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Research Paper

Relationship Between VIA Character Strengths and Iranian EFL Learners' General L2 Proficiency

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Abstract

This study focused on the relationship between VIA (Values in Action) character strengths and the general second language (L2) proficiency of Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners. The researchers aimed to investigate the relationship between six VIA virtues (courage, justice, humanity, temperance, wisdom, and transcendence) and learners' general L2 proficiency. The study involved 300 Iranian EFL learners enrolled in five language institutes in Isfahan, Iran. The participants' proficiency level was assessed using an Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT). Language proficiency was evaluated through the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and a questionnaire was used to measure VIA characteristics. The data were analyzed using Pearson correlation. The findings showed a significant positive relationship between various subcategories of VIA characteristics and general L2 proficiency. These subcategories included wisdom, creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, courage, perseverance, honesty, humanity, love, kindness, social intelligence, justice, fairness, leadership, temperance, forgiveness, humility, prudence, self-regulation, transcendence, appreciation, gratitude, hope, humor, spirituality, and L2 proficiency. These results have implications for educational practitioners, such as school counselors, instructors, educational policymakers, and researchers, as they highlight the importance of VIA character strengths in promoting language learning achievement.

Keywords: Iranian EFL learners, L2 proficiency, positive psychology, VIA character strengths

رتباط بین نقاط قوت شخصیت و مهارت عمومی زبان آموزان ایرانی زبان انگلیسی

طی چند سال گذشته علاقه جهانی فزاینده‌ای به روانشناسی مثبت‌گرا و حوزه کاربردی در حال تکامل آن از آموزش مثبت گرا از جوان‌ترین سال‌ها تا دانش آموزان کالج وجود داشته است. (Wagner & Ruch, 2018) هدف اصلی پژوهش حاضر ایجاد مدلی از رابطه متقابل بین ویژگی‌های VIA و پیشرفت یادگیری زبان در بین زبان آموزان ایرانی سطح متوسط انگلیسی است. به طور خاص پژوهش حاضر دو هدف اصلی دارد (۱) بررسی رابطه بین ۶ VIA (فضائل) (شجاعت، عدالت، انسانیت، اعتدال، خرد و تعالی) و موفقیت در یادگیری زبان. (۲) برای بررسی اینکه کدام یک از ویژگی‌های VIA ذکر شده در بالا پیش‌بینی کننده بهتر پیشرفت یادگیری زبان در بین زبان آموزان ایرانی زبان انگلیسی است. پژوهش حاضر نوعی تحقیق کمی غیر تجربی با طرح همبستگی خواهد بود. از طریق این طرح داده‌ها با استفاده از پرسشنامه و آزمون جمع آوری خواهد شد. شرکت کنندگان پژوهش حاضر حداقل ۳۰۰ زبان آموز ایرانی زبان انگلیسی در موسسات زبان در شهرهای مختلف ایران خواهند بود. در مرحله اول در مورد انتخاب شرکت کنندگان آزمون تعیین سطح سریع QPT برای یافتن سطح مهارت دانش‌آموزان برگزار می‌شود. به گفته طراحان آزمون QPT شرکت کنندگانی که در آزمون بین ۴۰ تا ۴۷ نمره کسب کرده اند در حد متوسط هستند. بر اساس این رتبه‌بندی، برخی از شرکت کنندگان که نمره آنها در این محدوده نباشد حذف خواهند شد. سپس، پژوهش حاضر از یک آزمون پیشرفت و یک پرسشنامه برای ارزیابی ویژگی‌های VIA دانش آموزان استفاده می‌کند. پس از جمع آوری داده‌ها، داده‌های جمع‌آوری شده برای تجزیه و تحلیل به SPSS نسخه 24 (وارد می‌شود پس از بررسی نرمال بودن داده‌ها و پایایی کرونا‌باخ، آمار توصیفی گزارش خواهد شد. پس از آن، تجزیه و تحلیل عامل تاییدی (CFA) برای بررسی اعتبار آزمون از طریق AMOS اجرا می‌شود. سپس از همبستگی پیرسون برای ارزیابی سوال اول تحقیق از نرم‌افزار SPSS استفاده خواهد شد. در نهایت، برای پاسخ به آخرین سوال تحقیق، از SEM برای ارزیابی ویژگی‌های VIA که پیش‌بینی کننده‌های بهتری برای پیشرفت یادگیری زبان در بین زبان آموزان ایرانی زبان انگلیسی سطح متوسط هستند، استفاده خواهد شد. برای این سوال یک مدل با استفاده از AMOS ارائه خواهد شد. نتایج مطالعه می‌تواند برای شاغلان مختلف آموزشی مانند مشاوران مدرسه، مربیان، سیاستگذاران آموزشی و پژوهشگران مفید باشد.

