Investigating the Relationship of Irrational Beliefs with Anxiety and Their Effect in Two Different Academic Systems in Iran (Undergraduate College students of Payam Nour University and Islamic Azad University)

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ABSTRACT: Irrational beliefs have close relationship with anxiety and can make the person more anxious and distort his perception or understanding. Rational-Emotive–Behavioral theory of Ellis is one of the most recognized cognitive methods that introduce various kinds of irrational beliefs – as the main factor of human problems. The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship of irrational beliefs with anxiety in two different academic systems of Iranian college students at undergraduate (BA) level and its effects on their achievement. In this study, anxiety state of college students at BA level in Azad and Payam Nour University (PNU) of Ghorveh, Kurdish area of Iran, in academic year of 2011 – 2012 is considered and compared. To carry out the research the questionnaire of irrational belief of Jones which includes 100 questions and Kattel anxiety were applied. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficient and T-test were used to analyzing. The results suggest that there is a positive and significant relationship between irrational beliefs and anxiety among two different systems of Iranian college students to the effect that irrational beliefs and anxiety are more common among girls than boys. Furthermore, the study suggests that irrational and anxieties have negative effect on students’ academic achievement. An irrational belief is almost the same in both universities, but anxiety in PNU was greater than Azad students. These results can be related to different systems and procedures of teaching.

Key words: irrational beliefs, anxiety, comparison of two societies, Kurdish.

INTRODUCTION

Ellis believes that emotional and cognitive disorder is greatly the result of unreasonable and irrational beliefs of a person and if he or she learns to increase his rational beliefs and decrease irrational thoughts, then he may be released of mental, emotional and behavioral disorder. In Ellis view point, people are radically rational; dealing with their problems is possible by improving people’s thoughts and their perception (Koukebi Sioki et al 2010). Many of the cognitive problems are associated with the way people think. Therefore, rationality and cognition are considered in psychological area as an important phenomenon (Laster 1989, Nelson, 1977). Irrational thoughts have close relationship with anxiety and can make the person nervous and distort the perception (Finaly, Jones & Brown, 1981). According to Ellis (1991) anxiety and problems of each person are the result of his or her irrational beliefs. Human beings have the potential to avoid anxiety and distress by the help of positive thoughts and beliefs (Shafie abadi, Naseri, 2001). While being anxious, each of human kind has tendency to cognitive distortion (Firouz bakht, 2004). Ellis, one of the founder of cognitive model, asserts that emotional and psychological disorder are greatly the result of unreasonable and irrational beliefs of a person and if he learns to increase his rational thoughts and reduce irrational beliefs, then he may be freed of mental, emotional and behavioral disorders (Koukebi Sioki et al 2010). In this study, the relationship of irrational beliefs with anxiety has been analyzed among the students of Azad and PNU in Ghorveh, western Iran. Some suggestions have been made to parents, students, college officials and especially college
assistants in order to make them aware of the link between student's irrational beliefs and anxiety. We hope that they identify cognitive problems and irrational beliefs and arrange them intelligently and pave the way for reducing some problems of higher education system and help the students live a normal and healthy life. Investing the relationship between irrational beliefs and anxiety from experts' perspectives. Humans thoughts may in plague their feelings and what they feel may have an effect on thoughts (Baron & Byrne, 2004). Irrational beliefs may intensify anxiety and make the person fall in to a vicious circle. Irrational assessment of an event in life, brings about misplaced anxiety in a person, then the person regards this anxiety as sign of a problem; and this problem, in turn, enhances irrational evaluation. Finally, the anxiety caused by an irrational belief, changes in to a big problem which has nothing to do with reality. When anxiety overcomes, the person enlarges (intensifies) the trouble so much that fear caused by anxiety debilitates the person more than real fear from the problem (Chambless and Gracely, 1989). Rational – emotive – behavioral theory of Ellis (1995) is one of the cognitive theories. This theory introduces irrational beliefs as the main source of human problem. Feldman (1987) believes that Ellis attributes the root (source) of many problems and behavioral and mental disorders to different kinds of irrational beliefs about the world around him/her. For instance Ellis (1973) believes that when an activating event A, happens to someone, he or she may have two different but contrasting interpretation for A; Hear she may do so on the basis of her or his internal (innate) tendency. One belief is rational (RB) and the other is irrational (IB). If a person follows rational beliefs: he or she with come up with rational consequences (RC) and would have a normally personality: but if a person is prone to irrational beliefs (IB), he would encounter irrational consequences and accordingly he or she would have an abnormal and anxious character (Moetamedin & Ebadi, 2007).

