

Does Family Functioning Matter More Than School Culture? Understanding Deeper Junior High School Student's Character Strength with Spirituality as mediator

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Abstract

Previous research has shown that character strength significantly impacts students' future success. This study examines the functioning of family and school culture as antecedents of character strength through spirituality as mediators. The research sample was 1871 junior high school students in Surabaya City consisting of 1010 female students and 861 male students selected by proportional cluster random sampling from five areas of Surabaya City. The research instruments used were the character strength scale of human dimension of *Values in Action Inventory for adolescents (VIA-Youth)*, spirituality scale of *Aspects of Spirituality Questionnaire (ASP) Version 2.1.*, family functioning scale of *Family Assessment Device (FAD)*, and school culture scale of *School Climate and School Identification Measure—Student (SCASIM-St)*. The study was conducted by testing research instruments using *confirmatory factor analysis* and model testing using *Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)* analysis. The results showed that the fit, family functioning had a more significant influence than school culture did in shaping student character strength in the human dimension and spirituality model proved to significantly mediate the functioning of family and school culture and the strength of student character on the human dimension. The implications of the study results are expected to accelerate the improvement of student character strength in the humanitarian dimension and become policy recommendations for human resource development that are ready to face various challenges.

Keywords: character, strength, student, family, school.

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Introduction

In recent years, the new field of positive psychology has refocused scientific attention on character strength. It is seen as one of the pillars that support the formation of an extraordinary life (Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The theory of *character strengths* comes from two leading psychologists in the field of positive psychology, Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005; Ferragut et al., 2014a; Kor et al., 2019a; Ngai, 2015; Proctor et al., 2011; Raimundi et al., 2019a; Ros-Morente et al., 2018; Ruch et al., 2014; Wagner & Ruch, 2015; Weber et al., 2013). The strength of character in humans acts like a shield against all mental illnesses (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Character strength is a positive trait reflected on the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral levels. Character strengths, like personality, tend to be stable at all times (Gander, Fabian; Hofmann, Jennifer; Proyer, René T; Ruch, 2019). Several studies have shown that character strength has an impact on life satisfaction, *subjective well-being*, academic success, peer acceptance, positive emotions, prosocial attitudes, and friendship quality (Kor et al., 2019; Proctor et al., 2011; Wagner, 2019; Wagner & Ruch, 2015). The strength of character not only has a significant impact on the younger generation but also on the development of the nation. Character strength is the capital of world recovery in the face of COVID-19 (Subhashini, 2020).

One of the dimensions of character strength is the dimension of *humanity*, such as love, kindness, and social intelligence. Character strength with human dimension has the highest correlation with other character strength dimensions on life satisfaction and positive behavior (Martínez-Martí & Ruch, 2014; Ros-Morente et al., 2018; Ruch et al., 2014). Famous students in school show a link with the strength of character contained in the dimension of *humanity* (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Longitudinal research (Ferragut et al., 2014) shows the strength of the character of the human dimension (*humanity*) to be the most dominant in adolescent boys and girls.

The character strength in students grows well because of support from internal and external factors (Niemic, 2018). The theory of *Social Cognitive Learning* explains character strength and that a person learns behavior through observation and direct relationships with others around him (Miller, 2011;

Narvaez, 2008). The strength of character formed from the environment usually starts from the closest environment, such as family, school, and the surrounding community, which fosters the construction and expression of positive traits in students (Park, 2004). Student development grows from the environment in which they are located such as the home environment (Darling, 2007; Glassman & Hadad, 2009). Home environments such as family functioning are highly correlated with the strength of student character, especially in adolescence (Raimundi et al., 2019). The closeness of parents and children is the basis of good behavior and prevents morally destructive behavior in life (Cahyono & Julom, 2015; Jiménez, 2009; Qudsyi et al., 2019).

Student character strength is also shaped by the school environment through school culture. School culture can shape character behavior (Nashihin, 2018). School culture is modeling in school that students need to impact their character to prepare for a good future (Aristhotles, 2002; Denbow, 2004; Silvera, 2017). Other studies have also corroborated that the message schools send by presenting direct examples becomes a hidden curriculum for student success (Brockbank, A., & McGill, I, 2003).

Internal factors to encourage human behavior in a person usually arise because there is an inner tendency or belief in something good. The belief in goodness is one manifestation of spirituality. Spirituality not only grows in places of worship but can also grow in various places, such as family and school environments. It will be impactful in a suitable environment (Lee & Huang, 2021). Spirituality in the development of students at adolescence has a level of stability (Kor, 2017). A study (Benson et al., 2012) showed that spirituality significantly impacts life among humans, such as the character of altruism and generosity. However, only a few articles discuss the development of spirituality in students.