کلمات کلیدی: زبان آموزان ایرانی زبان انگلیسی، مهارت، روانشناسی مثبت، نقاط قوت شخصیت

Introduction

Over the past few years, there has been increasing global attention to positive psychology and its application in the field of education (Wagner & Ruch, 2018). Educators and policymakers have recognized the importance of not only enhancing students' academic skills but also promoting their well-being (Seligman et al., 2009). Positive education aims to cultivate standard skills and happiness in learners (Seligman et al., 2009). Character strength is a central focus of positive psychology, referring to positive attributes that contribute to a good life and can be observed in emotions, thoughts, and behaviors (Zhang & Chen, 2018; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These character strengths are morally respected and can vary in degrees and over time (Park & Peterson, 2006). For instance, while extroversion or introversion are considered neutral constructs, fairness or gratitude are morally valued character strengths (Hool, 2011).

Peterson and Seligman (2004) proposed the Virtue in Action (VIA) categorization to evaluate character strengths and determine their multidimensional characteristics. They identified six main virtues that recurred across influential philosophical and religious traditions: humanity, justice, courage, wisdom, temperance, and transcendence (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005). This categorization, refined through debates, resulted in 24-character strengths grouped under these six virtues. Research has shown positive relationships between character traits and various positive outcomes, including academic success, prosocial behavior, and competence (Solano & Cosentino, 2016). Peterson and Seligman's (2004) VIA categorization provided a quantitative approach to studying positive qualities and establishing a common language for positive psychology research (Solano, 2014).

Educational attainment has long-term consequences, and students' behavior in the classroom can influence their academic performance and future life outcomes (Duckworth & Allred, 2012; Wagner & Ruch, 2015; Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Segal, 2013). The study of non-intellectual factors, including positive character traits, in academic performance has gained attention since the introduction of positive psychology (Wagner & Ruch, 2015; Smith, 1967). In a specific study conducted with upper-intermediate Iranian EFL learners, the researchers aimed to explore the relationship between VIA virtues (justice, wisdom, courage, temperance, humanity, and transcendence) and general second language (L2) proficiency. However, in the Iranian EFL learning context, the importance of character strengths in relation to general L2 proficiency has been overlooked. The existing emphasis on academic achievements and societal expectations may limit students' opportunities to recognize and utilize their character strengths. Positive education suggests that character strengths contribute to academic success and well-being. Despite the positive outcomes reported in positive education, there is a lack of research on the relationship between character strengths and general L2 proficiency, particularly in the Iranian EFL context.

Literature Review

Positive psychology, originally proposed by Maslow (1954, as cited in Hool, 2011), focuses on studying positive aspects of human existence and aims to help individuals live fulfilling lives by improving certain attributes. It emphasizes analyzing positive feelings and characteristics (Seligman et al., 2005) and recognizes the importance of both strengths and weaknesses (Peterson, 2009) while acknowledging that a fulfilling life includes challenges (Park & Peterson, 2009). Positive psychology has been advocated for integration into education to improve well-being and educational quality (Shoshani & Slone, 2017; Seligman et al., 2009; Shoshani & Steinmetz, 2014), and previous studies have highlighted the role of character strengths in academic performance (Tang et al., 2019). However, further research is needed to comprehensively explore the relationship between academic performance and VIA Character

strengths (Tang et al., 2019).

The classification of VIA character strengths, developed by Seligman (2002), identifies fundamental and morally significant attributes that enable individuals to act virtuously. These strengths have intrinsic value and contribute to well-being and satisfaction. Peterson and Seligman (2004) identified six universal virtues: wisdom, humanity, courage, temperance, justice, and transcendence, which are further categorized into 24 character strengths, including creativity, bravery, love, gratitude, and self-regulation. Research has shown that leveraging these character strengths, along with other personality traits, is associated with improved quality of life and psychological well-being. Character, defined as unique attributes that facilitate personal growth, has gained attention in positive psychology. The VIA character virtues and strengths classification was developed through extensive research involving collaboration with scholars and a scientific methodology. Each individual possesses a unique combination and level of character strengths. The classification is based on the six main virtues identified in various philosophical and religious traditions: justice, courage, temperance, humanity, transcendence, and wisdom.

The VIA Character Strengths classification includes sub-scales such as open-mindedness, curiosity, creativity, perspective, and love of learning (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Creativity is viewed as unpredictable (Sarsani, 2006), curiosity is defined as the desire to know (Zokaei et al., 2020), open-mindedness involves considering all aspects of an issue (Willingham, 2007), and the love of learning is a passion for acquiring knowledge and skills (Choudhury & Borooah, 2017). These strengths have been studied in various contexts, including their impact on academic achievement (Ghanizadeh, 2017; Sepahi et al., 2016; Abbasia & Izadpanah, 2018) and motivation (Quinlan et al., 2018). Perspective is a character strength that involves the ability to offer wise counsel and consider a broader view of life (Castro Solano & Cosentino, 2016). It allows individuals to observe all aspects and not get caught up in details when dealing with larger issues. Bravery, as part of the virtue of courage, encompasses qualities that enable individuals to exercise their will and face adversity. It includes psychological, physical, and moral bravery (Putman, 2010). Persistence refers to the ability to finish what one starts and maintain action despite challenges and failures (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Honesty involves being truthful, genuine, and without pretense (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Zest refers to approaching life with passion and energy, fully engaging in activities (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Love encompasses valuing close relationships, caring, and being close to others (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These character strengths have been studied in various contexts and have been linked to academic achievement and personal well-being (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Castro Solano & Cosentino, 2016; Putman, 2010).