In Ellis viewpoint, there are ten irrational beliefs which are as follows: 1, demand for approval, 2, high self – expectation, 3, blame prone mess, 4, frustration reaction 5, emotionality irresponsibility, 6, Anxious over concern, 7. Problem avoidance 8, dependency 9, help lessens for change 10, perfectionism. Moradi et al (2010). These beliefs may influence mental health of persons and their long – term presence would cause anxiety (Ellis and Harper, 1973). Ostadian et al (2009). Come to the conclusion that group. Counseling in the form of rational, emotive and behavioral would reduce exam anxiety. Various studies refer to the relationship between a person’s cognitive system – especially irrational beliefs and emotional disorder like anxiety. Calvet. E., & Lokga (Kalot 2002), Harris & Dryden, (2006).

In Ellis perspective, anxiety is created by the effect of irrational beliefs on a person's emotion and behavior and remedy is done by correcting irrational beliefs and replacing them by rational ones. (Mahmoodalilo et al, 2010). Smith and Zoasky (1987), in a research, considered the connection between irrational beliefs and emotional disorder in a testing group including 73 of attending patients to a mental clinic. Their findings show that correlation coefficient between irrational beliefs with emotional states such as clear anxiety, and rational behavior. The investigation of research and health testing in Germany suggest that anxiety in women is twice as much as that of men (Shamsipour 2009). The result of Darounkalac and Alinajar(2004), research showed that there I significant relationship between irrational beliefs of students and their academic achievement. The level of irrational beliefs was more prominent among girls than boys. The result of Amini’s research (1997) showed that there is significant difference between irrational beliefs of both men and women. Dounapoush (1998) did a research to analyze normalization of irrational beliefs Test of Jones. The research was done on male and female college students and its results showed the level of irrational beliefs was more common among the girls than the boys. Khaledian (2010), in another research entitled the relationship irrational beliefs with anxiety came to the conclusion that there is positive significant relationship between irrational beliefs and anxiety and these feelings were more common among the girls than boys. The aim of this research is investigating the relationship of irrational beliefs with anxiety and their effect on academic achievement in two different academic systems (Azad universities and Payam Nour Universities(PNU)). So first the differences of these universities is described. Then the method of research is explained. In the next sessions the finding and result is presented.

Introducing the specifications of 3 kinds of universities in Iran
We have 3 kinds of academic systems in Iran:
National university: such as Tehran university in Iran or Stanford University In USA or York University in England.
Islamic Azad university: One of the pillars of the scientific development of the country is expanding education, which result social development along with the blossoming of talents, and prepare human creativities. The capacity of National Universities was inadequate. So Azad universities is established.
PNU: Conventional and current training (in National and Azad Universities) alone is not sufficient, so PNU is established. In PNU new methods of education and training programs, such as training contents, open, remote or virtual education, to achieve development objectives, is applied.
The specifications of these universities describe in Table (1).
Table 1. Comparing the specifications of Iran’s Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National University</th>
<th>Islamic Azad University</th>
<th>Payam Nour University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Via very hard Koncours exam</td>
<td>Via easy Koncours exam &amp; in some branches without Koncours</td>
<td>Via Koncours exam and is Very easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training method</td>
<td>Teacher teach the lessons, then students can interact and scientific challenge with their teacher in class. The Score is based on a hard descriptive exam.</td>
<td>Students studied the lessons in their home, then there are few sessions for interact with their teacher in class. The Score is based on a moderate descriptive exam.</td>
<td>Students studied the lessons in their home, then there are few sessions for interact with their teacher in class. The Score is based on a choice test exams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance and level of education</td>
<td>Very high</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>Need to student tries very hard</td>
<td>Need to student tries moderate.</td>
<td>Need to student tries hard, because he hasn’t access to teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition for each Term</td>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>About 300-600 $</td>
<td>About 75-1050 $</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So the innovation of this paper is investigating of irrational beliefs with anxiety and their effect in different population not unique population. We interview with 18 assistant professor with 10 years experience in teaching students in national or Azad universities. They believed one of the critical reasons for low performance of educated student in Azad and PNU is anxiety about their knowledge level and futures jobs. Government agencies employ of graduate of national universities rather than Azad and PNU. So in this paper we would like to test this matter and compare two different teaching systems.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, the relationship between irrational beliefs and anxiety was investigated particularly based on IBT test, Kattell test and average point of final exam scores. IBT test was developed by Jones (1968). The test has ten scales and each of these scales includes 10 questions based on Likert five–point scale (Jones, 1968). Total score of IBT ranges from 100 to 500. Low scores show rational beliefs and high score shows irrational beliefs (Bridges and Sander man, 2002).

