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The Relationship Between Demographic Features and Iranian EFL Teachers' Attachment Style

La relación entre las características demográficas y el estilo de apego de profesores iraníes de inglés como lengua extranjera

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This study investigated Iranian English as a foreign language teachers' attachment styles and possible influential factors such as age, teaching experience, gender, and educational degree. The participants were 108 female and 79 male Iranian English teachers, chosen through convenience and snowball sampling. Using Google forms, a researcher-made questionnaire was sent to the participants. There was a positive relationship between age and a secure style, and a negative relationship between fearful and preoccupied styles and age. Further, there was a positive correlation between a secure style and teaching experience, and a negative relationship between fearful and preoccupied styles and teaching experience. Male teachers were more secure, and educational degree made no difference in secure and preoccupied styles.

Keywords: attachment style, demographic features, English language teachers

Este estudio investigó los estilos de apego de profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera iraníes y los posibles factores influyentes como edad, experiencia docente, género y nivel educativo. Los participantes fueron 108 mujeres y 79 hombres, seleccionados por el muestreo de conveniencia y en cadena. Se elaboró un cuestionario en línea que se envió a los participantes. Las respuestas revelaron que, en cuanto a la edad, existía una relación positiva con el estilo seguro y una negativa con los estilos temerosos y preocupados. Además, en cuanto a la experiencia docente, hubo una correlación positiva con el estilo seguro y una negativa con los estilos de miedo y preocupación. Los hombres indicaron sentirse más seguros y el nivel educativo no mostró diferencia para los estilos seguro y preocupado.

Palabras clave: características demográficas, estilo de apego, docentes de inglés

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Introduction

The first relationship that children establish is with parents and siblings in their homes. The children's daily interactions with adults and peers propel their future learning and development (Choi & Dobbs-Oates, 2016; Krstić, 2015). After a child begins to dis-attach him or herself from the parents or other siblings, the other adults with whom a child builds meaningful relationships are often the teachers. The positive relationship between teacher and children provides them the emotional security needed for engaging in learning activities and improving their social, behavioral, and self-controlling competencies (Barker, 2015; Granot & Mayseless, 2001). Thus, the attachment styles of teachers and students deserve some attention, and it is a topic worth researching because the quality of early attachments determines the quality of adults' academic, emotional, and social abilities (de Castro & Pereira, 2019).

Attachment style, as a kind of relationship initiated by a person with others, is usually formed during the first years of life, but it goes on throughout that person's life (Bowlby, 1973). It is not synonymous with dependency as it is the anchor from which children begin to explore their world (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). In a family setting, both mother and father are understood as "attachment figures"; and "although considerably more attention in the attachment field has been given to mothers, interest in fathers emerged very early in the development of attachment theory" (Bretherton, 2010, p. 9). However, the main point is that, in school, this attachment figure is usually a teacher. Children failing to bond with their attachment figures in their early life may later develop significant attachments with their teachers (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; de Castro & Pereira, 2019; Polek, 2008).

Several factors are involved in the formation of attachment styles. Hazan and Shaver (1987) maintain that the perceptions about children's relationships with parents, and their parents' relationship with each other, are the best predictors of adult attachment styles. A few studies attribute children's cognitive skills and school achievements to their secure attachment to parents (Cassidy et al., 2013; de Castro & Pereira, 2019; Granot & Mayseless, 2001). Gervai (2009) mentions that environmental and biological factors may exert influence on adulthood's attachment style, and there is also the number of significant relationships, which increase as children mature (Veríssimo et al., 2017). Thus, the attachment style of adults is logically to a large extent a function of the amount of care and emotion they received during childhood (Ackerman, n.d.; Granot & Mayseless, 2001).

On the other hand, attachment styles may exert effects on students' success and behaviors in educational contexts (de Castro & Pereira, 2019). Attachment relationships with parents and teachers can impact both school adjustment and success (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Granot & Mayseless, 2001; Krstić, 2015). Negative teacher–student attachment may cause withdrawing from school (de Castro & Pereira, 2019; O'Connor & McCartney, 2007). Furthermore, teachers usually depend on their students' mental representations, which help them maintain their professional identity (Riley, 2009).