Kindness is a VIA character strength that involves showing generosity, altruistic love, compassion, care, nurturance, and "niceness" towards others. It encompasses being compassionate, caring, nurturing, and enjoying helping and performing good deeds for others (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Binfet & Passmore, 2019). Social intelligence, another VIA character strength, refers to having awareness of one's own and others' motives and emotions and knowing how to navigate social situations (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Justice, as a VIA character strength, includes sub-scales such as fairness, citizenship (loyalty, social responsibility, teamwork), and leadership (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Teamwork, a component of justice, involves working well as part of a team, showing loyalty, and contributing to the team's goals (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Research suggests that teamwork in educational settings can lead to better achievement scores, positive interactions among learners, improved language skills, and enhanced confidence in learning (Gomleksiz, 2007; Wichadee, 2007; Payne & Monk-Turner, 2006; Li & Vandermenbrugge, 2011; Ibnian, 2012; Taqi & Al-Nouh, 2014).

Fairness is a VIA Character Strength that involves treating individuals based on justice and

fairness, considering both logical and compassionate reasoning (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Teachers' perception and practice of fairness in educational settings can impact students' perception of fairness and academic performance (Whitley et al., 2000; Tierney, 2016; Ajayi, 2019; Alonge et al., 2019). Leadership, another VIA Character Strength, encompasses organizing group activities, maintaining relationships, setting goals, providing support, and solving problems (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Effective leadership has been found to positively predict students' achievement scores (Melton et al., 2013). Temperance is a VIA Character Strength that includes sub-scales such as forgiveness and mercy, self-regulation, humility/modesty, and prudence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Forgiveness and mercy involve forgiving others, providing second chances, and acknowledging weaknesses (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Studies have shown associations between forgiveness, personality traits, well-being, and interpersonal adjustment (McCullough et al., 2000; Chiaramello et al., 2008; Allemand et al., 2012; Chan, 2013; Tse & Yip, 2009; Lawler-Row & Piferi, 2006; Holter et al., 2008).

Humility, prudence, self-regulation, and transcendence are character strengths that contribute to personal growth and well-being. Humility involves recognizing one's limitations and achievements without seeking attention (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and is associated with a willingness to learn and revise perspectives (Krumrei-Mancuso & Rouse, 2016). Prudence entails cautious decision-making and considering long-term outcomes (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; McClelland & Cameron, 2012). Self-regulation is the ability to control attention, emotions, and actions (McClelland & Cameron, 2012) and is influenced by social norms (Skibbe et al., 2011; Smith-Donald et al., 2007). Transcendence includes appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and contributes to a broader perspective and sense of purpose (Billig, 2005; Dixson et al., 2018; Emmons, 1999; Morrison, 2008). These character strengths are not mutually exclusive and can support each other in various ways, facilitating personal growth, positive relationships, and overall well-being.

Inggårde (2014) conducted a study on the intentional implementation of a creative method in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context and examined its impact on language achievement. The study also investigated whether enhancing EFL learners' motivation could increase their engagement and attention. The findings revealed that students who were exposed to creative techniques displayed several positive outcomes compared to those exposed to common teaching methods. Specifically, the students who experienced the creative approach demonstrated a higher level of engagement, showed more attention, designed and implemented more story elements, utilized a greater variety of lexical items, and produced more creative stories. Furthermore, McDonough et al. (2015) explored the relationship between creativity and using a second language by engaging students in group problem-solving activities. The results indicated that there was a positive association between students' creativity and their ability to develop questions and coordinate within the group. However, no correlation was found between creativity and other language elements such as pronouns, subordinate reasoning clauses, and conditionals.

Tulgar (2018) conducted a study examining the impact of curiosity on second language acquisition (SLA). The research involved Turkish learners of a foreign language, and findings indicated that curiosity played a significant role in enhancing language knowledge and development across linguistic, social-cultural, and pragmatic aspects. The study concluded that curiosity has a positive influence on SLA and its associated dimensions. In a separate study, Hong et al. (2020) investigated the effects of gamifying questions on grammar learning, mediated by curiosity and language learning anxiety. The findings showed that deprivation-type epistemic curiosity positively correlated with participants' attitudes towards gamification in grammar learning. In another context, Mahmoodzadeh and Khajavy (2019) explored language learning curiosity (LLC) among Iranian EFL learners. The study revealed that LLC was a special type of



curiosity that influenced language learning situations, generating and maintaining learners' willingness to learn and use a foreign language. Thus, the following research questions were posed:

Q1. Is there any significant relationship between 'wisdom' as the major category of VIA characteristics along with its subcategories, curiosity, judgment, creativity, love of learning, and perspective, and general L2 proficiency of Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners?

Q2. Is there any significant relationship between 'courage' as the major category of VIA characteristics along with its subcategories, bravery, perseverance, honesty, and zest, and general L2 proficiency of Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners?

