



The Relationship Between Turkish EFL Learners' Academic Resilience and English Language Achievement

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to investigate Turkish EFL learners' academic resilience levels. Whether gender can be a factor in the learners' academic resilience was also examined. Additionally, figuring out the correlation between learners' academic resilience and their English language achievement was within the aims of this research. To achieve this, a quantitative correlational research design was adopted, and an academic resilience scale was administered to the prep class students from the English Language Teaching Department and English Language Literature Department at a state university in Türkiye. The findings of the study indicate that the prep class students' academic resilience levels are at a medium level. The sub-categories of the questionnaire have shown that the students are highly perseverant while they are reflective, adaptive help-seeker and they avoid negative effects and emotional responses at a medium level in the face of academic adversity. As for gender factors, it has been posed that male students are less affected by negative events and give responses less emotionally when they face difficulty in the academic context. On the other hand, it has been revealed that a positive but weak correlation exists between the students' levels of academic resilience and academic achievement in English.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely acknowledged that learning a foreign language is a highly complex process that affects individuals psychically, cognitively, and emotionally during their language journey. This challenging process causes learners to experience stress and face challenges while learning the foreign language and the reasons of stress may differ from one person to another. Nevertheless, even if they learn the language in the same context that causes almost similar stress, some students may be more vulnerable to the stress and negative life circumstances, which in turn may lead to more achievement in foreign language. Considering this point, a person's ability to cope with stress, change or adversities successfully is defined as resilience. (Sarwar, Inamullah, Khan, & Anwar, 2010; Murthy, 2017).

Broadly speaking, resilience means the ability to accomplish a comeback in the presence of adverse or traumatic conditions. In a general sense, Fong (2011) explains the term of resilience as recovering from risk factors such as poverty, family difficulty, parental death or divorce, substance abuse, mental illness, learning disability, medical risk or other disadvantaged situations. In the academic context, academic resilience refers to the ability of students to deal with any academic stress, or adverse situation efficiently (Martin, 2002; Martin & Marsh,

2003). From this perspective, Jowkar, Kojuri, Kohoulat and Hayat (2014) advocated that resilience has been regarded as a domain specific concept such as academic, emotional, behavioral and so on by some researchers, and the investigation of academic resilience has gained more attention among education researchers.

As Foster (2013) implied, we live in a society that is changing constantly; therefore, being resilient is necessary for students to be successful in this ever-changing world. That is why; resilience-based research is needed in different contexts and cultures around the world with the purpose of identifying the features of less resilient and more resilient students, their personal, social and educational background differences regarding the resilience levels, or academic achievements, and the factors that make them strong or weak in the face of adversity. In our context, foreign language learning is a rather daunting task for students in that they are supposed to learn many language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing in different contexts in addition to the target language culture. In this regard, Gürsoy (2018) also reports that language learning is generally a challenge for students, and they complain about how demanding it is.

There are several studies on the concept of resilience around the world and some in Türkiye; however, there the following topics have been studied in Türkiye in a limited number: the ones which examine the nature of academic resilience; the processes that students experience while learning English; the factors that act as contributors or inhibitors for students' academic resilience levels; and the relation of students' academic resilience to their academic achievement. Therefore, the aim of this study is to contribute to the literature with the goal of investigating prep class students' academic resilience and finding out whether there exists a meaningful relationship between the students' levels of academic resilience and academic achievement in Turkish EFL context. In addition, whether gender can be a factor on the students' academic resilience or not is examined.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

As the research design of the study, a correlational research design was chosen in this quantitative study. Correlational research is used in investigating the direction and strength of the relationship between variables (Creswell, 2012). In the current research, the relationship between the prep class students' academic resilience levels and academic achievement in Turkish EFL context was examined.

Participants

The population of this study consists of 88 prep class students at a state university in Türkiye. Convenience sampling method is chosen for the present study. According to Bryman (2012), "a convenience sample is one that is simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility".