Although there exists a large body of studies which investigate the factors influencing attachment styles of elementary and middle school children (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Cassidy et al., 2013; Choi & Dobbs-Oates, 2016; Granot & Mayseless, 2001; Ogelman & Seven, 2012; O'Connor & McCartney, 2007; Stevenson-Hinde & Verschueren, 2002; Verissimo et al., 2017) and adult students (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; de Castro & Pereira, 2019; Simpson & Rholes, 2017; Tagay & Karataş, 2012), there exists little research focusing on teachers' attachment style, English language teachers in particular, and how it may vary according to commonly known factors.

Considering all the above-mentioned factors, this study aims to focus on Iranian English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' attachment styles and examine the factors that influence these styles. The factors included in this study are age, teaching experience, gender (women vs. men), and educational degree (e.g., BA, MA, PhD). The

research question is as follows: Is there any relationship between the attachment styles of Iranian EFL teachers and (a) their age, (b) their experience, (c) their gender, and (d) their educational degrees?

Literature Review

Background

The theory of attachment can be viewed from environmental and psychological perspectives. Gervai (2009) believes that Bowlby's attachment theory could be truly environmental because it has explained individual differences by individual variation in relation to caregivers' behavior. Ainsworth et al. (1978) assert that optimal secure behavior could be related to sufficient sensitive responsiveness at home. Gervai also mentions factors such as income and size of the family; age and education of parents; major nerve-wracking events like loss of a parent, birth of a sibling, severe illness, marital relationships; and relationship breakdowns seem to exert an effect on the standard of attachment relationships.

Several studies suggest the existence of a strong link between the adolescents' attachment styles and psychological functioning (Allen & Land, 1999; Gervai, 2009; Simpson & Rholes, 2017). An adolescent's preoccupied style, for instance, has a close relationship with internalizing problems, in particular to the degree of self-reported depression (Allen & Land, 1999). "The attachment system . . . motivates vulnerable individuals to seek close physical and emotional proximity to their primary caregivers" (Simpson & Rholes, 2017, p. 19). Nevertheless, attachment formation, either environmentally or psychologically, is considered a developmental process that goes far beyond infancy and early childhood (Shumaker et al., 2009).

Categorization of Attachment Styles

Ainsworth and Bell (1970) identify three major styles of attachment: secure, ambivalent-insecure, and avoidant-insecure. On the other hand, Moss and St-Laurent (2001) identify four types: secure, insecure/avoidant, insecure/resistant, and insecure/disorganized or controlling. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) divide the attachment styles in adulthood to four categories: secure, fearful, dismissive, and preoccupied. These four attachment styles are defined according to a mixture of a person's positive or negative self-image and the image provided by others (again positive or negative). Since our study uses the four attachment styles developed by Bartholomew and Horowitz, we briefly define them next.

Secure: It is relatively easy for people belonging to this category to develop intimacy with or become emotionally close to others. Relying on others and having others rely on them is also quite usual for them. They do not worry about being alone, do not have problems with needing others' approval or not being accepted by others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Polek, 2008). They also act better to control their emotions and impulses (de Castro & Pereira, 2019). Teachers with a secure attachment style use warm, positive words when talking to their students and do not resort to corporal punishment; they are less controlling and demonstrate more positive moods and enjoyment (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

Dismissing: Adults with the dismissing style tend to live comfortably without enjoying a close emotional relationship. Being independent and self-sufficient is extremely important for them, and they have low anxiety but show high avoidance of relationships (Polek, 2008; Toffoli, 2015). Teachers high in avoidance are less inclined to compromise in a conflict situation with students. They may avoid helping the students with difficult tasks (Stevenson-Hinde & Verschueren, 2002), and they may not be available when the children are in emotional turmoil (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

Preoccupied: Preoccupied adults very much tend to be quite intimate with others but may think others are reluctant to get to them as much as they would like. These people need others' opinions to feel worthy and feel uncomfortable in their life when having no

close relationships (Polek, 2008; Toffoli, 2015). A preoccupied person may show exaggerated feelings and is difficult to soothe (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Teachers with this attachment style may be demanding and preoccupied with their students (Stevenson-Hinde & Verschueren, 2002). This group of people may also get mad at their students even while trying to please them and may seem dependent on their approval (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

Fearful: Individuals with this style are somewhat uncomfortable getting close to others, anxious within relationships, and highly need to be accepted in a relationship (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Segal et al., 2009). These people question their self-worth and expect the other person to abandon them or harm them in some way. They find it very hard when they want to trust or depend on others (Polek, 2008; Simpson & Rholes, 2017; Toffoli, 2015). As teachers, fearful adults are apprehensive, and their stressful behaviors may even be worse when attending their classes. These teachers may try to reduce uncertainty and may seem confident, but still are sensitive and anxious (Stevenson-Hinde & Verschueren, 2002).

