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## An examination of perceived social support among Iranian and Turkish EFL teachers

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### Abstract

The present study examined perceived social support based on the theoretical model of Weiss (1974) who offers six provisions reflecting what we receive from relationships with other people. A total of 386 Iranian (N=230) and Turkish (N=156) high school EFL teachers were selected for the study. A 12-item questionnaire ( $\alpha= 0.750$ ), adapted from Russell and Cutrona's (1984) Social Provisions Scale, was used to assess social support among EFL teachers. The results indicated that there were cross-culturally significant differences between Iranian and Turkish EFL teachers in relation to their perception of social support by considering their demographic characteristics such as age, gender, marital status and academic level.

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*Keywords:* Social support; EFL teachers; Iran; Turkey

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### Introduction

Social support refers to the physical and emotional comfort which teachers receive from administrators, colleagues, parents, and students. Social support is usually defined as the “existence or availability of people on whom we can rely, people who let us know that they care about, value, and love us” ( Sarason et al.,1983, p. 127). In a broad sense, social support includes social integration defined as the structure and quantity of social relationships, such as the size and density of networks and the frequency of interaction, but in the narrow sense social support has been defined in various ways. For example, it is regarded as resources provided by others, as coping assistance or as an exchange of resources. Distinction often made between the perceived available support and support actually received (Hlberc, 2009; Sarason,

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Pierce, & Sarason, 1990; Vaux, 1988;). The former pertains to anticipating help in time of need, and the latter to help provided within a given time period (Schwarzer & Knoll, 2007; Taylor, 2007).

In this study, 'perceived social support' is considered as a school factor because support of teachers usually originates from the school environment, and our conceptualization of social support is based on the theoretical model of Weiss (1974) who offers six provisions reflecting what is received from relationships with other people. The six provisions include *guidance* (advice or information), *reliable alliance* (assurance that others can be counted on in times of stress), *reassurance of worth* (recognition of one's competence), *attachment* (emotional closeness), *social integration* (a sense of belonging to a group of friends), and *opportunity for nurturance* (providing assistance to others). Hence, considering the fact that Iranian and Turkish high school teachers' views on perceived social support will shed more light on the role of social support in EFL settings, the paper aims at finding answers to the following research questions:

1. In what areas (i.e. *guidance*, *reliable alliance*, *reassurance of worth*, *attachment*, *social integration* and *opportunity for nurturance*) do Iranian and Turkish high school EFL teachers' social support perceptions differ?
2. Is there difference between male and female teachers' perceptions on social support?
3. Does 'age' play any role in social support?
4. Is there any relationship between social support perceptions of EFL teachers and their 'marital status'?
5. Is there any relationship between social support and the 'academic level' of EFL teachers?

## 2. Methodology

The participants were 386 high school teachers teaching English as a foreign language in state schools of Iran (N=230) and Turkey (N= 156) during 2011-2012 academic year. There were 176 males (45.6 %) and 210 females (54.4 %) teachers in the study. The data for the study were collected from North West provinces of Iran and four city regions of Ankara in Turkey. A 12-item questionnaire, adapted from Russell and Cutrona's (1984) *Social Provisions Scale* which is based on the theoretical model of Weiss (1974), was used to measure social support in relation to the six subscales mentioned above (see section 1). The internal consistency reliability coefficient, as determined by the Cronbach's alpha value, for all items of the questionnaire was 0.750, which indicates an acceptable reliability index for the measure. SPSS version 19.0 for Windows was used to obtain descriptive statistics in frequencies, percentages, and mean rank scores. Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis Tests were used for determining potential relationships among variables.

## 3. Results

The results, as determined by Mann-Whitney U-test, were statistically significant between Iranian (N= 230) and Turkish (N= 156) EFL teachers' perceptions on social support in subcomponents of guidance (U= 14626.500; P-value= 0.002, P< 0.05), reliable alliance (U= 10017.500; P-value= 0.00, P< 0.05), social integration (U= 15755.000; P-value= 0.039, P< 0.05) and opportunity for nurturance (U= 14130.000; P-value= 0.000, P< 0.05).

