



# The Meditational Role of Emotional Regulation between Family Communication Pattern and Academic Adjustment

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**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of present study was to investigating the meditational role of emotional regulation in the relationship between family communication pattern and academic adjustment. Participations were 482 first-grade higher education students, (228girls and 247boys), who were selected from Shirazs' high schools by using stratified random sampling method. Participants completed revised version of family communication pattern questionnaire (RFCP), difficulties in emotion regulation Scale (DERS) and Adjustment Inventory for school students (ATSS). Data analyzed by Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using AMOS software. These result showed that among components of difficulties in emotional regulation, limited access to emotional regulation and difficulties engaging in goal-directed behavior can mediate the relationship between family communication pattern and academic adjustment. In general, these findings show that emphasizing on conformity in family, with increasing in adolescent's difficulties in emotional regulation, can rebound pure academic adjustment. Suggestions and implication for future research are also proffered.

**Keywords:** Family communication pattern, Emotional regulation, Academic adjustment, Mediatory, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## INTRODUCTION

The adjustment is one main symptom (psychological state) that shows mental (psychological) health. This psychological state is closely linked with emotional, social and educational areas. Educational adjustment is considered as one aspect of psychological-social adaptability which was long the main interest of scholars and researchers in the field of education. Educational adjustment monitors (evaluates) learner's abilities to see whether these abilities are adaptable with academic conditions, requirements and roles in the school, as a social institution. The learner face these situations in the school and the psychologist studies learner's adaptability with these activities in the school (Pettus, 2006).

It is obvious that educational adjustment, the same as overall adjustment, is the product of several factors, such as family factors (e.g. Aminabad al., 2011; Contreras et al, 2009; Simons, 1999), social factors (e.g.; Finn et al., 1997; Floyd, 1996), individual factors (e.g. Waxman, et al., 1997) and interpersonal factors (e.g. Nota et al. (2003). One individual factor affecting educational adjustment is emotion regulation (e.g. Berkinga et al. 2008). Emotion regulation can be regarded as a process through which individuals can affect (control) what to be excited over, when they should be excited and how they should express their excitement (Gross, 1998).

Thompson (1996) considered emotion regulation as both internal and external processes which are responsible for controlling, monitoring, evaluating and modifying emotional reactions of the individual in the realization process of his goals and behaviors. Many authors (e.g. Gross et al., 2007) have mentioned various roles and benefits for emotion regulation such as coping with basic tasks and solving them, behavior coordination, individual adaptability with social environments and transferring feeling to others. All these issues indicate the role of emotion in individual adaptability with the environment. Thus, according to Thompson (1996), emotion regulation process has done an appropriate task when it adjusts individual's emotions in a way that it will lead to higher adaptability of the individual to the environment.

In addition, many educational theorists and researchers considered family and relevant factors as one influential factor which affects students' educational adjustment (e.g. Richards et al., 2000; FuladChang (2006). Family has many functions and dynamics which have a significant impact on various stages of child's development.

It largely determines their behavior and their interaction with the environment. Among families' dynamics and functions, families' communication patterns can be mentioned.

The family communication pattern is one model proposed in family [psychology] context. This pattern deals with interactions in the family and how these interactions affect adjustment of the individual with the environment (Coerner et al., 2006). The context of family communication pattern in area of psychology is defined as scientific structure of physical world of the family based on the relationship between family members. It also includes content of the conversations, activities, and interactions between family members and meanings of the relationships they have in mind (Coerner et al., 2006). Fitzpatrick et al. (1994) proposed that two dimensions of conversation and conformity orientations are considered as key dimensions in family communication. Conformity orientation reflects a pattern in family relationships in which there is a pressure on family members to have the same attitudes, values, and beliefs (or conformity orientation refers to the degree to which families create homogeneity of attitudes, values, and beliefs). Families with high scores on this dimension focus on conforming their opinions and attitudes to each other. As a result, they emphasize on conformity between each other, conflict avoidance and interdependence of family members to each other. In general, the relationship between family members in such interactive pattern is defined as obedience to adults and parents. Conversation orientation refers to the extent that family creates free space and provides comfort for family members, so that they can participate in various activities. The families who receive the highest score in this dimension are the kind of families whose members communicate with other members without any limitation; furthermore, they communicate with each other with a level of unrestricted freedom [which is defined by the family itself]. In this type of family, so many hours are dedicated to family discussions on various topics; moreover, they make decisions after several discussions on relevant issue with each other.