Jones, 1968 reported the reliability of test, using test – retest, was 92% and reliability of each of the it’s ten sub – scales ranged 66% to 80%. He also achieved average reliability of all sub – scales as 84%. IBT test validity was achieved by correlating with Depression Test of (Beck) and it was 77% which was significant at 99% (Farah Bakhsh, 1993), (Taghipour, 1994). Reported test reliability coefficient on the sample of 106 college students of Tabatabaei university by using cron bach & method it was 71%. Its content validity was supported in different research (Farah Bakhsh 1993, Moradi 2010).

Kattel Anxiety test (1950) was made to assess (evaluate) anxiety and one of the mostly used tools to measure anxiety (Karami, 2007). In this research, this test will be used to measure anxiety. This test has 40 questions in which the first 20 questions shows hidden anxiety and the other 20 questions show clear and morbid anxiety and the total scores of 40 questions show general (total) anxiety (Karami, 2007; Sharifi, 1998). In this research, the student academic term averages was considered as a criteria to measure academic achievements. As different social institutions (education and training banks and …) serve the average more than 14 as a success criteria and less than 14 as weak success criteria or failure , in this research the average more than 14 indicates academic achievement and below 14 indicates failure (khaleedian et al, 2012).

Given the research topic – investigating the relationship of rational and irrational beliefs with anxiety and academic success – and it purpose, this is a field research and since it evaluate (analyzes) the relationship between two variables, it is also correlative study. The statistical populations of this research are all undergraduate college students of Humanities in Ghorveh University – Azad and PNU – who were busy studying in 2011 – 12 academic year. Among all the mentioned students who were 1100, 280 participants – 140 from Azad and 140 from PNU – were chosen especially based on Krisi & Morgan (1970). From each college 70 men and 70 women and totally 140 men & 140 women were selected randomly for responding to questionnaire. Also all questionnaires are completed and delivered.

Data analyses and research findings

Table 1. Descriptive statistics results of survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irrational beliefs</td>
<td>203.87</td>
<td>11.76</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anxiety</td>
<td>31.17</td>
<td>7.86</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. correlation between the scores of student's irrational beliefs with anxiety and Academic achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irrational beliefs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.429</td>
<td>0.281</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anxiety</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>academic achievement</td>
<td>0.281</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= (280)

The data in table (2) show that there is positive significant relationship between students irrational and their anxiety \( r=0.429, p<0.001 \) meaning that by increasing scores in one of the variable, the scores will also rise in the variable. The data in table (2) show that there is negative significant relationship between students irrational beliefs and academic achievement; and anxiety with academic achievement. The data also shows there is positive and significant correlation between the scores of irrational beliefs with anxiety – among Payam Nour University College. \( r=0.406, P<0.001 \), meaning that by increasing scores in one of the variables, the scores will also increase in the other variable. The data also shows there is positive and significant correlation between the scores of irrational beliefs with anxiety – among Azad University College. \( r= 0.452, P<0.001 \), meaning that by increasing scores in one of the variables, the scores will also increase in the other variable. The data showed there is significant correlation between irrational beliefs and anxiety among female college students: \( r= 0.47, p<0.05 \), meaning that by increasing scores in one variable, the scores will also rise in the other variable. There is significant and positive relationship between irrational beliefs and anxiety of male college students: \( r=0.388, p<0.05 \), meaning that by increasing scores in one variable, the scores will also increase in the other variable.