Examination of the Mean Rank (Mrk) and Median (Mdn) scores of the subscales of social support also demonstrated that high scores were received by Turkish teachers in all the six subcomponents of guidance (Iranian ► Mrk= 179.09; Mdn= 7.0000 and Turkish ► Mrk = 214.74; Mdn= 8.0000), reliable alliance (Iranian ► Mrk= 159.05; Mdn= 7.0000 and Turkish ► Mrk = 244.29; Mdn= 9.0000), reassurance of worth (Iranian ► Mrk = 187.42; Mdn= 4.00 and Turkish ► Mrk= 202.46; Mdn= 4.00), social integration (Iranian ► Mrk = 184.00; Mdn= 8.0000 and Turkish ► Mrk= 207.51; Mdn= 9.0000), attachment

(Iranian ► Mrk = 188.55; Mdn= 12.000 and Turkish ► Mrk= 200.79; Mdn= 12.000) and opportunity for nurturance (Iranian ► Mrk = 176.93; Mdn= 8.0000 and Turkish ► Mrk= 217.92; Mdn= 8.0000).

Analysis of Cohen's (1988) reliability effect test showed a slight significant difference for Iranian and Turkish groups in three significant subcomponents of guidance ( $Z = -3.106$ ;  $r = 0.158$ ,  $r < 0.3$ ), social integration ( $Z = -2.062$ ;  $r = 0.104$ ,  $r < 0.3$ ), and opportunity for nurturance ( $Z = -3.587$ ;  $r = 0.182$ ,  $r < 0.3$ ) whereas a moderate significance in subscale of reliable alliance ( $Z = -7.413$ ;  $r = .377$ ;  $r < .50$ ). Cohen's (1988) reliability effect indexes for small, moderate, and strong relationships are  $r = 0.1$ ,  $0.30$ , and  $0.50$  respectively. See Table 1.

Table1. Nationality and Social Support

Group statistics	Mann-Whitney U-Test				r			
	Nationality	N	Mrk	Mdn	U	Z	Sig.	(=Z/N Square root)
1. Guidance	Iranian	230	179.09	7.0000	14626.500	-3.106	0.002	.158
	Turkish	156	214.74	8.0000				
2. Reliable Alliance	Iranian	230	159.05	9.0000	10017.500	-7.413	0.000	.377
	Turkish	156	244.29	7.0000				
3. Reassurance of worth	Iranian	230	187.42	4.00	16542.000	-1.344	0.179	-
	Turkish	156	202.46	4.00				
4. Social Integration	Iranian	230	184.00	8.0000	15755.000	-2.062	0.039	.104
	Turkish	156	207.51	9.0000				
5. Attachment	Iranian	230	188.55	12.000	16802.000	-1.064	0.287	-
	Turkish	156	200.79	12.000				
6. Opportunity for nurturance	Iranian	230	176.93	8.0000	14130.000	-3.587	0.000	.182
	Turkish	156	217.92	8.0000				
Total		386						

The findings, as determined by Mann-Whitney U-test, revealed that there were statistically significant differences between Male (N= 176) and Female (N= 210) EFL teachers' perceptions on social support in subscales of *guidance*, *reliable alliance*, *reassurance of worth*, *social integration*, and *opportunity for nurturance* (see table 2). However, no significant difference was observed between the groups in subscale of *attachment*.

In addition, the results of Mean Rank (Mrk) and Median (Mdn) analyses for the groups showed that female teachers received higher scores in all the subscales of guidance (Male ► Mrk=176.14; Mdn=7.0000 and Female ► Mrk=208.05; Mdn=8.0000), reliable alliance (Male ► Mrk=177.00; Mdn=7.0000 and Female ► Mrk = 207.33; Mdn= 8.0000), and reassurance of worth (Male ► Mrk =168.24; Mdn=4.00 and Female ► Mr=214.67; Mdn=5.00), social integration (Male ► Mrk =175.69; Mdn=8.0000 and Female ► Mr=208.43; Mdn=8.0000) and opportunity for nurturance (Male ► Mrk =177.68; Mdn=8.0000 and

Female ► Mr=206.76; Mdn=8.0000) .Cohen’s (1988) reliability effect test revealed a slight significant difference for male and female groups in subcomponents of guidance (Z= -2.822; r= 0.183, r< 0.3), reliable alliance(Z= -2.678; r= 0.136, r< 0.3), reassurance of worth (Z= -4.211; r= 0.214, r< 0.3), social integration (Z= -2.914; r= 0.148, r< 0.3) and opportunity for nurturance (Z= -2.585; r= 0.131, r< 0.3).