Grych et al. (2003), in their model, wanted to understand the effects of parental conflict on children. They found out that emotional and cognitive processes are considered as mediatory factors in assessment of the children from their family interactions and their adaptability with the environment. Eisenberg et al. (2001) stated that family interactions affect children's adaptability through regulating their emotions. Schwartz et al. (2000) in their study also stated that one way in which family relationships can influence children's adaptability is through its impact on children's emotion regulation. In this context, it can be said that parents help their children develop some skills in emotion regulation

through their interactions with their children, parenting styles, teaching methods. These skills can also develop when the parents are role models for their children. Disturbed family relationships affect emotion regulation process development in children and make some difficulties in emotion regulation process. As a result, it creates adaptability of children with the environment. Therefore, emotion regulation process - which is greatly the outcome of interactions between family and the environment - affect the way the individual adapt with various situations. In this regard, families' interactions can affect this adaptability both in a direct way as well as with mediation of emotion regulation.

Students' educational adjustment is closely associated with personal and social life of the individual as well as his career in the future. If an individual has high educational adjustment, a positive outlook can be expected in other aspects of his future life. However, a few studies have already examined educational adjustment and its influential factors. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct further researches on this important and decisive issue. According to above-mentioned materials about education adjustment, family communication patterns, emotion regulation and theoretical background of the research in this regard, it can be stated that emotion regulation components (factors) can mediate (affect) the relationship between family communications patterns and educational adjustment. Therefore, the main objective of the present study was to investigate the mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between family communication patterns and educational adjustment.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The design of this study is correlational. In addition, structural equation modeling approach was used in this study. Besides, data were analyzed using Amos software.

### **Population, Sample and Sampling Method:**

Statistical population of this study included all junior high school students who studied in Shiraz high schools in 2010-2011 academic years. Research sample was selected from the students using multiple-step stratified sampling method. Sampling method was done in this way: first, two districts were randomly selected from four educational districts in Shiraz, then two high schools for female individuals and two high schools for male individuals were randomly selected from each district, then two classes were randomly selected from the first grade high school in each high school. Finally, all students in 16 selected classes (8 classes for female individuals and 8 classes for male

individuals) voluntarily completed the research questionnaire. Thus, 500 students participated in this study. However, after the study, twenty-seven questionnaires from the collected questionnaires due to incomplete responses to questions were excluded from the study and remaining 473 questionnaires were analyzed. It is worth noting that 228 questionnaires from 473 questionnaires belonged to female individuals while 245 questionnaires from 473 questionnaires belonged to male individuals.

### Research Tools

1. *Revised Family Communication Patterns Questionnaire*: in order to evaluate family communication patterns, children's version of "Revised tool of Family Communication Patterns" was used (Ritchie and Fitzpatrick, 1990; quoted from Koerner et al., 2002). This questionnaire includes 26 items and it is a self-conformity tool which evaluates two conformity and conversation orientations dimensions using a 5-degree likert scale (from strongly agreed to strongly disagreed).

In Iran, Latifian et al. (2005) studied the validity of this questionnaire by calculating the correlation of each item with total score as well as correlation of each factor with total score. These results indicated desirable validity of the questionnaire in an Iranian sample. Besides, these researchers calculated the reliability of this tool through Cronbach's alpha coefficient and obtained the reliability of dialogue orientation as 0.87 and the one for conformity dimension as 0.81. They also obtained the reliability of conversation and conformity orientations retest as 0.84 and 0.78 respectively (Latifian et al., 2005). Reisy (2011) studied structural factor of this questionnaire in the students using factor analysis. The results of this analysis revealed that there are two factors in this questionnaire. These results were in line with two-factor structure of the main questionnaire.