Table 3. Group differences for irrational beliefs among boys and girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Boys Mean</th>
<th>Boys Standard deviation</th>
<th>Girls Mean</th>
<th>Girls Standard deviation</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>irrational beliefs</td>
<td>201.38</td>
<td>12.56</td>
<td>206.36</td>
<td>10.96</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>-3.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P<0.001

Data in table (3) show that the difference of mean score of irrational beliefs is significant for both girls and boys \( t=-3.55, df =278, p<0.001 \) and mean score of girl's irrational beliefs is significantly higher than that of boy's college students. The data showed that the difference of mean score of irrational belief's of boy and girl college students in Azad university, is significant \( t=3.94, df=138, p<0.01 \). Meaning the mean of irrational beliefs of girl college students in Azad University is significantly higher than that of boy college students of the same university. Also, the data showed mean score of irrational beliefs of girl students in PNU is higher than that of boy students of the same university. Data showed that the difference of mean scores of irrational beliefs of girl and boy college students is significant \( t=3.16, df=138, p<0.01 \). That is, mean score of irrational beliefs of girl in PNU is significantly higher than that of boys in the same university.

Table 4. Group difference for anxiety among boys and girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Boys Mean</th>
<th>Boys Standard deviation</th>
<th>Girls Mean</th>
<th>Girls Standard deviation</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>anxiety</td>
<td>29.38</td>
<td>7.27</td>
<td>32.97</td>
<td>8.46</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>-3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P<0.001

The data in Table (4) shows significant different between mean score of anxiety for boy and girl college students \( t=-3.8, df =278, p<0.01 \). Meaning that girls students anxiety is higher than that of boys. Data show mean and scores of anxiety in girl college students of Azad University is higher than mean and anxiety score of boy students in the same university. Furthermore, the data show that mean and SD of anxiety score of girl students in PNU \( (33.42\text{and }8.78) \) is higher than mean and SD of anxiety score of boy students of the same university. \( (28.92,6.96) \). The result show significant difference between mean score of anxiety for boy and girl students in PNU \( (t=3.38, df=138, p<0.01) \) and the anxiety of girl students in PNU is greater than boy students in the same university. Generally, the result showed that there is negative significantly relationship between irrational beliefs and anxiety of college students and there and their average and educational situation; such that those students whose average was less than 14, in the first term of academic year 2010-11, had more anxiety and irrational beliefs. In other words; there is difference between irrational beliefs anxiety of students with academic achievement and irrational belies and anxiety of students with little or on academic success. Total mean score of irrational beliefs of the group with no achievement \( (29.79) \), was more than mean score of irrational beliefs in successful group \( 27.94 \). These data show significant difference between mean score of irrational beliefs of both groups. That is, successful and unsuccessful students. \( (t=3.9,df=278, p<0.001)\);
meaning that the amount of irrational beliefs of students with little or no success is significantly more than irrational beliefs of academically successful students. And mean score of anxiety in unsuccessfully academic students, (33.61) was higher than mean score of anxiety in academically successful group (29.73). The data, also, show significant difference between mean score of anxiety in both group sod successful and unsuccessful students (t=3.37, d f=278, p<0.001); meaning that anxiety of academically unsuccessful students is significantly more than that of successful students.

Table 5. Group difference for students' irrational beliefs in both universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Azad U</th>
<th></th>
<th>PNU</th>
<th></th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>209.12</td>
<td>13.11</td>
<td>198.62</td>
<td>10.41</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>7.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deviation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P<0.001

The data in table (5) show significant difference between students irrational beliefs in Azad and PNU; such that the amount of students irrational beliefs in Azad university is more than that of PNU. That data show significant difference between irrational beliefs of students in Azad and PNU. (t=7.44, d f=278, p<0.001) meaning that irrational beliefs of students at Azad university is significantly than that of PNU students.

Table 6. Group differences for student's anxiety in both universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Azad</th>
<th></th>
<th>PNU</th>
<th></th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>29.57</td>
<td>7.63</td>
<td>32.77</td>
<td>8.09</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>deviation</td>
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<td>***</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P<0.001

The data in table (6) show significant difference between students anxiety mean score in Azad sand PNU. Such that the level of students anxiety in PNU is more than that of Azad University. These data show significant difference between students irrational beliefs at Azad and PNU (t=3.4, d f=278, p<0.001); meaning that the level of students anxiety at Payam Nour university is significantly more that of students in Azad university students.