Table2. Gender and Social Support

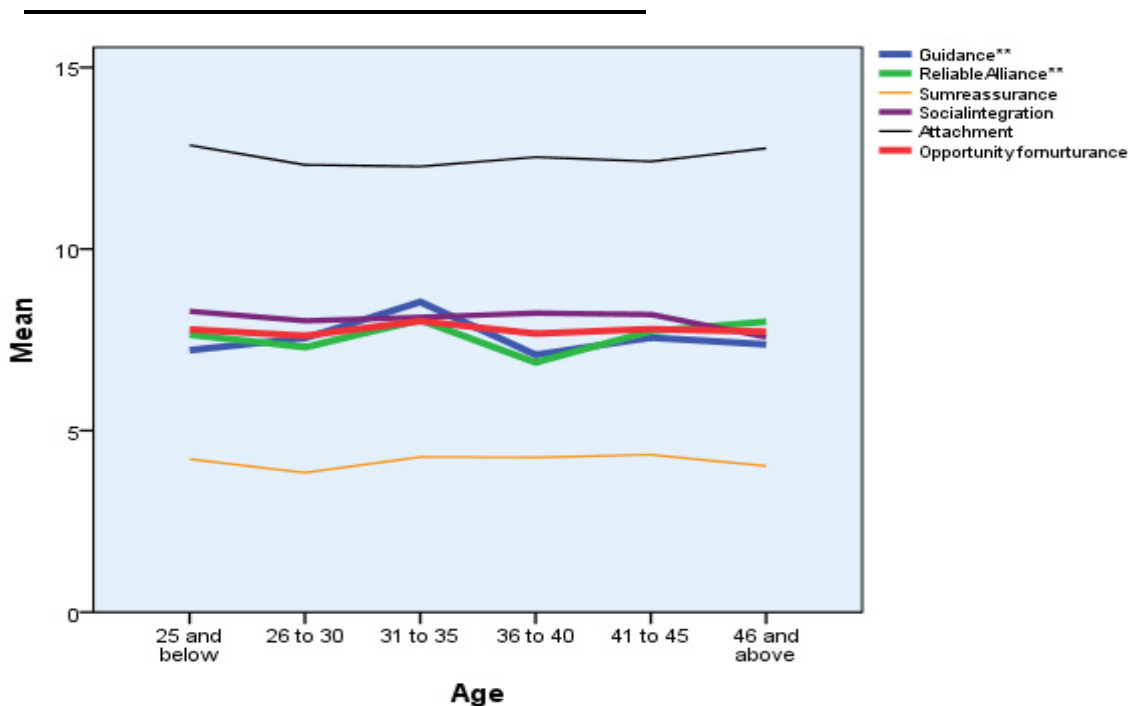
Group statistics	Mann-Whitney U-Test				r			
	Gender	N	Mrk	Mdn	U	Z	Sig.	(=Z/N square root)
1. Guidance	Male	176	176.14	7.0000	15424.500	-2.822	0.000	.143
	Female	210	208.05	8.0000				
2.Reliable alliance	Male	176	177.00	8.0000	15575.500	-2.678	0.007	.136
	Female	210	207.33	7.0000				
3. Reassurance of worth	Male	176	168.24	4.00	14034.000	-4.211	0.000	.214
	Female	210	214.67	5.00				
4.Social integration	Male	176	175.69	8.0000	15345.500	-2.914	0.004	.148
	Female	210	208.43	8.0000				
5.Attachment	Male	176	183.85	12.000	16782.000	-1.564	0.118	-
	Female	210	201.59	12.000				
6. Opportunity for nurturance	Male	176	177.68	8.0000	15695.000	-2.585	0.010	.131
	Female	210	206.76	8.0000				
Total		386						

The results of analyses for age groups of ‘25 and below’ (N=14), ‘26 to 30’ (N=44), ‘31 to 35’ (N=66), ‘36 to 40’ (N=115), ‘41 to 45’ (N=107), and ‘46 and above’ (N=40), as determined by Kruskal-Wallis Test, were statistically significant in subscales of guidance [ $\chi^2$  (5, 386) =15.507; P-value = 0.008; P< 0.05]and reliable alliance [ $\chi^2$  (5, 386) =11.403; P-value = 0.044; P< 0.05].However, there were statistically no significant differencesbetween the age groups and the subcomponents of reassurance of worth [ $\chi^2$  (5, 386) =5.873; P-value = 0.328; P> 0.05], social integration [ $\chi^2$  (5, 386) =6.464; P-value = 0.264; P> 0.05], attachment [ $\chi^2$  (5, 386) =1.019; P-value = 0.961; P> 0.05], and opportunity for nurturance [ $\chi^2$  (5, 386) =0.428; P-value = 0.995; P> 0.05]. Figure1 diagrammatically shows theassociation between age groups and social support.