Related Studies

The studies investigating the association between attachment styles and education are mostly conducted on children. Bergin and Bergin (2009) show how attachment to parents was connected to school achievements. These authors gave 12 suggestions on how to improve student–teacher relationships and how school bonding could be fostered. These suggestions include:

> Increase sensitivity and warm, positive interactions with students . . . Be well-prepared for class and hold high expectations for students . . . Be responsive to students' agendas by providing choice whenever possible . . . Use induction rather than coercive discipline . . . Help students be kind, helpful, and accepting of one another . . . Implement interventions for specific, difficult relationships. (Bergin & Bergin, 2009, pp. 158–159).

Krstić (2015) focuses on the quality of attachment between students and teachers and teachers' practices. Results showed that attachment to teachers greatly influenced the students' opinions about school and the learning process in both fourth and fifth grades, and it also affected their school marks. The quality of the support provided in teaching influenced students' academic attachment, and teachers' warm relationship with learners impacted their school marks and attitudes towards school and learning.

Riley (2009) worked on adults' attachment perspective, the relationships between student and teacher, and classroom management difficulties. In his study, the attachment styles of 291 preservice and experienced elementary and secondary school teachers were investigated. The results showed that the experienced teachers were more secure than their inexperienced colleagues and the elementary teachers were more secure than their secondary colleagues. Elementary teachers tended to be less anxious and less avoidant of close relationships. As their experience increased, this difference became more pronounced for both men and women; however, male teachers were highly sensitive in this regard.

de Castro and Pereira (2019) worked on the early school dropout rate of Portuguese students and introduced the Alternative Curricular Course (ACC), which enhances the basic learning skills. In their study, they compared students in ACC to students in regular education (RE), examining aspects such as students' internal working models and student–teacher relationships, and the association of these factors with school performance. The results revealed that students of the ACC enjoyed a less secure internal working model than students in RE, and that the quality of the student–teacher relationship was correlated with a better educational attainment.

Although the previous studies mainly focus on children, they show evidence that teachers' attitudes inside the classroom are an important factor in students' academic success. Thus, it is worth knowing and exploring teachers' attachment styles as this may help identify their impact on students' learning achievements.

Method

Design

This study follows descriptive and correlational design. As no experimental or control group or treatment was defined, a quantitative and non-experimental approach was utilized. The researchers collected data by administering the attachment style questionnaire (see Appendix) and entered the numerical data into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The teachers' attachment style was the target variable and teachers' age, gender, teaching experience, and educational degree were studied for their possible correlation with the attachment style. The strength of association between attachment styles and age, and attachment style and experience (two continuous variables) were measured by a correlation test, while the difference between attachment styles of different genders and educational degrees (one continuous and one nominal variable) was determined via comparison.

Participants

Data were obtained from 187 Iranian English teachers working in different cities of Iran and whose teaching experience ranged from 1 to 25 years. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Participants

Educational degree	*n*	Men	Women
Diploma holders/BA students	5	2	3
BA holders	56	25	31
MA holders	95	42	53
PhD students	7	4	3
PhD holders	24	6	18
Total	187	79	108

The participants worked as teachers in private language institutes (n = 98) and in state high schools (n = 62) or as lecturers in state universities (n = 19). A small proportion (n = 8) chose not to report their place of work as this was optional. The participants' first language was Persian, and their ages ranged from 20 to 59 years.

Data Collection Instrument

A researcher-made and validated questionnaire was used to find out about the teachers' attachment style. The researchers developed the questionnaire based on two different questionnaires by Van Oudenhoven et al. (2003) and Poole Heller (2014). The researchers added 20 items of Poole Heller and 22 items of Van Oudenhoven et al., and then narrowed them down, deleting some items which were vague, cutting long statements into half to make them simpler and more understandable, and rephrasing three to four items in each category. This was done until the items related well to the goals of the research. The final version of the questionnaire was sent for two experts in the field to check for the validity of the items. This piloting resulted in the rephrasing of several items, and the addition of five items since they were double-barreled in the previous version.