The current study was conducted with a sample of 88 preparatory school students. 36 of the participants were male and 52 of them were female. Based on the responses regarding the age, it can be stated that 82 of the participants were between 17 and 20 ages. 4 of them were between 21 and 24, and the rest 2 participants were above 24, along with the mean ($M = 1.09$).

Data Collection Tools

In the current study, Cassidy (2016)'s Academic Resilience Scale-30 (ARS-30) was used as the data collection instrument. Information about the scale is briefly presented below.

The scale consists of three factors regarding academic resilience, namely, *perseverance, reflecting and adaptive-help-seeking, negative affect, and emotional response*. This scale was developed by Cassidy (2016) to measure university students' academic resilience. It was originally developed in English. The scale measures university students' responses to a hypothetical academic adverse situation through vignette. The researcher studied with a sample of 532 university students by using both an original vignette and an alternative vignette which was a modified version of the original one to assess discriminant validity. For this purpose, the original vignette version of the scale was administered to a sample of participants (N = 321), and the alternative vignette version was completed by the remaining participants (N = 211). The researcher randomly assigned the participants to the sub-groups of the alternative version or original one. The 30 scale items were responded by participants, along a 5-point Likert scale from likely (1) to unlikely (5). The participants were asked to visualize themselves as the student described in the academic adversity vignette. The Cronbach Alpha value of the scale for Factor 1 was 0.83; it was 0.78 Factor 2, and it was 0.80 for Factor 3. The researcher found the Cronbach Alpha as 0.90 for the total of the scale (summation of the 30 items), which means that it is a reliable and valid scale for measuring academic resilience of university students. Therefore, it can be stated that ARS-30 is a reliable instrument to measure the prep class students' levels of academic resilience.

Data Collection Procedure

The data was collected during 2018-2019 academic year at a state university in Türkiye. Before starting to collect data, the researcher got the ethical permission to conduct the current study. Then, the participants were given a consent form for the questionnaire, and they were given information about the questionnaire and the aim of the study. After that, the participants were asked to answer the questionnaire during their regular class session by taking permission from their lecturers as well. Since the questionnaire included a vignette which required the participants to imagine themselves in that adversity and answer the items accordingly, the researcher did not want to give a time limit for filling the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the Academic Resilience Scale-30 (ARS-30) were coded and processed by employing statistical analysis through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 23.0. The analysis of the amount of data gathered from the participants was analyzed in the lights of the research questions. To do this, descriptive analysis was employed to investigate academic resilience, along with means and standard deviations of the students' responses to each item in the scale. Then, inferential statistics, namely, Independent Sample t-test, Analysis of Variance and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) were employed to examine whether any relationship exists between academic resilience and English language achievement of prep class students. Additionally, Independent Sample t-test was done to explore gender factor on academic resilience.

FINDINGS

Academic Resilience Levels of Turkish EFL Students

In this section of the current study, statistical findings of descriptive analysis including Turkish prep class students' academic resilience levels are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Academic Resilience Scale (ARS-30)

Sub-Categories	Item Description	Mean	SD	Group Mean
Factor 1 Perseverance	(1) I would not accept the tutors' feedback	4.61	0.70	4.12
	(2) I would use the feedback to improve my work	4.44	0.80	
	(3) I would just give up	4.28	0.97	
	(4) I would use the situation to motivate myself	3.56	1.15	
	(5) I would probably change my career plans.	4.14	1.05	
	(8) I would see the situation as a challenge.	3.64	1.07	
	(9) I would do my best to stop thinking negative thoughts.	3.80	1.07	
	(10) I would see the situation as temporary.	4.00	0.81	
	(11) I would work harder.	4.11	1.02	
	(13) I would try to think of new solutions	4.23	0.77	
	(15) I would blame the tutor	4.14	0.98	
	(16) I would keep trying	4.23	0.77	
	(17) I would not change my long-term goals and ambitions	4.17	0.96	
	(30) I would look forward to showing that I can improve my grades	4.36	0.92	
Factor 2 Reflecting and Adaptive Help Seeking	(18) I would use my past successes to help motivate myself.	3.83	1.08	
	(20) I would start to monitor and evaluate my achievements and effort	4.03	0.88	
	(21) I would seek help from my tutors	3.95	0.99	
	(22) I would give myself encouragement	4.02	0.90	
	(24) I would try different ways to study	4.11	0.83	
	(25) I would set my own goals for achievement	4.26	0.75	
	(26) I would seek encouragement from my family and friends	3.55	1.17	