Additionally, the results of Mean Ranks (Mrk) and Median (Mdn) analyses showed that highest scores were ascribed to the age group of ‘31 to 35’ in the subscales of guidance( 31 to 35 ► Mrk=239.05; Mdn= 7.0000) and reliable alliance (31 to 35 ► Mrk=214.39; Mdn= 8.0000), the age group of ‘41 to 45’ in reassurance of worth (41 to 45 ► Mrk = 205.78; Mdn= 5.00), the age group of ‘25 and below’ in social

integration (25 and below ► Mrk = 216.57; Mdn= 9.0000) and attachment (25 and below ► Mrk = 210.89; Mdn= 12.0000), while to the age group of ‘26 to 30’ in opportunity for nurturance (26 to 30 ► Mrk = 196.25; Mdn= 7.5000). The lowest scores of mean rank were observed for the age group of ‘36 to 40’ in the subscales of guidance( (36 to 40 ► Mrk=174.02; Mdn= 7.0000) and reliable alliance (36 to 40 ► Mrk=167.55; Mdn= 7.0000), the age group of ‘26 to 30’ in reassurance of worth ( 26 to 30 ► Mrk = 161.63; Mdn= 4.00), the age group of ‘46 and above’ in social integration (46 and above ► Mrk = 122.46; Mdn= 8.0000) , the age group of ‘26 and 30’ in subscale of attachment (26 to 30) ► Mrk = 186.55; Mdn= 11.0000), while for the age group of ‘46 and above’ in the subscale of opportunity for nurturance (46 and above ► Mrk = 183.00; Mdn= 7.0000).

Figure1. Association between Age and Social Support



There were statistically significant differences between the participants’ marital status of single (N=62), married (N=304), and divorced (N=20) and the two subcomponents of attachment, and opportunity for nurturance .The highest mean ranks and median scores were received by the divorced group in the significant subscales of attachment (Mrk►248.70) and opportunity for nurturance (Mrk►249.08) whereas the lowest mean ranks and median scores were ascribed to the single group in attachment (Mrk ►175.04) and opportunity for nurturance (Mrk►179.07). See table 3.

Table 3. Marital Status and Social Support

Components	Group statistics			Kruskal-Wallis Test			
	Marital Status	N	Mrk	Mdn	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
1. Guidance	Single	62	185.96	8.0000	.343	2	0.842
	Married	304	194.97	7.0000			
	Divorced	20	194.53	7.0000			
2. Reliable alliance	Single	62	197.68	8.0000	1.923	2	0.382
	Married	304	197.57	7.0000			
	Divorced	20	225.08	7.5000			
3. Reassurance of Worth	Single	62	199.57	4.50	0.855	2	0.652
	Married	304	191.13	4.00			
	Divorced	20	210.75	4.50			
4. Social integration	Single	62	184.27	8.0000	2.816	2	0.245
	Married	304	197.64	8.0000			
	Divorced	20	159.20	8.0000			
5. Attachment	Single	62	175.04	11.0000	6.671	2	0.036
	Married	304	193.63	12.0000			
	Divorced	20	248.70	14.0000			
6. Opportunity for nurturance	Single	62	179.07	8.0000	61.67	2	0.046
	Married	304	192.79	8.0000			
	Divorced	20	249.08	10.0000			
	Total	386					

The findings, as determined by Mann Whitney U Test, revealed that there was statistically a significant difference between academic levels of Bachelor's Degree (N= 256) and Master's Degree (N= 130) in subcomponent of social integration (U= 14582.500; P-value= 0.044, P< 0.05), but no significant differences were observed in subcomponents of guidance (U= 16818.500; P-value= 0.545, P> 0.05), reliable alliance (U= 16091.000; P-value= 0.594, P>0.05), reassurance of worth (U= 16034.500; P-value= 0.546, P> 0.05), attachment (U= 16224.000; P-value= 0.686, P> 0.05) and opportunity for nurturance (U= 15750.500; P-value= 0.385, P>0.05).

Additionally, the results of Mean Ranks (Mrk) and Median (Mdn) analyses showed that high scores were received by M.A. degree holders in subcomponents of social integration (M.A. ► Mrk = 209.33; Mdn= 8.0000), reassurance of worth (M.A. ► Mrk= 198.16; Mdn= 4.50), and opportunity for nurturance (M.A. ► Mrk = 200.34; Mdn= 8.0000) while the highest scores of mean rank were ascribed to B.A. degree holders in guidance (B.A. ► Mrk= 195.93; Mdn=8.0000), reliable alliance (B.A. ► Mr = 195.64; Mdn= 8.0000), and attachment (B.A. ► Mr = 195.13; Mdn= 12.0000). The lowest mean score was ascribed to M.A. holders in guidance (Mrk=188.72) whereas to B.A. holders in subcomponent of social integration (Mrk= 185.46). However, Cohen's (1988) reliability effect test showed a slight significant difference for M.A. and B.A. degree holders in the subcomponent of social integration (Z= -2.014; r= 0.102, r < 0.3).