This study focuses on character strength with a human dimension that builds relationships between humans and characters of love, kindness, and social intelligence. Previous research examined one of the internal or external factors in building character strength and found a combination of internal and external factors. This study aims to build a model of student character strength in the human dimension in terms of family functioning and school culture with spirituality as a mediator.

Literature Review

Family Functioning and Character Strengths

Student development is influenced by the environment in which they are located, such as the family environment (Darling, 2007; Glassman & Hadad, 2009). The family has a character-building role. The family is a system that mutually supports survival and well-being (Thoburn & Sexton, 2016). Family functioning is described by how interactions among family members impact physical and emotional health by carrying out everyday tasks (Epstein et al., 2003; Miller et al., 2000).

Dynamics in the family functioning has a significant role in students, especially those entering their teens. Previous research has used more family functioning to address juvenile delinquency problems, and not much has focused on character strengths as a positive part of adolescents (Masykur & Kustanti, 2019; Saputra, 2017; Shek, D.T.L, 2010). Family functioning is essential because it involves problem-solving, communication, roles, affective response, affective involvement, and reasonable behavior control (Epstein et al., 2003; Miller et al., 2000). Family functioning has a higher correlation score in forming character than parental bonding, parenting style, and socialization of family values (Raimundi et al., 2016; Ngai, 2015; Pasaribu et al., 2013).

School Culture and Character Strengths

School culture shapes behavior and relationships and influences how people think, feel, and act (Deal & Peterson, 2009). Environmental factors have a significant role in changes in student behavior. The formation and engineering of the environment in schools include the physical environment, school culture, school management, curriculum, educators, teaching methods, life experiences, and school activities such as focus groups (Steen et al., 2003). School culture has a significant correlation value in shaping student character, including Marini's research (2018) which shows $r = .71$.

School culture as a social aspect of the learning environment illustrates the interaction between Student-student relationships, Student-staff relationships, Academic emphasis, Shared values , approach, and School identification (Moos, 2002). School culture can shape character behavior (Nashihin, 2018). Previous research by Denbow (2004) and Silvera (2017) found that school culture is modeling in schools that students need to impact character to prepare for a promising future.

McGill (2001) also confirms that the message sent by schools by showing direct examples is a hidden curriculum for student success.

Spirituality and Character Strengths

A good environment will make spirituality more robust (Huang, Y., & Zhao, N., 2020). Spirituality has a level of stability in the development of adolescent students (Kor, 2017). Spirituality as an intrinsic part is very relevant to study in all people regardless of age group, religious affiliation, and many social, demographic, and cultural (Ja Doe, 2010). Research shows longitudinal evidence of spirituality related to positive outcomes in students, including positive emotions, life satisfaction, prosociality, and strength of character such as gratitude, kindness, honesty, perseverance, hope, and caution, as well as the lowest level of problems with peers (Kor et al., 2019).

Students with a high spiritual attitude are shown by asking for protection through prayer, finding awareness and wisdom through inspiration, believing in the existence of God, the creator of the universe, feeling compassion for others, realizing the importance of the quality of interactions and relationships with others, having gratitude and being calm about everything that is given by God (Bussing et al., 2007). Only a little research has linked spirituality with character strength using Peterson and Seligman's theory. Previous research has only found two journals that discuss spirituality and character strength theory from Peterson and Seligman (Kor et al., 2019; Kor, 2017).

Method

Design

This study used a quantitative approach to test all exogenous variables against endogenous variables. The variables in this study were character strengths as the dependent variable, family functioning as an independent variable, school culture as the independent variable, and spirituality as the mediator. Data collection was done by using an online questionnaire.

Participants

The population used in this study is junior high school students in Surabaya. The sample in this study

was 1871 students consisting of 1010 female students and 861 male students. The sample was obtained using a *proportional cluster random sampling* technique, where researchers divided the population of Surabaya City into five regions: West Surabaya, North Surabaya, South Surabaya, East Surabaya, and Central Surabaya then in each region was taken proportionally by 50%.

Measurement

Data collection of character strengths using the *Values in Action (VIA) Youth* scale with a humanitarian dimension. This scale is for ages 10-17 years. *VIA Youth* consists of 12 items using a *Likert* scale of five points (from very appropriate to very inappropriate). *VIA youth* has a Cronbach alpha score of .72 to .91 (Park and Peterson, 2006).