The final version of the questionnaire consisted of 45 short statements, out of which nine items related to the secure attachment style, 10 items to the fearful attachment style, 14 items to the preoccupied attachment style, and 12 items to the dismissing attachment style. The statements addressed how the participants felt in emotionally intimate relationships. Moreover, the participants were asked to answer questions about their age, gender, teaching experience, and educational degree. The scale ranged from one (*strongly disagree*) to five (*strongly agree*, see Appendix).

Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

The questionnaire was prepared using Google Forms, and its link was sent to the participants using WhatsApp, Telegram, and email. The participants were identified through convenience and snowball sampling techniques. The participants answered the questionnaire statements anonymously, so they felt at ease in answering them. As Riley (2009) suggested,

> to increase the chances of valid responses to the instrument, it was determined that participants would be more likely to see the benefit of honest responses to the questionnaire, which contains a number of challenging statements, only after they had gained some knowledge of attachment theory and its connection to their professional lives. (p. 628)

In light of the foregoing, the attachment style was defined, its different types were explained, and the respondents were promised that the results of the research would be sent to them later. Consequently, the researchers provided their emails at the end of the questionnaire so that the respondents could contact them. Some of them, whom the researchers could visit, signed a consent form, but for those who were living in other cities, it was explained at the beginning of the questionnaire.

The data were analyzed using the SPSS statistical package (version 23). Statements are scaled from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), educational degree from 1 (diploma holders/BA students) to 5 (PhD) as well as gender as 1 (men) and 2 (women). For age and experience, no scales were defined. Then statements under each category of four attachment styles were computed and merged; and new variables (e.g., secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing) were created. The final result was the mean score of each attachment style for each participant. The data, then, were checked for normality assumption. The test showed that, except for preoccupied style, the rest of the scores and means were not normally distributed. However, researchers decided to run a non-parametric test for all variables since there was not any significant difference between the final results. For answering the first and second research questions—the relationship between attachment styles and age and teaching experience—Spearman's rank–order correlation was run. To answer the third research question which compares men's and women's attachment styles, the Mann-Whitney U test was run. Finally, for comparing participants' attachment styles regarding their educational degree, the Kruskal Wallis Test was administered.

Results

The data were initially checked for normality assumption, and Table 2 presents the results from the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and the Shapiro-Wilk test. As the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is more appropriate for large sample sizes (< 50 samples), this test was used as a numerical means of assessing normality.

Table 2 shows that the significant values of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for "secure," "fearful," and "dismissing" attachment styles were .000, .014, and .000, respectively. Thus, they deviated from a normal distribution and, non-parametric tests were used. Regarding "preoccupied" style, the significant value of .200, which was greater than 0.05, showed that the data were normally distributed and a parametric test could be used. However, since there existed no difference between parametric and non-parametric results for this variable, the researchers preferred to use a nonparametric test.

Table 2. Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov [a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	*df*	Sig.	Statistic	*df*	Sig.
Secure	.094	187	.000	.984	187	.036
Fearful	.074	187	.014	.981	187	.012
Preoccupied	.052	187	.200*	.990	187	.214
Dismissing	.095	187	.000	.973	187	.001

[a] Lilliefors Significance Correction.

*This is a lower bound of the true significance.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Attachment Styles

		F	%	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Secure	103	43.1	55.1	55.1
	Fearful	13	5.4	7.0	62.0
	Preoccupied	28	11.7	15.0	77.0
	Dismissing	43	18.0	23.0	100.0
	Total	187	78.2	100.0	
Missing	System	52	21.8		
Total	239	100.0			

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of four attachment styles. Among 187 participants, 103 chose secure style (43.1%), 13 fearful (5.4%), 28 preoccupied (11.7%), and 43 were of dismissing style (18%).

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics of age and experience and four attachment styles. Age groups were divided into eight groups from 20 to 59 years old. Except for the 25–29 and the 45–49 age groups, the percentage of secure style among participants increased as the age increased, whereas the percentage of fearful and preoccupied styles decreased by increasing age. The most fearful (14.8%) and the most preoccupied (22.2%) participants were among the 20–24 age group. Years of experience were divided into five groups ranging from 1–25 years. The results showed that as the teaching experience increased, the percentage of the secure styles increased too. Participants who had 16 to 25 years of experience (77% to 80%) were the most secure. Whereas teachers with 1 to 5 years of experience were among the most fearful (8.7%) and the most preoccupied ones (19.7%), and teachers with 6 to 10 years were the most dismissing (27.5%).