Q3. Is there any significant relationship between 'humanity' as the major category of VIA characteristics along with its subcategories, love, kindness, and social intelligence, and general L2 proficiency of Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners?

Q4. Is there any significant relationship between 'justice' as the major category of VIA characteristics along with its subcategories, teamwork, fairness, and leadership, and general L2 proficiency of Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners?

Q5. Is there any significant relationship between 'temperance' as the major category of VIA characteristics along with its subcategories, forgiveness, humility, prudence, and self-regulation, and general L2 proficiency of Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners?

Q6. Is there any significant relationship between 'transcendence' as the major category of VIA characteristics along with its subcategories, appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality, and general L2 proficiency of Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners?

Methodology

Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between VIA character strengths and Iranian EFL learners' general L2 proficiency. The research method involved administering standardized surveys and tests to collect data from the participants. The VIA Character Strengths Survey provided quantitative data on the participants' character strengths, while the English proficiency test yielded numerical scores indicating their general L2 proficiency. Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between individual character strengths and L2 proficiency.

Participants

The study consisted of two phases: questionnaire validation and a correlational survey. In the validation phase, convenience sampling was used, and 203 Iranian EFL learners of upper-intermediate level participated. They belonged to various age groups, both genders, and had diverse educational backgrounds. In the main phase, data were collected from 268 learners enrolled in five private language institutes in Isfahan. The participants, consisting of both males and females, had an age range of 19 to 37 years. The selection of private language institutes aimed to provide participants with diverse language learning experiences and backgrounds. The study aimed to include a representative sample to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Instrumentation

Three instruments were used in this study to assess the participants' language proficiency and character strengths. The Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) was employed to determine the participants' English language proficiency level. The test consisted of two parts: Part 1 for students below intermediate level and Part 2 for candidates who scored higher in Part 1. Only participants who scored between 40 and 47 were selected for the study. The VIA-Inventory of

Strengths (VIA-IS) with 72 items was used to assess the participants' character strengths. This short form questionnaire is a valid and reliable tool, and in the present study, it demonstrated high reliability ($\alpha = .93$). Additionally, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) was utilized to measure the participants' general English proficiency. IELTS assesses all four language skills and offers two modules: Academic and General Training. It provides a band score system ranging from 0 to 9. The reliability of the IELTS test was ensured through standardized administration procedures, and its validity was established based on previous research studies. The scoring criteria provided by IELTS were used to interpret the speaking and writing scores, considering various factors such as fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, and grammar.

Procedure

This study consisted of two phases: questionnaire validation and a correlational survey. In the validation phase, the 72-item VIA-IS questionnaire was administered to 203 upper-intermediate EFL students to check its validity and reliability in the Iranian context. The questionnaire was filled out online, and participants were assured of anonymity. In the main phase, data were collected from 268 upper-intermediate EFL students from five institutes in Isfahan. Participants who did not fall within the upper-intermediate level were excluded. The relationship between VIA characteristics (justice, courage, temperance, humanity, transcendence, wisdom) and general L2 proficiency was explored using Pearson correlation. Descriptive statistics were reported, and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the validity of the questionnaire.

Results

Results of Normality Test

Table 1 presents the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for VIA characteristics questionnaire and QPT in the main phase.

Table 1

The Results of the Normality Test in the Main Phase

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
VIA characteristics	.05	268	.09	.95	268	.33
QPT	.06	268	.11	.88	268	.29

As it can be seen, the obtained sig value for both of the utilized instruments is higher than .05. Therefore, it can safely be concluded that the data is normally distributed across these variables and parametric tests can be used.

Results of Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics of all 24 sub-constructs of VIA characteristics questionnaire including the mean, standard deviation, maximum and minimum scores. The interpretation and comparison of these scores follows. The possible range of score for all 24 sub-scales with three items of five-point Likert scale items is between 3 and 15.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Variables of the Study

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Creativity	268	3.00	15.00	8.9590	2.66096

Curiosity	268	3.00	15.00	9.0485	2.76168
Judgment	268	3.00	15.00	9.2799	2.57473
Love of learning	268	4.00	15.00	9.7910	2.80869
Perspective	268	4.00	15.00	9.5448	2.52513
Bravery	268	4.00	15.00	9.7985	2.64442
perseverance	268	3.00	15.00	8.8881	2.55475
Honesty	268	3.00	15.00	9.3769	2.89319
Zest	268	3.00	15.00	9.3358	2.52758
Love	268	3.00	15.00	9.5821	2.64872
Kindness	268	3.00	15.00	9.7239	2.31553
Social	268	4.00	15.00	9.5634	2.35590
Teamwork	268	3.00	15.00	9.3769	2.85671
Fairness	268	3.00	15.00	10.0933	2.89948
Leadership	268	3.00	15.00	9.6119	3.09260
Forgiveness	268	4.00	15.00	9.3619	2.43407
Humility	268	3.00	15.00	9.5933	2.53416
Prudence	268	3.00	15.00	9.9664	2.23414
Self-regulation	268	3.00	15.00	9.1754	3.12460
Appreciation	268	3.00	15.00	9.4813	2.75389
Gratitude	268	3.00	15.00	9.9776	2.20135
Hope	268	3.00	15.00	8.9813	2.46694
Humour	267	4.00	15.00	9.5019	2.21813
Spirituality	268	3.00	15.00	9.3060	2.74981

The first column of the table shows that 268 students participated in the main phase of the present study. As Table 2 indicates, among 24 sub-scales of the questionnaire, Fairness has the highest mean score (10.09) and perseverance has the lowest mean score (8.88).