2. *Educational adjustment list for students (ATSS)*: This 60-item scale was developed by Singhet al. (1993) which measures three main areas of adjustment including emotional, social and educational adjustment. In addition, total score of educational adjustment is obtained from sum of these three scales, i.e. emotional, social and educational adjustment. Grading (scoring) each item is done by a two sided yes and no scale. Singhet al. (1999) reported the reliability range of this scale from 0.90 to 0.96 for subscales and total test using retest and half-splitting methods. Reisy (2011) in his study on students investigated reliability level of the questionnaire by calculating the correlation of each item with the score of each dimension. The results indicated appropriate reliability of this questionnaire.

3. *Difficulty scale in emotion regulation (DERS)*: This scale was developed by Gratz et al. (2004) using 36 items with a 5 degree Likert Scoring Scale. This scale evaluates six difficulties in emotion regulation. These difficulties included Non acceptance of Emotional Responses, Difficulties Engaging in Goal-Directed Behavior, Impulse Control Difficulties, lack of emotional awareness, limited access to emotion regulation strategies and lack of emotional clarity. Gratz et al. (2004) investigated structural reliability of this scale using factor analysis. The results of this analysis showed existence of these six factors. Moreover, the researchers reported satisfactory level of criterion and convergent reliability of this scale. In addition, the results of studying the reliability of this scale showed that Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.93 for total scale score of this scale; furthermore, it showed that Cronbach's alpha coefficient is over 0.80 for six sub-scales of this scale.

In Iran, Khanzadeh et al. (2012) studied factor structure and reliability features of this scale in a sample of students. The results of exploratory factor analysis of this scale showed that there are six factors [in this scale]. These results were in line with the results of Gratz et al. research (2004). In addition, these researchers reported appropriate criterion reliability of this scale by calculating the correlation coefficient of this scale with Beck Depression and Anxiety scale logs. Furthermore, in this study, the reliability of subscales of this scale ranged from 0.66 to 0.84 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Moreover, the reliability retest of these subscales after two weeks retesting ranged from 0.79 to 0.91. (Khanzadeh et al, 2012). Reisy (2011) also obtained acceptable level of this scale's reliability by calculating internal correlation of each item with relevant subscale scores. Besides, it was reported that the reliability of these subscales ranges from 0.60 to 0.70 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Reisy, 2011).

**Data Analysis Methods:** The present study attempted to investigate mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between family communication patterns and students' educational adaptability using structural equation modeling.

### RESULTS

Table 1 shows the correlation between research's variables. Descriptive statistics of these variables are also presented in this table. As the results of Table 1 shows, dialogue dimension of family communication pattern has no significant relationship with any of the difficulty components (factors) in emotion regulation while it has significant and positive relationship with all adaptability dimensions. In contrast, conformity

dimension of family communication patterns have positive relationship with difficulty components (factors) in emotion regulation while it has significant and negative relationship with educational adaptability dimensions.

To examine mediating role of difficulty factors in emotion regulation, first all possible paths between components (factors) of family communication patterns, difficulty in emotion regulation and educational adaptability were drawn in Amos software medium. After analysis, fit indexes and significance of the paths were studied. To evaluate fitness of the model, following indexes were used: chi-square ( $X^2$ ), the ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom ( $X^2/df$ ), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), root mean square residual (RMR), goodness of fit index (GFI), the index of goodness adaptive fitness (AGFI), normalized fit index (NFI), relative fit index (RFI) and credit- fit index (IFI). The fit indexes for initial model are presented in Table 2. As these indexes show, fitness of the model is poor. Therefore, according to modification indexes and elimination of insignificant pathways, the model was revised and modified. Revised model fit indexes are presented in Table 2.

Comparison of model's fit indexes before and after model modification shows that model modification leads to a significant increase in fitness level of the model.

Figure 1 shows significant paths in final model. In this model, conformity dimension is directly related to emotional adaptability. These two variables are also related to each other with mediation of difficulties in performing targeted behavior (task). Dialogue dimension is also directly related to emotional and educational adaptability. These two variables are also related to each other with mediation of limited access to emotion regulation strategies. In addition, dialogue dimension is directly related to social adaptability with mediation of limited access to emotion regulation strategies.