#### 4. Discussion

The findings regarding the degree of difference between Iranian and Turkish EFL teachers' social support perceptions in reference to the four subcomponents of *guidance*, *reliable alliance*, *social integration* and *opportunity for nurturance* showed that Iranian and Turkish EFL teachers differed statistically in their perception of social support, but no significant difference was observed between the participants in subscales of *reassurance of worth* and *attachment*. Moreover, the results revealed a high mean rank and median in all subscales for Turkish teachers (Iranian ► Average Mrk= 179.17; Average Mdn= 7.66 and Turkish ► Average Mrk= 214.61; Average Mdn= 9.83). This implies that Turkish teachers receive more social support than Iranian ones in having access to advice and information on how to handle discipline problems within a school setting, having access to reliable others for tangible assistance, perceptions of competence, skills, and value to others, a sense of security and safety, sharing interests and concerns with other colleagues and feeling responsibility for the well-being of others.

The findings were statistically significant between male and female groups in all subscales except for the subscale of *attachment*, where the mean rank of female group (Mrk ► 201.59) was also greater than that of the male one (Mrk ► 183.85). This implies that females receive more support than males in handling discipline problems encountered within a school setting, are supported by colleagues more than males, have greater understanding of other colleagues, are eager to share interests and concerns with other colleagues and a feeling of responsibility for the well-being of another, while both groups think equally about the degree of emotional security provided within school settings, a feeling of strong emotional bond with other colleagues and a feeling of intimacy towards them.

Regarding age variable, the findings also demonstrated that there were statistically significant differences between the groups in the subscales of *guidance* and *reliable alliance*. The highest scores were observed among age group '31 to 35' and the lowest scores were received by age group '36 to 40' in the significant subscales. This suggests that some teachers do not have reliable others on whom they can rely on for assistance while others are provided with necessary help when needed.

As for the marital status variable, the examination of mean ranks showed that the divorced group had large mean ranks in subscales of *attachment* (Mrk ► 248.70) and *opportunity for nurturance* (Mrk ► 249.08) and this suggests that this group, due to marital experience, has greater sense of emotional security and feel more responsibility for the well-being of other colleagues. Conversely, the single group had small mean ranks in both significant subscales of *attachment* (Mrk ► 175.04) and *opportunity for nurturance* (Mrk ► 179.07). This means that they perceive they are not provided with a desirable sense of emotional security and well-being, have no strong emotional bond and intimacy with colleagues and are, thus, less concerned about the well-being and needs of other colleagues.

Finally, findings for the academic levels of Bachelor's Degree and Master's Degree were statistically significant in subcomponent of *social integration*, but no significant differences were observed in other subcomponents of social support. The mean rank and median scores of M.A. degree holders in the significant subscale, and insignificant subcomponents of *reassurance of worth* and *opportunity for nurturance*, were greater than that of the B.A. degree holders. That is, the M.A. holders perceive they have strong social integration and are more inclined to share their beliefs and attitudes with colleagues in comparison with the B.A. holders. This can be attributed to their knowledge and experience in understanding the nature of social support in these areas.

#### 5. Conclusion



The study aimed at investigating the perceived social support of Iranian and Turkish EFL teachers. The results revealed that there were cross-culturally moderate significant differences between Iranian and Turkish EFL teachers in the *guidance, reliable alliance, social integration* and *opportunity for nurturance* subscales of social support, but not in subscales of *reassurance of worth* and *attachment*, that male and female teachers differed significantly in their perception of all subscales of social support except for the subscale of attachment, that age is a key factor in subscales of guidance and reliable alliance in both groups, that marital status plays an important role in participants' perception of attachment and opportunity for nurturance subscales, and that academic level was significant only in the perception of social integration among both Iranian and Turkish groups. The findings do have important implications for educational policy makers to provide and promote social support needed by teachers. The application of these findings will foster positive social relations network and this may, in turn, enhance the recruitment and retention of teachers within school environment and have beneficial effect on the quality of work and performance of EFL teachers by improving availability and quality of social support to them.

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