	(27) I would try to think more about my strengths and weaknesses to help me work better	4.32	0.70	
	(29) I would start to self-impose rewards and punishments depending on my performance	2.98	1.23	3.89
Factor 3 Negative Affect and Emotional Response	(6) I would probably get annoyed.	2.24	1.21	
	(7) I would begin to think my chances of success at university were poor	3.29	1.32	
	(12) I would probably get depressed.	3.51	1.29	
	(14) I would be very disappointed	2.49	1.31	
	(19) I would begin to think my chances of getting the job I want were poor	3.65	1.18	
	(23) I would stop myself from panicking	3.78	1.04	
	(28) I would feel like everything was ruined and was going wrong	3.45	1.37	3.20
Total		3.83	1.02	

The first sub-category exemplifies perseverance. The total group mean value is $M = 4.12$ (4: Agree, 5: Strongly Agree). This indicates that the participants, in the present study, are highly perseverant in the face of any academic adversity. Based on the statistical findings from Table 1 above, it can be stated that Item 1 has the highest mean score ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 0.70$), and secondly Item 2 has a closer mean score ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 0.80$). In the third place follows Item 30 with a slightly lower mean score ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.92$). This means that students highly agree to accept the tutors' feedback and use it to improve them; moreover, they highly tend to show that they can improve their grades. Additionally, the mean scores of the following items are indicated as Item 3 ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.97$), Item 16 ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.77$) and Item 13 ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.77$), which means that the students are highly in tendency not to give up, keep trying and try to think of new solutions when they face any academic adverse situation. On the other hand, Item 5 ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.05$) and Item 17 ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.96$) indicate that the students highly agree not to change their career plans, long term goals and ambitions. Also, according to the mean scores of Item 10 ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.81$), Item 11 ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.02$) and Item 15 ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.98$), the students are highly in tendency not to blame the tutor and to work harder by seeing the situation temporary. Although these students are found highly perseverant based on the group mean score, some items have lower mean scores than 4.00 under this sub-category of the academic resilience scale. Item 9 ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 1.07$) and Item 8 ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.07$), indicating that the students moderately stop thinking negative thoughts and moderately see the academic adverse situation as a challenge. Item 4 has the lowest mean score ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.15$) among the items under the first sub-category; however, it has the highest standard deviation ($SD = 1.15$), indicating that some students can show differences in using the situation to motivate themselves. In the lights of these findings, it can be concluded that the participants mostly agree with the statements presented in Factor 1 'perseverance'.

The second sub-category is about 'reflecting and adaptive help-seeking', with the total mean value result $M = 3.89$ (3: Neutral, 4: Agree). That is to say, the participants have the