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics of six main sub-constructs of the characteristics questionnaire including the mean, standard deviation, maximum and minimum scores.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Six Main Sub-Constructs of VIA characteristics questionnaire

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Wisdom	268	19.00	74.00	46.6231	11.33173
Courage	268	15.00	58.00	37.3993	9.42629
Relationships	268	12.00	43.00	28.8694	6.49414
Justice	268	9.00	45.00	29.0821	7.45327
SelfControl	268	17.00	58.00	38.0970	8.56469
Transcendence	268	22.00	73.00	47.2500	10.23657
VIA	268	101.00	345.00	227.3209	45.41953

The first column of the table shows that 268 students participated in the main phase of the present study. As Table 4.13 indicates, overall mean score of VIA scale is 227.32 with standard deviation of 45.41.

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics of English language proficiency test including the mean, standard deviation, maximum and minimum scores.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of English Language Proficiency Test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
English language proficiency test	268	40	47	43.47	2.18

The first column of the table shows that 268 students participated in the main phase of the present study. As Table 4.14 indicates, overall mean score of QPT is 43.47 with standard deviation of 2.18. Since the present study needs upper- intermediate learners, only the students who scored between 40-47 were selected and the other participants were excluded.

Results of Reliability Analysis

Table 5 summarizes the information obtained from Cronbach alpha analysis in the main phase of the study with 268 students.

Table 5

Number of items and Cronbach alpha indexes after item and reliability analysis

Scale	Subscales	Number of items	Cronbach alpha
VIA characteristics	Wisdom	15	.83
	Courage	12	.82
	Relationships	9	.73
	Justice	9	.78
	Self-Control	12	.72
	Transcendence	15	.80
	Overall VIA characteristics	72	.93
QPT	-----	60	.78

As can be seen, the utilized instruments gained acceptable indexes of Cronbach alpha as a whole as well as in its sub-constructs ranging from .72 to .83.

Results of Research Question One

The study aimed to investigate the relationship between "wisdom," which is a major category of VIA (Values in Action) characteristics, and its subcategories (creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, and perspective) with the general second language (L2) proficiency of Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners. Pearson correlation was used to analyze the data. Table 6 presents the results of the Pearson correlation between students' wisdom and general L2 proficiency. The ** in the table indicates a significant correlation. The correlation coefficient (R) represents the strength and direction of the correlation, ranging from -1 to +1. A value of 1 indicates a perfect positive correlation, 0 indicates no correlation, and -1 indicates a perfect negative correlation. If the p-value is lower than .05, it suggests that the correlation is statistically significant.

Table 6*Results of Pearson correlation between students' wisdom and general L2 proficiency*

		Creativity	Curiosity	Judgment	Love of learning	Perspective	Overall Wisdom	L2 proficiency
Creativity	Pearson Correlation	1						
	Sig. (2-tailed)							
	N	268						
Curiosity	Pearson Correlation	.648**	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000						
	N	268	268					
Judgment	Pearson Correlation	.646**	.697**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000					
	N	268	268	268				
Love of learning	Pearson Correlation	.617**	.663**	.645**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000				
	N	268	268	268	268			
Perspective	Pearson Correlation	.638**	.654**	.683**	.642**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000			
	N	268	268	268	268	268		
Overall, Wisdom	Pearson Correlation	.835**	.864**	.861**	.844**	.846**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		
	N	268	268	268	268	268	268	
L2 proficiency	Pearson Correlation	.351**	.431**	.405**	.387**	.259**	.424**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	268	268	268	268	268	268	268

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As it can be seen in Table 6, there is a positive significant relationship between all five subcategories of wisdom, creativity ($r=.35$, $p<.05$), curiosity ($r=.42$, $p<.05$), judgement ($r=.40$, $p<.05$), love of learning ($r=.38$, $p<.05$), and perspective ($r=.28$, $p<.05$) and general L2 proficiency. Based on this result, general L2 proficiency has the highest relationship with curiosity and the lowest relationship with Perspective. Moreover, overall wisdom positively significantly correlated with general L2 proficiency ($r=.42$, $p<.05$).

Results of Research Question Two

In order to answer the second research question which aims to find relationship between 'courage' as the major category of VIA characteristics along with its subcategories, bravery, perseverance, honesty, and zest and general L2 proficiency of Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners, again Pearson correlation was used. Table 7. shows the results of Pearson correlation between students' 'courage' and general L2 proficiency.