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Age and Experience

	Age range															
	20–24		25–29		30–34		35–39		40–44		45–49		50–54		55–59	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Secure	15	55.5	19	35.1	32	58.1	23	71.8	11	84.6	2	50	1	100	0	0
Fearful	4	14.8	4	7.4	2	3.6	2	6.2	1	7.6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Preoccupied	6	22.2	10	18.5	8	14.5	4	12.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dismissing	2	7.4	21	38.8	13	23.6	3	9.3	1	7.6	2	50	0	0	1	100
Total	27	100	54	100	55	100	32	100	13	100	4	100	1	100	1	100
	Years of experience															
	1–5		6–10		11–15		16–20		21–25							
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%						
Secure	43	47.2	34	58.6	15	62.5	7	77.7	4	80						
Fearful	8	8.7	3	5.1	2	8.3	0	0	0	0						
Preoccupied	18	19.7	5	8.6	4	16.6	1	11.1	0	0						
Dismissing	22	24.1	16	27.5	3	12.5	1	11.1	1	20						
Total	91	100	58	100	24	100	9	100	5	100						

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Gender and Educational Degrees

	Gender				Educational Degrees									
	Men		Women		Diploma holders/BA students		BA		MA		PhD student		PhD	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Secure	52	65.8	51	47.2	2	40	30	53.5	50	52.6	5	71.4	16	66.6
Fearful	3	3.7	10	9.2	0	0	5	8.9	7	7.3	0	0	1	4.1
Preoccupied	9	11.3	19	17.5	2	40	9	16	14	14.7	1	14.2	2	8.3
Dismissing	15	18.9	28	25.9	1	20	12	21.4	24	25.2	1	14.2	5	20.8
Total	79	100	108	100	5	100	56	100	95	100	7	100	24	100

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistic for gender and degrees with regard to the four attachment styles. Out of a total of 187 participants, 79 were men and 108 were women. Among the men, 52 participants preferred a secure style (65.8%), 15 dismissing, nine preoccupied, and three fearful. Among the women, 51 participants had a secure style (47.2%), 28 dismissing, 19 preoccupied, and 10 fearful. Thus, men showed more security than women. Regarding educational degrees, the more secure participants were among PhD students (71.4%) and PhD holders (66.6%). BA holders showed secure slightly more than MA holders (53.5%). The BA group also showed the most fearful one (8.9%) in comparison to their MA counterparts. The BA group turned out to be more preoccupied than the MA group and PhD group, while the MA group was the most dismissing one.

For finding out the relationship between attachment styles and age, a correlation test was run. The results are presented in Table 6.

A Spearman's rank–order correlation showed that there was a strong negative correlation between fearful style and age ($r_s(8) = -.160, p = .029$); and preoccupied style and age ($r_s(8) = -.172, p = .018$). That is, as age increases, people become less fearful and less preoccupied. There was also a negative relationship between dismissing style and age, which was not statistically significant ($r_s(8) = -.078, p = .286$). The results showed no significant correlation between secure style and age ($r_s(8) = .023, p = .755$).

Table 6. Correlation Between Attachment Styles and Age (*N* = 187)

			Age
Spearman's rho	Secure	Correlation coefficient	.023
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.755
	Fearful	Correlation coefficient	-.160*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.029
	Preoccupied	Correlation coefficient	-.172*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.018
	Dismissing	Correlation coefficient	-.078
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.286

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 7. Correlation Between Attachment Styles and Experience (*N* = 187)

			Experience
Spearman's rho	Secure	Correlation coefficient	.074
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.311
	Fearful	Correlation coefficient	-.133
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.069
	Preoccupied	Correlation coefficient	-.107
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.146
	Dismissing	Correlation coefficient	.015
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.842

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

A Spearman's rank–order correlation was run to determine the relationship between the four attachment styles and experience (see Table 7).

As the results show, there was a negative correlation between fearful style and experience ($r_s(8) = -.133, p = .069$), and preoccupied style and experience ($r_s(8) = -.107, p = .146$). There was a positive correlation between secure style and experience which was not statistically significant ($r_s(8) = .074, p = .311$). There was not any significant relationship between dismissing style and experience ($r_s(8) = .015, p = .842$).

Then, the differences between men and women were investigated. As the researchers aimed to compare differences between these two groups concerning attachment styles, which were continuous but not normally distributed, they used the Mann-Whitney U test. Table 8 provides the test statistic, *U* statistic, and the asymptotic significance (2-tailed) *p*-value. It can be concluded that men and women were significantly different in secure style ($U = 4201.500, p = .859$) with men showing more secure than women. They possessed the least difference in fearfulness ($U = 3471, p = .029$) with men again showing they are less fearful teachers than women.