Emotional adaptability, social adaptability, educational adaptability, difficulties in performing targeted behavior (task), limited access to strategies, conformity, dialogue. Finally, to examine mediating role of difficulties components/factors in emotion regulation in the relationship between family communication patterns and educational adaptability, indirect paths significance was tested using bootstrap method in AMOS software. The results are shown in Table 3. The results of Table 3 show that the difficulties engaging in goal-directed behavior mediate the relationship between conversation and conformity dimensions and emotional adjustment. In addition, limited access to emotion regulation strategies mediates the relationship between conversation dimension and emotional, social and educational adjustment.

**Table 1.** Correlations between research's variables and their relevant descriptive statistics

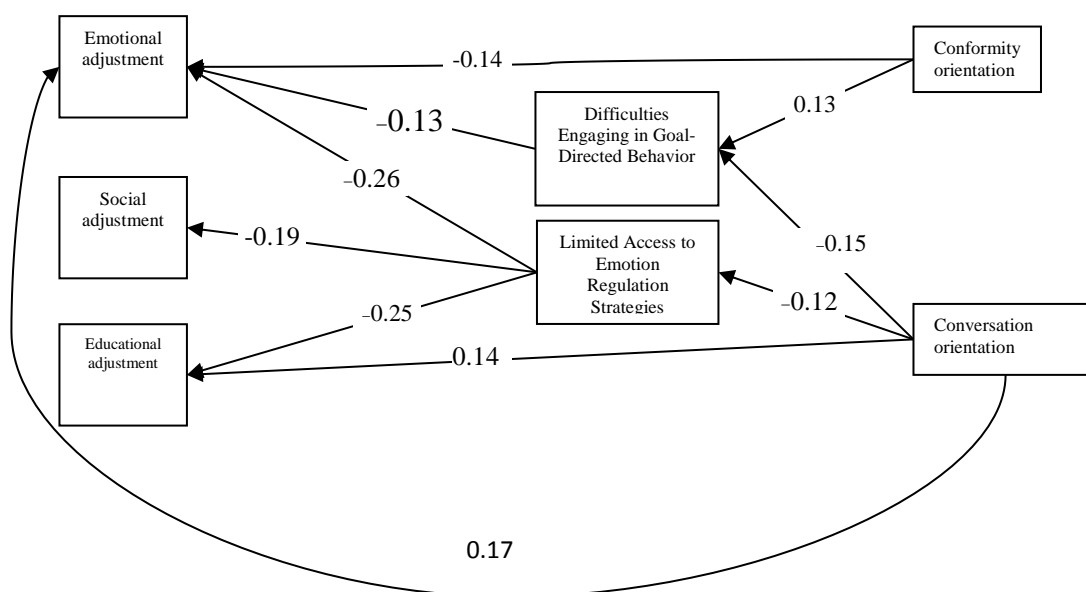
SD	M	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
9.17	33.14												1	
12.39	47.14												-0.05	2
5.46	18.67											0.028	0.03	3
4.35	13.04										0.33**	0.12*	0.07	4
4.70	14.53									0.41**	0.25**	0.15*	0.06	5
4.65	20.51							-0.09	-0.17**	-0.22**	0.06	-0.11	0.06	6
5.91	24.42						-0.17**	0.36**	0.43**	0.46**	0.14*	-0.05	0.03	7
3.68	15.91					0.35**	0.16**	0.25**	0.26**	0.30**	0.18**	0.03	0.03	8
3.60	6.86				-0.13*	-0.21**	0.01	-0.18**	0.01	-0.19**	-0.22**	0.18**	0.10	9
3.06	7.73				0.42**	-0.21**	-0.17**	0.00	0.047	-0.07	-0.11	-0.23**	0.10	10
3.82	7.89			0.24**	0.49**	-0.17**	-0.16*	-0.04	-0.14*	-0.01	-0.14*	-0.23**	0.08	11
8.06	22.49	0.78**	0.68**	0.83**	-0.22**	-0.23**	-0.01	-0.13*	-0.02	-0.20**	-0.30**	0.16*	0.16*	12