tendency to reflect and seek help at a medium level when they are exposed to any academic adversity. According to the results of the second sub-category, Item 27 has the highest mean score ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.70$). In the second place, Item 25 has a closer mean score ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.75$). Thirdly, Item 24 has a slightly lower mean score ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.83$). Then, Item 20 ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.88$) and Item 22 ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.90$) follow along with higher mean scores above the group mean score of this sub-category similar to the aforementioned items above. All of these indicate that the students highly agree to take into consideration their strengths and weaknesses, to set their own goals for achievement, to try different ways to study, to self-monitor and evaluate their success and effort, and they highly agree to give themselves encouragement. In Item 18 ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.08$), Item 21 ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.99$), and Item 26 ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.17$), they moderately agree to use past successes to motivate themselves, to seek help from their tutors and encouragement from their family and friends. On the other hand, Item 29 has the lowest mean score ($M = 2.98$); but the highest standard deviation ($SD = 1.23$). This indicates that students can show differences in the tendency to use rewards and punishments regarding their performance. Based on these statistical findings, it can be concluded that students moderately agree with the feature themes including reflection on strengths and weaknesses, changing approaches to study, asking help and support, observing effort and achievements, and using rewards and punishments.

The third sub-category is related to 'negative affect and emotional response'. Its total mean value is $M = 3.20$ (3: Neutral, 4: Agree). This indicates that students avoid showing negative affect and emotional response at a medium level when they face any adversity in academic context. According to the results of the third sub-category, Item 23 has the highest mean score ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.04$), and secondly Item 19 has a closer mean score ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.18$). Thirdly, Item 12 follows with a slightly lower mean score ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.29$), which means that students moderately agree to stop them from panicking, get depressed and they moderately agree to think the possibility of getting the job they want were poor when they face any adversity in academic context. After that, Item 28 ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.37$) and Item 7 ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.21$) indicate that the students moderately feel like everything was going bad and wrong and think the possibility of success at university were poor. Under this sub-category 'negative affect and emotional response', these aforementioned items have higher mean scores above the group mean score of this sub-category ($M = 3.20$). However, Item 14 ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 1.31$) demonstrates that students agree with the statement at low level that they would be very disappointed which means that some students can be disappointed easily while some cannot. Moreover, Item 6 has the lowest mean score under this sub-category ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 1.21$), indicating that some students can show differences in getting annoyed easily in the face of adversity. In the lights of these findings, it can be concluded that students moderately agree with the idea including anxiety, avoiding negative emotional responses, optimism, and hopelessness. The total mean of global ARS-30 score is also indicated in Table 1 ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.02$), which means that students have a medium level of academic resilience in the current study.

Gender Factor on Academic Resilience of Turkish EFL Students

With the purpose of exploring whether gender is a factor on academic resilience of Turkish EFL students in university context, the statistical findings were assessed by using both descriptive and independent sample t-test analysis. The results presented in Table 2 revealed that for Factor 1 'perseverance' and Factor 2 'reflecting and adaptive help-seeking', no significant differences exist between male and female students in terms of academic resilience ($p = .888$; $p = .437$, respectively). However, in Factor 3, the mean scores of males and females were found as $M = 24.50$ and $M = 20.51$, respectively. Therefore, it can be concluded that there

are significantly differences between male and female students in terms of negative affect and emotional response ($p = .002$). That is to say, male students are less affected by the negative results and give response less emotionally in the face of any academic adversity so that they are more resilient emotionally than females. However, female students are less resilient emotionally because they are affected more by the negative results of any academic adversity by showing emotional response more.

Table 2. Gender Factor on Academic Resilience of Turkish EFL Students

Factors	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Factor 1 (Perseverance)	male	36	57.52	8.27	.141	.888
	female	52	57.26	8.57		
Factor 2 (Reflecting and adaptive help seeking)	male	36	34.44	5.31	-782	.437
	female	52	35.25	4.32		
Factor 3 (Negative affect and emotional response)	male	36	24.50	5.88	3.123	.002
	female	52	20.51	5.87		

The Relationship Between Turkish EFL Students' Academic Resilience and English Language Achievement

One of the purposes of this study was at exploring whether any significant relationship exists between the students' academic resilience and their academic achievement in learning English. Therefore, the correlation was analysed between these two variables by using Pearson Correlation Analysis in SPSS 23.0 software. For this reason, the students' two exam marks were taken, and the data were computed. The mean of these two exams were used as students' academic achievement score in English. The statistical findings are presented in Table 3. Table 3 indicates the extent of correlation between students' English language achievement and their academic resilience regarding the factors of the scale. In this study, the significance of value (r -value) is assumed to be .05.