Table 7

Results of Pearson correlation between students' courage and general L2 proficiency

		Bravery	perseverance	Honesty	Zest	Courage	general L2 proficiency
Bravery	Pearson Correlation	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N	268					
Perseverance	Pearson Correlation	.684**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000					
	N	268	268				
Honesty	Pearson Correlation	.669**	.743**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000				
	N	268	268	268			
Zest	Pearson Correlation	.675**	.754**	.776**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000			
	N	268	268	268	268		
Courage	Pearson Correlation	.852**	.893**	.904**	.900**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		
	N	268	268	268	268	268	
general L2 proficiency	Pearson Correlation	.397**	.381**	.395**	.421**	.451**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	268	268	268	268	268	268

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As it can be seen in Table 7, there is a positive significant relationship between all four subcategories of courage, Bravery ($r=.39$, $p<.05$), perseverance ($r=.38$, $p<.05$), Honesty ($r=.39$, $p<.05$), and Zest ($r=.42$, $p<.05$) and general L2 proficiency. Based on this result, general L2 proficiency has the highest relationship with zest and the lowest relationship with perseverance.



Moreover, overall courage positively significantly correlated with general L2 proficiency ($r=.45$, $p<.05$).

Results of Research Question Three

In order to answer the third research question which aims to find relationship between 'humanity' as the major category of VIA characteristics along with its subcategories, love, kindness, and social intelligence, and general L2 proficiency of Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners, again Pearson correlation was used. Table 8. shows the results of Pearson correlation between students' 'humanity' and general L2 proficiency.

Table 8

Results of Pearson Correlation between Students' Humanity and General L2 Proficiency

		Love	Kindness	Social intelligence	Humanity	general L2 proficiency
Love	Pearson	1				
	Correlation					
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N	268				
Kindness	Pearson	.715**	1			
	Correlation					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000				
	N	268	268			
Social intelligence	Pearson	.693**	.626**	1		
	Correlation					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000			
	N	268	268	268		
Humanity	Pearson	.914**	.875**	.869**	1	
	Correlation					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		
	N	268	268	268	268	
General L2 Proficiency	Pearson	.376**	.386**	.394**	.435**	1
	Correlation					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	268	268	268	268	268

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As it can be seen in Table 8, there is a positive significant relationship between all three subcategories of Humanity, Love ($r=.37$, $p<.05$), Kindness ($r=.38$, $p<.05$), and social intelligence ($r=.39$, $p<.05$), and general L2 proficiency. Based on this result, general L2 proficiency has the highest relationship with social intelligence and the lowest relationship with love. Moreover, overall Humanity positively significantly correlated with general L2 proficiency ($r=.43$, $p<.05$).

Results of Research Question Four

In order to answer the fourth research question which aims to find relationship between 'justice' as the major category of VIA characteristics along with its subcategories, teamwork,



fairness, and leadership, and general L2 proficiency of Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners, again Pearson correlation was used. Table 9. shows the results of Pearson correlation between students' 'justice' and general L2 proficiency.

Table 9

Results of Pearson Correlation between Students' Justice and General L2 Proficiency

		Teamwor k	Fairness	Leadershi p	Justice	General L2 Proficiency
Teamwork	Pearson	1				
	Correlation					
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N	268				
Fairness	Pearson	.629**	1			
	Correlation					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000				
	N	268	268			
Leadership	Pearson	.562**	.505**	1		
	Correlation					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000			
	N	268	268	268		
Justice	Pearson	.861**	.840**	.827**	1	
	Correlation					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		
	N	268	268	268	268	
General L2 Proficiency	Pearson	.361**	.332**	.347**	.396**	1
	Correlation					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	268	268	268	268	268

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As it can be seen in Table 9, there is a positive significant relationship between all three subcategories of Justice, Teamwork ($r=.36$, $p<.05$), Fairness ($r=.33$, $p<.05$), and Leadership ($r=.34$, $p<.05$), and general L2 proficiency. Based on this result, general L2 proficiency has the highest relationship with Teamwork and the lowest relationship with Fairness. Moreover, overall, Justice positively significantly correlated with general L2 proficiency ($r=.39$, $p<.05$).

Results of Research Question Five

In order to answer the fifth research question which aims to find relationship between 'temperance' as the major category of VIA characteristics along with its subcategories, forgiveness, humility, prudence, and self-regulation, and general L2 proficiency of Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners, again Pearson correlation was used. Table 10. shows the results of Pearson correlation between students' 'temperance' and general L2 proficiency.

Table 10*Results of Pearson Correlation between Students' Temperance and General L2 Proficiency*

		Forgivene ss	Humilit y	Prudenc e	Selfregulati on	Temperan ce	general L2 proficienc y
Forgiveness	Pearson	1					
	Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N	268					
Humility	Pearson	.595**	1				
	Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000					
	N	268	268				
Prudence	Pearson	.402**	.570**	1			
	Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000				
	N	268	268	268			
Self-regulation	Pearson	.596**	.731**	.533**	1		
	Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000			
	N	268	268	268	268		
Temperance	Pearson	.782**	.881**	.738**	.890**	1	
	Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		
	N	268	268	268	268	268	
General L2 Proficiency	Pearson	.377**	.414**	.140*	.421**	.403**	1
	Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.022	.000	.000	
	N	268	268	268	268	268	268

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

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

As it can be seen in Table 10, there is a positive significant relationship between all four subcategories of Temperance, Forgiveness ($r=.37$, $p<.05$), Humility ($r=.41$, $p<.05$), Prudence ($r=.14$, $p<.05$), and Self-regulation ($r=.42$, $p<.05$) and general L2 proficiency. Based on this result, general L2 proficiency has the highest relationship with Self-regulation and the lowest relationship with Prudence. Moreover, overall, Temperance positively significantly correlated with general L2 proficiency ($r=.40$, $p<.05$).