Finally, the study looked for the differences between educational degrees (i.e., diploma holders/BA students, BA, MA, PhD student, and PhD) and attachment styles, thus, a non-parametric (i.e., Kruskal-Wallis) test was run. Table 9 shows that these five groups of educational degrees showed significant difference in preoccupation, $\chi^2 (2) = 9.530, p = 0.049$ (diploma holders/BA students were more preoccupied than the others) and not any statistically significant difference in the secure ($\chi^2 (2) = 8.125, p = 0.087$), fearful ($\chi^2 (2) = 5.977, p = 0.201$), and dismissing styles ($\chi^2 (2) = 7.411, p = 0.116$).

Table 8. Mann-Whitney Test Comparing Men and Women Styles

	Secure	Fearful	Preoccupied	Dismissing
Mann-Whitney U	4201.500	3471.000	3722.000	3601.500
Wilcoxon W	7361.500	6631.000	6882.000	6761.500
Z	-.177	-2.178	-1.489	-1.821
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.859	.029	.136	.069

Note. Grouping variable: Gender.

Table 9. Kruskal Wallis Test Comparing Educational Degrees

	Secure	Fearful	Preoccupied	Dismissing
Chi-Square	8.125	5.977	9.530	7.411
df	4	4	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	.087	.201	.049	.116

Note. Grouping variable: Educational degree.

Discussion

The present study addressed whether attachment styles of Iranian English teachers were associated with their age, gender, teaching experience, and educational degree. In total, among the 187 participants, 103 selected secure style, 13 fearful, 28 preoccupied, and 43 dismissing style. It is worth mentioning that although in this study individuals were conceptualized and placed into one category and a dominant style was considered as their attachment style, Segal et al. (2009) mention that attachment style cannot be viewed as a categorical construct, and thus must be measured dimensionally. The following paragraphs discuss each research question by investigating attachment styles from the dimensional point of view.

Concerning the correlation between the four styles and age, it was revealed that except for the 25–29 and the 45–49 age groups, there was a positive relationship between age and secure style and a strong negative relationship between fearful and preoccupied styles and age. Investigating responses of 27 teachers who were in their early twenties revealed that they had mainly a secure style. After that, preoccupied and fearful styles were dominant. In addition, the results of 55 teachers in their early thirties indicated that the dominant styles were secure (58.1%) and dismissing (23.6%) styles. As feeling independent and self-sufficient, not depending on others, and focusing on their own needs are the salient characteristics of dismissing individuals, the incidence of this style at this age group or older ones is predictable. An individual with the dismissing style is considered to have high self-esteem (Akbağ & İmamoğlu, 2010). This may be another reason why older Turkish teachers showed a dismissing style. Similarly, Segal et al. (2009) also found a lower number of persons with preoccupied and ambivalent (fearful) attachment styles and came up with a higher number of dismissing attachment styles in older adults in comparison to younger adults. They believed that "it is likely the differences found were a consequence of the unique social, cultural, and historical forces that have affected differently the two groups" (p. 128). To be more exact, younger adults are more likely to have higher rates of mental discomfort than older adults, or older adults may be less willing to report uneasy feelings than those in the younger group.

Regarding the relationship between attachment styles and experience, there was a positive correlation between the secure style and the experience of teachers. Riley (2009) reported that teachers with more than five years of experience were significantly more secure than novice teachers. For teachers, Riley (2012) considered experience a more effective predictor of attachment style than age. Furthermore, he believed that "the internal working model (IWM), a largely unconscious attachment mechanism, changes in teachers as a result of their classroom experience" (p. 12). The results of this study also showed that there was a negative relationship between fearful and preoccupied styles on the one hand and teaching experience. These results are in line with de Castro and Pereira's (2019) study, conducted in Portugal. They asserted that insecure attachment is due to the lack of experience in the executive functions such as difficulty in organizing, monitoring, evaluating, and planning actions, as well as being weak in abstract thinking, initiation, and working memory. Experienced teachers show confidence and acceptance to their students which promote positive relationships and learning experiences.