**Table 2.** Fit indexes for studying initial and final model fitness of the research

	X2	P	df	K2. df	GFI	AGFI	NFI	RFI	IFI	RMSEA	RMR	SRMR
<b>Initial model</b>	41.83	0.001	15	4.64	0.97	0.78	0.89	0.36	0.91	0.12	1.46	0.078
<b>Acceptance range</b>	---	P>0.05	---	<2	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	<0.05	---	< 0.05
<b>Final model</b>	63.23	0.001	14	1.68	0.98	0.93	0.91	0.77	0.96	0.047	0.51	0.039
<b>Acceptance range</b>	---	P>0.05	---	<2	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	P>0.05	---	<0.05

**Table 5.** The results of indirect paths bootstrap after model modification

Indirect paths	Standard coefficient $\beta$	Standard error S.E	Level of significance P	Confidence interval	
				Lower limit	Upper limit
Conformity to emotional adjustment through difficulties engaging in goal-directed behavior	0.05	0.02	P<0.05	0.01	0.1
Conversation to emotional adjustment through difficulties engaging in goal-directed behavior	-0.05	0.02	P<0.01	-0.01	-0.07
Conversation to social adjustment through limited access to emotion regulation strategies	-0.06	0.03	P<0.05	-0.01	-0.12
Conversation to emotional adjustment through limited access to emotion regulation strategies	-0.13	0.03	P<0.01	-0.19	-0.07
Conversation to educational adjustment through limited access to emotion regulation strategies	-0.06	0.02	P<0.02	-0.1	-0.03



**Figure 1.** Final model of mediating role of difficulties components (factors) in emotion regulation associated with the relationship between family communication patterns and students' educational adjustment

**DISCUSSION**

This study aimed to examine mediating role of difficulties in emotion regulation in the relationship between family communication patterns and educational adjustment. Research's findings in the area of the relationship between family communication patterns and educational adjustment showed that conversation orientation can positively predict educational adjustment dimensions while conformity orientation can negatively predict educational adjustment dimensions. These findings are in line with the results of several researches including: Roshanayi (2010), Rajabi, Chahar Doli, Atari (2005), FuladChang (2006), Latifian et al. (2005), and Haghighi et al. (2002). Haghighi et al. (2002) examined the relationship between family emotional climate and students' adaptability and found out that emotional relationships between parents and the children play an important role in the growth and adaptability

process of the students. According to this study, if love and frankness govern the family climate, the child will have the opportunity to express himself without any anxiety and fear of punishment. They can also defend their rights when it is required by adaptive behavior. Moreover, this kind of family climate will help them to have more adaptive behavior. In addition, these results can theoretically be justified with analysis of the structure of families with high [score in] conversation dimension. Because families with high conversation level are mainly characterized as warm families with intimate relationships and the freedom to express warm feelings and openly talk to each other (Fitzpatrick et al., 1994). Lopez stated that students who express sense of guilt and anger more freely when they are with their parents will have less difficulty in case of educational adjustment (Quoted from Stover, 2004). It seems that if there is adaptability as well as mutual understanding between children

and the parents, there will be adaptability, whether emotional, social or educational adjustment, outside family climate. In this way, students who were accepted by the parents (or children who had good mutual relationship with their parents) can better accept the environment outside family climate. Therefore they can adaptably interact with different individuals when they face various situations. On the other hand, conformity orientation - which reflects an emphasis on homogeneity of attitudes and beliefs, avoidance of conflict and dependency of family members on each other in family relationships - causes rejection of independence in adolescents. As a result, this orientation leads to adolescents' inadaptability (Coerner et al., 2004).

Besides, the results of this study in field of the relationship between family communication patterns and difficulties in emotion regulation showed that there is a direct relationship between conformity and conversation orientation and difficulties in emotion regulation. Therefore, if conformity increases, difficulties in students' emotion regulation will increase too. On the contrary, if conversation orientation increases, difficulties in emotion regulation will decrease. These findings are in line with the results of following researches: Joe, (2009), Duchesneet al., (2007), Salehi, Bagheban, Bahrami and Ahmadi (2011) and Basharat (2010).