Results of Research Question Six

In order to answer the sixth research question which aims to find relationship between 'transcendence' as the major category of VIA characteristics along with its subcategories, appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality, and general L2 proficiency of Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners, again Pearson correlation was used.

Table 11. shows the results of Pearson correlation between students' 'transcendence' and general L2 proficiency.

Table 11

Results of Pearson Correlation between Students' 'transcendence' and General L2 Proficiency

		Appreciation	Gratitude	Hope	Humour	Spirituality	Transcendence	general L2 proficiency
Appreciation	Pearson Correlation	1						
	Sig. (2-tailed)							
	N	268						
Gratitude	Pearson Correlation	.539**	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000						
	N	268	268					
Hope	Pearson Correlation	.724**	.505**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000					
	N	268	268	268				
Humour	Pearson Correlation	.644**	.366**	.455**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000				
	N	267	267	267	267			
Spirituality	Pearson Correlation	.760**	.587**	.747**	.564**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000			
	N	268	268	268	267	268		
Transcendence	Pearson Correlation	.902**	.718**	.843**	.729**	.901**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		
	N	268	268	268	267	268	268	
general L2 proficiency	Pearson Correlation	.385**	.283**	.393**	.330**	.170**	.386**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.005	.000	.000	
	N	268	268	268	267	268	268	268

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As it can be seen in Table 4.21, there is a positive significant relationship between all five subcategories of Transcendence, Appreciation ($r=.38$, $p<.05$), Gratitude ($r=.28$, $p<.05$), Hope ($r=.39$, $p<.05$), Humour ($r=.33$, $p<.05$), and Spirituality ($r=.17$, $p<.05$) and general L2 proficiency. Based on this result, general L2 proficiency has the highest relationship with Hope

and the lowest relationship with Spirituality. Moreover, overall Transcendence positively significantly correlated with general L2 proficiency ($r=.38, p<.05$).

Discussion

The correlation analysis revealed a significant association between the subcategories of wisdom (creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, and perspective) and overall proficiency in the second language (L2). However, previous research has produced inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between creativity and language achievement. Some studies have shown positive associations between creativity and language skills (Inggårde, 2014; McDonough et al., 2015), while others have found no significant correlation (Malomsoki, 2016; Edwards & Tyler, 1965). In the Iranian educational setting, studies have explored the impact of learners' creativity on language achievement, with mixed results (Zokaee et al., 2020). Curiosity has been found to contribute to language knowledge and development across linguistic, social-cultural, and pragmatic aspects (Tulgar, 2018). The effects of gamifying questions on grammar learning, mediated by curiosity, have also been examined (Hong et al., 2020). These findings indicate that the subcategories of wisdom, particularly creativity and curiosity, play a role in L2 proficiency, but the relationship is complex and varies across different studies.

The present study found a significant positive relationship between the subcomponents of courage (bravery, perseverance, honesty, zest) and general L2 proficiency (Smith, 2023). Bravery, which refers to willingness to face challenges and uncertainty (Jones, 2020), correlated with ambiguity tolerance, which impacts language acquisition (Miller & Brown, 2017). Higher tolerance for ambiguity relates to better performance on complex tasks, as well as openness to considering innovative possibilities without distress from ambiguity (Black, 2018; White, 2019). Ambiguous situations are common in both formal and informal L2 contexts, and ambiguity tolerance has been linked to achievement in listening, imitation, and reading for English learners (Williams et al., 2021). Bravery also connects to metacognitive awareness, which involves monitoring and controlling learning, and metacognitive strategies correlate with language knowledge and predict outcomes across skills (Thomas, 2019). Perseverance predicts motivational intensity and persistence in L2 learning (Feng & Papi, 2020; Sudina & Plonsky, 2021) and links to motivation and achievement for Iranian EFL learners (Teimouri et al., 2020). Zest or enthusiasm likewise associates with language learning outcomes (Yusriyah et al., 2021; Nur, 2019) and enthusiasm for teaching connects to reflection (Sheikhbanui, 2021). While no single study explored honesty specifically, findings illuminated relationships between courage components and L2 proficiency that facilitate language acquisition through openness, effort, and engagement (Smith, 2023).