The results also showed a statistically significant difference between men and women in secure style. Men were more secure than women, but women

proved more preoccupied and more dismissive than men. These results were supported by Tagay and Karataş's (2012) study where Turkish women were more fearful and dismissing than men. They concluded that Turkish men were usually in charge of the family and were expected to meet the needs of other family members more than their own needs; therefore, they were expected to experience a higher preoccupied attachment level covering the idea that others are more important. According to Tagay and Karataş, Turkish women are usually afraid of and anxious about their close relationships in their lives, so their generally submissive character and obedient behaviors are supported. In another study conducted in Turkey, women showed to be more affected by their mistakes and more interpersonally sensitive than men, which may make them more fearful and preoccupied (Akbağ & İmamoğlu, 2010). In Riley's (2009) study, young Australian female teachers showed a less secure style compared to young men teachers. He believed that women usually gain more benefits from their work experience than their men counterparts. In general, researchers have proposed that gender differences in an attachment style may be predictable. Studies with Czech and Slovak women showed that they develop anxiety-related attachments, while men show avoidance-related attachments (Rozvadský-Gugová & Heretik, 2011; Scharfe, 2017). However, Del Giudice (2011) named geographic region and effect of age as the variables that may confound these results.

Finally, regarding the differences between individuals in relation to different educational degrees, there was not any statistically significant difference in educational degrees between the secure, fearful, and dismissing styles, but there was a significant difference in the preoccupied style, where diploma holders/BA students showed to be more preoccupied than others. Teachers who were PhD students and teachers holding PhD degrees were more secure than other groups. Teachers holding BA degrees were either the fearful or preoccupied ones, while teachers with MA degrees were the most dismissing teachers. In Choi and Dobbs-Oates's (2016) research, teachers holding a higher-education degree showed lower teacher–student closeness (dismissing style) compared to other teachers. Teachers having higher education reported an equitable level of close relationship with boys and girls, whereas younger teachers whose degree was lower than MA or PhD displayed a higher closeness with girls than with boys. Their findings suggested that more educated teachers may act as a buffer for learners who have the potential to form less close teacher–student relationships based on their gender. Riley (2009) concluded that "pre-service training that emphasizes relationship building may have long-lasting positive effects on teachers" (p. 634). The chances are high that these mostly collegial relationships will be much longer-lasting than teacher–student relationships as they provide the corrective experiences for teachers.

Conclusion

This study set out to determine Iranian EFL teachers' attachment styles and investigate the factors which might have a correlation with or effect on them. Teachers' ages was shown to be one of the factors that were related to teachers' secure bonding with students. As revealed in this study, the more mature teachers were more secure and less fearful and preoccupied. However, teaching experience turned out to be among the most effective factor since it had a more positive correlation with the secure style and a strong negative correlation with the fearful and preoccupied styles. Furthermore, the responses to the questionnaire indicated that men teachers saw themselves very secure and not fearful, while the female teachers self-described as more preoccupied and dismissing. Educational degrees, however, did not make any statistically significant difference between the secure and preoccupied styles, but teachers holding PhD degrees were more secure than other groups.

It can be concluded that attachment styles are not stable over time. Thus, teachers with insecure style problems (e.g., being uncertain, stressful, and anxious) tend to keep a distance from students, usually withdraw from helping their students, and struggle with feelings of low self-esteem. However, these teachers might later reach a secure attachment style as their age and teaching experience grows. Teachers can facilitate ways to cope with insecure styles through practices like cognitive-behavioral therapy, which is a "short-term therapy technique that can help people find new ways to behave by changing their thought patterns [and by focusing] on their present-day challenges, thoughts, and behaviors" (Davis, 2018, paras. 1–4); or mindfulness therapy, which is a technique for relieving and improving symptoms of stress and anxiety, mental health concerns, physical pain, and so on (Hoffman et al., 2010). The fact that higher educated teachers showed a more secure style suggested that, by upgrading their education, teachers can cultivate a secure style. The fact that teachers having a higher-education degree may display a dismissing style cannot be ignored, though. To help student teachers overcome insecure style problems, a tool called the Recovery Assessment Scale is recommended to be included in in-service education programs. This tool, developed by Hancock et al. (2015), incorporates ideas like self-esteem, feeling powerful, receiving support from society, and living standard. Finally, regarding gender differences, and if women can compete with men to be more secure, it may seem unlikely because it largely depends on societal conditions which are beyond the scope of this study and, as noted above, women usually are the ones who exhibit more fearful attitudes, and avoid close relationships in certain cultures (such as the Iranian one), because in their culture it is the men who usually make most of the decisions to start, continue, or end a relationship such as marriage. Therefore, women are often worried about losing relationships and more likely than men to consider the consequences of getting involved in a close relationship (Pourmohseni-Koluri, 2016). Therefore, as long as the attitudes of society are unchanged, women's attachment styles will also remain unchanged.