DISCUSSION

The results show that there is positive and significant relationship between students' irrational beliefs with anxiety and we may conclude that the more the irrational beliefs, the more anxiety there is. This relationship was also significant separately between two groups of boy and girl college students. In the first place; these findings supported the rational, emotive. And behavioral theory of Ellis (1970); because he holds that a person's beliefs may influence his or her behavior and these very beliefs of a person determine his behaviors and not an activating event. From this viewpoint, anxiety is a behavior that is the consequence of irrational beliefs of a person; such that the more a person has irrational beliefs, the more anxious he would be. The findings, that is, being positive relationship between irrational beliefs and anxiety – are consistent with Ostadian et al (1988), smith and Zoaski (1987), Fenili et al (1981), Calvet& Lokga (2002), Harris and Driaden (2006), maybe the possible support and explanation of this hypo thesis is the rational-emotive-behavioral theory of Ellis (1969); Because he asserts that when an activating event (A) happens, the persons behavior or reaction does not directly arise from this event, but between persons behavior and the activating event the persons beliefs (B) exist. The system of beliefs influences his or her behavior (C) so anxiety can be a consequence of a person's irrational beliefs.

The mean score of girls' students irrational beliefs was significantly higher than that boys college students. Which is consistent with the findings of Amini jamal (1997), khaledian (2010), dounapoush (1998), darounkalaie, Alinajar (2004). The results also show that there is significant difference between mean score of anxiety among boy and girl college students and mean score of anxiety in girl student was higher that of boy students. The results of this study are consistent with research findings of Digraph et al (2002), Brisloue et al (1999), and Jacobi et al (2004). In explaining the finding, it can be said that probably women report their anxiety symptoms much often; also psychological differences may justify these gender gap. For example, mean are conditioned to have more control over their own situation. Social cultural justification like gender role has a port in this condition. For example, may have more experience than women in encountering fear in society. Facing anxiety and fear is one of the remedy (cure) for dealing with anxiety. (Kring et al, 2007) Cited in (Shamsipour, 2009).

Mean score of Azad student's irrational beliefs was significantly higher than score mean of PNU students. The possible reason is that the former students pay higher tuition fees. Mean score of anxiety among
PNU students was significantly higher than score mean of anxiety among Azad students. The possible reason is that based on the interviews done with these students, they presented this problem by saying that PNU classes are held in the form of problem – solving sessions; therefore students are not so sure of their own learning especially when it comes to learning the whole material contained in a text book and this brings about more anxiety in the students.

One of the research limitations is the unavailability of the IQ degrees, the cultural and economical positions, the problems that students are facing with and their effects on the irrational beliefs and the anxiety positions. Another limitation of the research was the lack of a similar research in this area and relates to the topic in Iran and abroad; also this topic was new as there had been found no similar research in scientific-searching databases, so there was not enough background.

CONCLUSION

The results of data analysis show, there is significant relationship between irrational beliefs and anxiety; meaning that the more the irrational beliefs cause more anxiety. The result about the difference between anxiety and irrational beliefs – among girls and boys – showed that anxiety and irrational beliefs of girl's students are more than boys' students.

The result about the difference between Azad and PNU, showed that irrational beliefs is more widespread among Azad students and anxiety is more common among PNU students than Azad students. So the following solutions are suggested for above mentioned problems:

It is suggested that college officials and administrators hold works hops to reduce irrational beliefs and anxiety of the students.

Given the volume of emotional problems (anxiety and depression) it is essential that experienced and knowledgeable counselor should be hired.

Making continuing attempts to make students aware of negative impact of irrational beliefs on anxiety by using new methods and group counseling in an emotional – rational way.

In this field, there has been no research in Iran, so because of the Kurdish culture and language of the people in this city, this research can be base of similar future researches. The students can make a sense of importance and be familiar with the irrational beliefs and the anxiety rates in this city. The researchers are going to identify the methods for decreasing the anxiety and depression and enhancing the capacity of understanding, expressing, rational beliefs application, self- satisfaction and value. The results can help to all stockholders such as professors, students, faculty managers to enhance academic achievement. It is recommended that the university authorities present some workshop to decrease the student irrational beliefs and the anxiety via consultants and psychologists.

This result can be a useful tool for clinical psychologists, consulting psychologists, students, Undersecretary of the student affairs in universities, the students' undersecretary of the ministry of science, research and technology.

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