Table 3. The Relationship Between Turkish EFL Students' Academic Resilience and English Language Achievement

		Academic achievement	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Global ARS-30 Score
Academic achievement	R	1	,243*	,087	,152	,214*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,023	,419	,158	,045
Factor 1	R	,243*	1	,694**	,514**	,939**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,023		,000	,000	,000
Factor 2	R	,087	,694**	1	,182	,739**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,419	,000		,090	,000

Factor 3	R	,152	,514**	,182	1	,717**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,158	,000	,090		,000
Global ARS-30 Score	R	,214*	,939**	,739**	,717**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,045	,000	,000	,000	

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

As indicated in Table 3, a statistically significance but weak positive correlation was found between students' academic resilience and academic achievement in learning English ($r = .214$; $p < .05$). This means that the higher the students become academically resilient, the more success they get in English. Furthermore, these findings also indicate that the students become more successful, they get more resilient academically. Based on the correlation level between the academic achievement and the factors of academic resilience, it can be inferred that there existed a statistically significant but weak positive correlation between students' academic achievement in English and Factor 1 'perseverance' ($r = .243$; $p < .05$). In other words, when the students get more success in English, they become more perseverant as well. The results also reveal that the students' perseverance increases, their success does as well. Regarding the correlation results of the factors of academic resilience, it can be stated that Factor 1 'perseverance' is highly correlated with Factor 2, and Factor 3, respectively ($r = .694$; $r = .514$; $p < .05$). This indicates that the higher perseverant students become, the more reflective and adaptive help-seeker they are, furthermore, the more they avoid negative affect and emotional response when they face any academic adversity. On the other hand, the findings reveal that there is also a statistically significant and high correlation between global ARS score and its each factor, respectively ($r = .939$; $r = .739$; $r = .717$; $p < .05$).

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this part of the present study, the findings were discussed with similar and relevant studies in the literature. Furthermore, recommendations and implications were made in the light of the findings.

The findings of the current study showed similar results regarding academic resilience levels with the study of Cassidy (2016). Similar to her participants' total score of academic resilience scale (115.61), the students in this study also were moderately academic resilient. Moreover, a positive correlation between academic resilience and academic self-efficacy was found. In this regard, the students of the present study might have moderate level of academic self-efficacy and, that is why; they might show academic resilience at medium level. Similarly, Riahi, Mohammadi, Norozi and Malekibatar (2015) also advocate the existence of a positive relationship between resilience and self-efficacy. In another study, Mwangi, Ireri, Mwaniki and Wambugu (2018) investigated the relationship between secondary school students' academic resilience and academic achievement. According to the findings of their study, the participants had moderate levels academic resilience. There also exist studies with discrete findings. To illustrate, Cinkara's (2017) study with the academic resilience of 209 Syrian students in Turkish EFL context indicated that the participants' academic resilience levels were high. In another research, unlike the findings of the present study, Coşkun, Garipağaoğlu and Tosun (2014) who conducted their study with university students in Turkish EFL context, found that students had high resilience level and the researchers proved that students' resilience increased, their perception of problem-solving skills got better.

When the results of the present study are considered with the aforementioned studies, it seems that students' academic resilience levels show differences from context to context and

culture to culture. That might be because of the differences in individuals' self-efficacy beliefs, problem solving skills and so on. Supporting that, Gürsoy (2018) uses a metaphor as 'student immunity' which can be a significant indicator of a learner's resilience in the process of foreign language learning. Simply put, the researcher explains that the students with this immunity can know well how to deal with the adversities and take the necessary action to solve the problems instead of giving up because this immunity protects them from the negative effects of the academic adverse situations while learning language. Moreover, the researcher stresses the importance of some characteristics that are contributing factors to the students' immunity such as challenger, commitment & success, future concern, self-efficacy, and extreme self-confidence. Within this concern, it can be concluded that academic resilience is a multifaceted concept which is related to some contributing factors aforementioned; that is why, the students' academic resilience levels can be relatively at medium level in the present study in Turkish EFL context.