Like all survey studies, verifying the results depended largely on the accuracy and honesty of the participants' responses. Although the researchers encouraged participants to read and answer the questions carefully and assured them their answers would be strictly confidential, inaccuracy in answering the questions seems inevitable. There were also some limitations in finding teachers over 50 years old as most of them were either retired or not available, or they were university chancellors who refused to fill out the questionnaire. Due to the limited works done in this area in Iran and around the world, there was not much literature at hand for researchers with which to compare the results in the discussion section.

Further research can be done on teachers' attachment styles and students whose English teachers have both secure and insecure styles to see how teachers' attachment styles can affect students' performance in learning different language skills. This line of research needs to be complemented by qualitative data collected through observation and focus group interviews. More research can be carried out regarding the men and women issues mentioned above. In addition, research can be conducted on planning strategies to help teachers overcome their attachment difficulties, and teacher educators who oversee preservice and in-service teacher education might benefit from including these strategies in their curriculums. It must be kept in mind that such studies need to benefit from follow-up data collection cycles in which data are collected at least six months after the training since changing a behavior takes time. The obtained results of the study would be useful for teachers, teacher educators, curriculum designers, and administrators. However, since quantitative data and research might not be able to give a complete picture of the situation, future researchers are encouraged to conduct qualitative and mixed-methods studies while researching the change of behaviors in teachers.

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Appendix: Attachment Style Questionnaire

This questionnaire, which is based on Van Oudenhoven et al. (2003) and Poole Heller (2014), is designed to gather data about attachment styles of Iranian EFL teachers. The questionnaire consists of 45 items in which you have to carefully read each item and check what best describes you. The statements concern how you feel in emotionally intimate relationships and how you generally experience relationships. Your answers to the questions will be strictly confidential.

A. Please complete personal information.

Age:

Gender:

Years of teaching experience:

Degree:

Place of work:

B. Please respond to each statement by marking a circle to indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*).

	1	2	3	4	5
1. I feel at ease in emotional relationships.					
2. I would like to be open in my relationships, but I can't trust other people.					
3. I feel uncomfortable when relationships with other people become close.					
4. I find it difficult to fully trust other people in close relationships.					
5. I prefer that others are independent of me.					
6. I am preoccupied with what others think of me.					
7. I usually avoid close relationships with people around.					
8. I feel that I like others better than they like me.					
9. I like it when other people can rely on me.					
10. I am often afraid that other people don't like me.					
11. It is important for me to be independent.					
12. I find it easy to get engaged in close relationships.					
13. I feel at ease in intimate relationships.					
14. I like to be self-sufficient.					
15. I find myself ready to apologize or take responsibility for things I did not do.					
16. I think it is important that people can rely on each other.					
17. I don't worry about being alone.					
18. I am afraid that I will be deceived when I get too close with others.					
19. I usually find other people more interesting than myself.					
20. I trust that my partner will be there for me when I need him/her.					
21. I am afraid to get hurt if I get engaged in a close relationship.					
22. It is important to me to know if others like me.					
23. I act like I don't need reassurance or encouragement.					

24. I am not able to repair and receive repair attempts from others in relationships.
25. I usually trust in others and in the future realistically.
26. I prefer the company of animals instead of people.
27. I need constant reassurance about the reliability of my relationships.
28. I am concerned if other people value me.
29. When love happens or is available, I reject it because it is too good to be true.
30. I feel I actively reject opportunities for connection.
31. I have trouble saying no to people when needed.
32. It is difficult for me to be clear about my feelings.
33. I focus more on work and hobbies than relationships.
34. I have obsessive thoughts about how to keep the relationship going.
35. I minimize the importance of close relationships.
36. I predict catastrophic outcomes and events.
37. I always feel superior and that I don't need others.
38. I have trouble setting boundaries in my relationships.
39. I rarely worry about my partner leaving me.
40. I don't worry whether people like me or not.
41. I don't need other people very much.
42. I am afraid of losing my partner.
43. I often wonder whether people like me.
44. I cannot think clearly most of the time.
45. I like that I am independent of others.

Thank you so much for your cooperation.