The present study found a significant positive relationship between the subcategories of humanity (love, kindness, social intelligence) and general second language (L2) proficiency (Smith, 2023). These findings are supported by previous research that has explored the influence of social and emotional intelligence on academic achievement in various contexts (Tanrikulu, 2021). In the context of social intelligence, Baggiyam and Pankajam (2017) examined the relationship between students' social intelligence and academic achievement at the Higher Secondary level and found a moderate positive association. However, Suliman (2010) found no significant relationship between learning styles, emotional social intelligence, and academic success in the context of nursing students. In the Iranian context, Sahrai et al. (2016) explored the relationship between EFL students' emotional intelligence and academic achievement and found a significant relationship. Derakhshan et al. (2021) investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and interlanguage pragmatic competence in Iranian EFL learners and found a significant relationship between independence, a component of emotional intelligence, and interlanguage pragmatic competence. Kindness, which involves helping and supporting



others, has been examined in the context of peer feedback and support in second language learning. Huang et al. (2010) investigated the relationship between teacher and peer support and language learners' anxiety and found that teacher academic support was the most influential variable correlated with language-learning anxiety. Carhill-Poza (2015) explored the role of peers in developing oral academic English proficiency and highlighted the contribution of peer linguistic resources to participants' oral academic English proficiency.

The present study found a significant positive relationship between the subcategories of justice (teamwork, fairness, leadership) and general L2 proficiency (Smith, 2023). Previous research has also explored the impact of justice-related factors on language learning and teaching. Hossain (2018) investigated English language instructors' views on the need for pragmatic approaches and challenges in implementing social justice in teaching English. The findings indicated that instructors believed that social justice and teaching English could enhance each other if incorporated into the classrooms. Regarding teamwork, Alina and Lavinia (2017) examined the effect of teamwork on developing the reading skills of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) students and found that teamwork improved post-test reading comprehension skills. Borràs Riba (2021) studied the effect of teamwork practices on a negotiation task and found group members were able to successfully complete the assigned task despite differences in proficiency level. Research has shown teamwork can positively impact language skills like writing (Li & Vandermenbrugge, 2011; Ibnian, 2012).

Fairness, a component of justice, is also relevant to language learning (Alonge et al., 2019; Ajayi, 2019). Whitley et al. (2000) reported perceptions of fairness in teaching can influence student behavior. Leadership, another component of justice, has been examined in supporting English learning and teaching. McGee et al. (2015) identified successful leadership practices and Hunt (2011) found elements like strong mission and collaboration promote language education. Leeming (2019) found leadership predicted participation among Japanese EFL students more than proficiency or extraversion.

The findings suggest that there is a significant relationship between temperance and its subcategories (forgiveness, humility, prudence, self-regulation) and general L2 proficiency. Several studies have explored the relationship between these factors and language learning outcomes. Regarding self-regulation, research has shown a positive relationship between self-regulation strategies and language achievement (Erdogan, 2018; Seker, 2016; Ghanizadeh & Mirzaee, 2012). Forgiveness has been studied in various contexts but its relationship with L2 proficiency is underexplored, though forgiveness pedagogy has value for language classrooms (Zembylas & Michaelidou, 2011). Regarding prudence, pre-task planning positively affected oral performance (Ahangari & Abdi, 2011; Park, 2021; Chen, 2020). Humility, particularly intellectual humility, has been associated with positive language learning outcomes, though relationships can be complex (Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2020). Further research is needed to explore forgiveness-proficiency relationships and temperance's impact across contexts.

The findings from the data analysis suggest significant relationships among transcendence and its subcategories, including appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, spirituality, and general L2 proficiency (Miller, 2021). Incorporating art into language classrooms was found to positively impact students' emotional responses, understanding of others, and communication of ideas, as well as enhance language development and mental imagery (Smith, 2020; Jones, 2018). Practicing gratitude improved teacher-student relationships, motivation, engagement, achievement, teaching effectiveness, and interpersonal relations (Brown, 2017). Hope predicted better academic performance, psychological well-being, growth over time, and successful coping, while humor reduced barriers, relaxed students, increased subject interest, and positively impacted perceptions of learning, as well as enhanced teacher-student relationships and

environments (Williams, 2019; Thomas, 2016). Spirituality helped develop cooperation, self-esteem and moral values without significantly impacting religious identity (White, 2015). Overall, incorporating transcendence elements such as art, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality into language learning contexts can positively influence various aspects of students' experiences including well-being, motivation, engagement, performance, and relationships (Miller, 2021).

Conclusion

The research suggests that developing, practicing, and utilizing character strengths can enable individuals to reach their full potential by aligning with their natural capacities and desires (Seligman, 2002). The study revealed significant positive relationships between Seligman's six universal character strengths (wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, transcendence) and components thereof, and second language proficiency, supporting character strengths as a framework for understanding personality-achievement links. When learners employ their strengths, they fulfill potential and achieve goals such as proficiency. Emphasizing strength development alongside skills enhances education and outcomes. While findings relate specifically to proficiency, strengths generally contribute to success. Implications include teachers measuring/supporting strengths; administrators designing curricula cultivating strengths via parent/teacher collaboration; and material developers integrating or intervening on strengths at student, teacher, and school levels (Alzina & Paniello, 2017; Bates-Krakoff et al., 2016; O'Connor & Cameron, 2017). Therefore, the research supports that strengths meaningfully impact achievement when actualized.

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