In order to find out whether gender is a factor on academic resilience of Turkish EFL students in university context, independent sample t-test analysis was employed in SPSS 23.0. The findings indicated that no significant differences were found between male and female students for Factor 1 and Factor 2 in terms of academic resilience ($p = .888$, $p = .437$, respectively). However, in Factor 3, gender differences were determined ($p = .002$) indicating that male students are less affected by the negative results and give response less emotionally in the face of any academic adversity than females.

The fact that gender is a factor on academic resilience is confirmed in the study of Wasonga, Christman, and Kilmer (2003). The researchers explored the protective factors contributing resilience and academic achievement of the urban students and the findings revealed that gender was effective on the resilience of the students. Similarly, Mwangi et al. (2018) found that academic resilience and achievement mean scores of boys were lower than that of girls. On contrast, Riahi et al. (2014) examined the relationship between high school students' academic self-efficacy and resilience, and the researchers found no significance difference between girl and boys regarding their resilience.

Cassidy (2016) also did not find any significant differences in the students' academic resilience levels in respect to gender. Additionally, Coşkun et al. (2014), in their study of relationship between university students' resilience and problem-solving skills, did not indicate any significant difference in university students' academic resilience levels in terms of gender. However, the findings of the present study reveal that students show differences regarding 'negative affect and emotional response'. Supporting that, Erdogan, Ozdogan and Erdogan (2015) implied that male students show higher resilience in the face of adversity than female students. According to the researchers, the reason might be because of societal gender roles in Turkish society i.e., men are assumed to have more responsibilities than women in many areas. Another important thing the researchers indicated about the gender differences is that when compared to men, women are generally more emotional, and they can be affected more in the face of difficulties. In the lights of these findings, the reason why male students are less affected by the negative results and give response less emotionally in the face of any academic adversity than females in the present study might be because of societal gender in Turkish society or the fact that women are generally more emotional as Erdogan et al. (2015) stressed.

IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study revealed that a meaningful relationship exists between the students' academic resilience and academic achievement in learning English at Turkish EFL university context. Considering the extent of this relationship between students' academic resilience and

academic achievement in learning English, foreign language teachers should take into consideration this finding by focusing on the protective factors that contribute to the academic resilience of the students to increase their students' academic resilience and enhance their success in English in their teaching context because this concept is positively correlated with academic achievement in the field of education (Acevedo, 2010; Culpepper, 2004; Foshee, 2013; Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009).

With these in minds, protective factors at both family and community level should be increased such as positive parent and child relationship, parental warmth, support and encouragement, care within the family, or a close relationship with significant others in school environment such as supportive peers, positive teacher influences, and opportunities for success (Olsson et al., 2003). As Anagnostaki et al. (2016) proposed, when students had high level of self-efficacy beliefs, internal locus of control, and family support, educated parents, they were found to be successful more academically regardless of their immigrant or social status. In other words, academic resilience can be fostered by providing protective factors among students even though they are at risk social and educational context, which in turn leads more academic achievement among students. In this respect, parents and teachers especially play important roles so that they should do their best to enhance their children's and students' both academic resilience and academic success in learning English by providing them with necessary parental and educational support.

This present study was conducted by using a questionnaire that is based on self-report data gathering tools of quantitative methods. However, in addition to the questionnaire, qualitative methods such as interview or observation might be also used as for data collection tools for further studies. Moreover, a longitudinal study design can be also preferred to examine the academic resilience of students in the process of learning English.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This paper is based on the master's thesis submitted to Çağ University, Türkiye, by the first author in 2019.

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