Coerner et al. (2004) considered acceptance of children's emotion from the parents as one influential factor on development of children's emotion regulation. Families with low conversation [score] do not provide free environment for their children, so that each one of their children may freely express his opinions; furthermore, their children may not be able to express their emotions and talk about them. Thus, these children are not able to freely express their emotions in different situations. This will cause emotional problems for the children (Koerner et al., 2006).

Finally, findings of this research on mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between family communication patterns and educational adaptability showed that difficulties in emotion regulation can mediate the relationship between family communication patterns and educational adjustment. In this way, limitation factors in emotion regulation strategies and difficulties in difficulties engaging in goal-directed behavior mediate conversation and conformity dimensions in family communication patterns and educational adjustment dimensions. These findings are in line with following researches: Jan (2008), Sandra, (2008), Eisenberg et al. (2003), Contreras et al. (2000), Aminabad et al. (2011). In addition, Yan (2008) in his study found out that warm

family environment and punitive reactions of parents affect children's emotion regulation. On the other hand, children's emotion regulation method is an intermediary variable between parental warmth and children's external behavior in peer group.

According to research findings, if families have higher level of conversation dimension, the level of interactions between families increases. Since the children follow family patterns, if families appropriately deal with children's emotions and use appropriate strategies related to emotion regulation, then the children will learn to deal with their emotions as the way their parents dealt with them. On the other hand, when families accept their children's emotions and deal with them appropriately, this leads to the fact that children will be able to follow their goals in various situations without having any problem with their emotions; instead, they use their emotions in order to achieve their goals. Performing targeted behavior (task) and having emotion regulation strategies leads to the fact that children will have no problem in their adaptability with school environment which includes educational, administrative emotional and social issues.

When Families highly consider conformity as an important factor in their relationships; moreover, they have weak interactions, following situations will occur: children are not allowed to express their emotions, parents do not accept their children's emotions, and children will have difficulties in performing targeted behavior (task). This inability to pursue goals in emotional situations may lead to difficulties in emotional adaptability in educational context.

In total, these results suggest that family communication patterns - which affect emotion regulation - can influence educational adjustment. The results of several studies showed that warm and receptive parent have the kind of children that regulate their emotions adaptably (e.g. Davidovet al., 2006). These parents facilitate their children's adaptable emotion regulation through increasing environment predictability and supporting children when they face stressful life events/situations (Eisenberg et al., 2003).

This study has several theoretical and practical implications. For example, according to the impact of conformity orientation on difficulties in emotion regulation and positive impact of dialogue orientation on adaptable emotion regulation, this study can help parents to be aware of importance of communication patterns' role in the families and destructive effect of inefficient patterns on children's emotion regulation way and finally their inadaptability as high as possible. They can also be trained to select better strategies in this regard. These training can be provided by

educators, schools' counselors both in private and public ways. Public ways may include lectures in associations of parents and the teachers. In this way, parents no longer fear to give their children the freedom they should have. Moreover, parents are encouraged to make some changes in their inefficient communication patterns. In addition, these results can be used as a guide for school's educational counselors. Thus, parents can identify educational inadaptability in the students as well as familial and individual factors associated with educational adaptability and improve them. Thus, parents may participate in counseling sessions about family communication patterns more carefully.

Finally, the results of this study showed that the most important mediating factor in the relationship between family communication patterns and all educational adaptability dimensions of the students is limited access to emotion regulation strategies. This factor of difficulties in emotion regulation alone has a significant impact on three dimensions of educational adaptability. Then, it is proposed to teach students various emotion regulation strategies using above-mentioned methods. Thereby, it is possible to increase emotional, social and educational adaptability of the children by enriching their emotion regulation strategies resources.

Given the fact that this study was conducted at high school level, in order to validate presented model in this research and examine how family communication patterns and emotion regulation affect educational adaptability and how they are developed, it is suggested to conduct further researches on various age groups and educational levels. Since these studies were correlative and their validity depended on the time that the study was done, then it is necessary to repeat this research in various situations, including different age groups and educational levels, in the future.

The main limitation of this study was application of correlational design. Then, causal inferences should be cautiously driven from these results. Given these limitations, it is suggested that further research in this area use other research designs, except correlational designs, including causal-comparative, quasi-experimental and longitudinal designs.

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