razavi Nematollahi (2017), Zare and mehman navazan (2015), Kang, Park, Han, & Park (2012), and also the findings of Bahlmann and Dinter (2001) can be pointed out.

In explaining the result, it can be stated that psychological capital is one of the concepts of positive psychology that includes the positive aspects of human life and includes those psychological features that Helps the individual's productivity and contain self-reliance, self-efficacy, goal-oriented, and resilient to problems (Norman, Nimnicht & Pigeon, 2010). And encouragement is to see the positive and negative aspects of the phenomena and, at the same time, the focus, is the consciously selective attention to the positive aspects and Knowing that

doing this is more useful than concentrating on negative aspects (Hersini, Barajali, & Pakdaman Savoji, 2015). Encouragement is the process by which one focuses on the self-assets to create self-esteem, confidence, and sense of value in him (Eckstein, Belongia, & Elit-Apelagat, 2000). Watts and Piterzak (2000) by reviewing a background of encouragement, particularly with an emphasis on Adler's views, say that encouragement is one of the most important aspects of human development and growth.

In explanation of the founded results we can point out that self-encouragement trainings probably help the individual to believe in their abilities and concentrate on their positive aspects which lead to the individual becoming optimistic about the future. It can also be said that encouragement creates a sense of sympathy and social interest which influences hope, optimism, effectiveness and resilience which are all psychological capital and results in the better performance of students in it (psychological capital).

Another finding showed that self-encouragement training is effective in increasing academic engagement of students. Among the researches that are consistent with the results of this study, one can point out the research of Farkoravand (2014), Karbala'i Majid's (2016), Keshavarz Nazari, Zahrakar, & Sarami (2015), & Amiri (2017). Brown (2006) found that successful learners used effective strategies such as self-encouragement and self-motivation to help cope with negative perceptions such as frustration and anxiety in a continuous way (Guo, & Liu, 2018). In explaining the result, it can be stated that academic engagement is considered as a good psychological state (endurance, attraction, & endowment) and an internal commitment to studies. The academic engagement involves several behaviors such as Participation, effort and ability to follow the guidelines (Fredricks, & McColskey, 2012).

Encouragement also submits motivation and daring by helping individuals to see their capabilities and developing their self-esteem. High self-esteem is related to the belief that if we try harder and preserve in our actions we will be able to create skills that are necessary for success (Alizadeh and Sajadi, 2009)

In actuality, in encouragement we bring hope to them and we help them believe in themselves and in their abilities. We are preparing them to stand against many storms in life (Salimi, 2010). Also, in explaining the result, it can be stated that self-encouragement education likely to

make individuals believe in their abilities and this case has increased their effort and participation by building faith in their abilities, paying attention to positive aspects, more endeavor, creating interest in accepting responsibility, and increasing responsibility in work. Also, self-encouragement has improved the relationship between teacher-student and the interest in group activities has increased their academic involvement.

One of the limitations of this research was the limited statistical society to female students which makes it impossible to generalize the findings to the entire population. Another main limitation was the inability to hold a follow up course. It is suggested that researchers take account of these points in follow up researches and take appropriate measures to fulfill them. The findings of this research show that training self-encouragement influences female students' academic involvement and psychological capital. The findings show the importance of self-encouragement training in improving academic involvement and psychological capital of students. Based on the effectiveness of these trainings on improving students' academic involvement and psychosocial capital, offering these trainings is evaluated to be useful for students.

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**Compliance with ethical guidelines:** All ethical principles were considered in this article .

**Informed Consent:** All individual participants included in the study gave their informed consent prior to data collection.

**Conflict of interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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