Family functioning using a *Family Assessment Device (FAD)* scale with 53 items. Internal Consistency and FAD reliability tests are *General Functioning (GF)* internal consistency of .80 and test-retest Reliability of .84, *Problem-Solving (PS)* Internal Consistency of .72 and test-retest reliability of .79, *Communication (CM)* Internal Consistency of 0.64 and *test-retest reliability* .76, *Roles (RL)* Internal Consistency .61 and test-retest reliability .62, *Affective Involvement (AI)* Internal Consistency .84 and test-retest reliability .71, *Affective Responsiveness (AR)* Internal Consistency .77 and test-retest reliability .74, *Behavioral Control (BC)* Internal Consistency .82 and *test-retest reliability* .61, (Turliuc, 2016).

School culture using *the School Climate and School Identification Measure—Student (SCASIM-St)* with 38 items. The internal consistency of Reliability was .94 for School identification, .96 for Student-Student Relations, .97 for Student-Staff Relations, 0.93 for Academic emphasis, and .93 for Shared Value Factors and Approaches. The convergent validity of SCASIM-St is obtained from medium to high coefficients. (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2012; Johnson et al., 1985).

Spirituality using the ASP spirituality scale. The spirituality scale is an adaptation of the *Aspects of Spirituality Questionnaire (ASP) Version 2.1* scale. From Bussing et al. (2007). A reliability score of .908, consisting of 25 questions with excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .94) and details (1) Religious orientation: Prayer/ Trust in God (9 items; alpha = .93); (2). Search for Insight/Wisdom (7

items; $\alpha = .88$; philosophical); (3). Conscious interactions (5 items; $\alpha = .83$); (4). Transcendence conviction (4 items; $\alpha = .85$).

Procedure

The researcher has made an instrument in four different Google link forms: the character strength scale, the spirituality scale, the family functioning scale, and the school culture scale. The researcher asked permission from the school to collect data on students in grades 7 and 8 with 1 class each. Schools allow offline data collection because face-to-face learning (PTM) has started. After obtaining permission from the school according to a predetermined date, the researcher then guides students in class in filling out 4 Google forms until they are finished with student gadgets and school WIFI. Students who do not bring gadgets still fill in the printed scale. Based on the results of 4 Google forms filled in by students, 1871 respondent data were collected

Data Analysis

Hypothesis testing uses *Structural Equation Modeling* (SEM) analysis techniques based on the consideration that SEM can combine *measurement* and *structural models* simultaneously using AMOS 4.

Ethical Clearance

The research carried out went through several licensing processes. first from Ubaya research ethics committee Number 31/KE/III/2022, second from Ubaya Psychology Doctoral Study Program Number 030/UL/GEN/D/III/2022 and third from DISPENDIK Surabaya City Number 070/9110/436.7.1/2022. Data in the google form including informed consent and personal identity.

Result

Description of Respondent Characteristics

The characteristics of male respondents are 46%, and female respondents 54%. The highest age was 14 at 47.3% and 13 years old at 37%. Family members of students at home are dominated by the nuclear family (father, mother, brother) by 58.9% and extended family (grandparents/om/aunts) by

parents by 2.4.6%.

Table 1
Research Respondent Characteristics

Demographic	Description	Sum	Percentage
Profile			
Gender	Woman	1010	54 %
	Man	861	46 %
Age	12 years	74	4%
	13 years old	693	37%
	14 years old	884	47,3%
	15 years	213	11,4%
	16 years old	7	0,3%
Member	The nuclear family (father, mother, brother)	1101	58,9%
Family	A large family with ortu	460	24,6%
	Large family without parents	42	2,2%
	Fatherless family	200	10,7%
	Motherless family	68	3,6%

Description of Research Variable Data

The strength of the character of the human dimension can be seen from the dominant love indicator in the medium category of 64.1%, the dominant kindness indicator in the medium category of 74.2%, and the dominant social intelligence indicator in the medium category of 70.2%.

Table 2

Frequency distribution of three indicators of character strength of students of the humanitarian dimension

Category	Love indicators		Indicators of kindness		Social intelligence indicators	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Very Low	0	0	0	0	0	0
Low	16	0,9	106	5,7	25	1,3
Keep	1200	64,1	1388	74,2	1313	70,2
Tall	655	35	377	20,1	533	28,5
Very High	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1871	100	1871	100	1871	100

Test the Student Character Strength Model regarding Spirituality, Family Functioning, and School Culture

The structural equation model analyzed in this study is to determine the functioning of schools and school culture as antecedents to student character strength through spirituality as a mediator. Based on SEM analysis's structural tests, results were obtained according to *Goodness of Fit* (Gozali, 2014; Hair et al., 2014). The results of the structural test of the model are shown by the values included in the *Cutoff Value/cutoff fit*, namely RMSEA values .094 ($\geq .08$), GFI .842 ($GFI \leq .9$), TLI .805 ($TLI \leq .9$), and CFI .833 ($CFI \leq .9$).

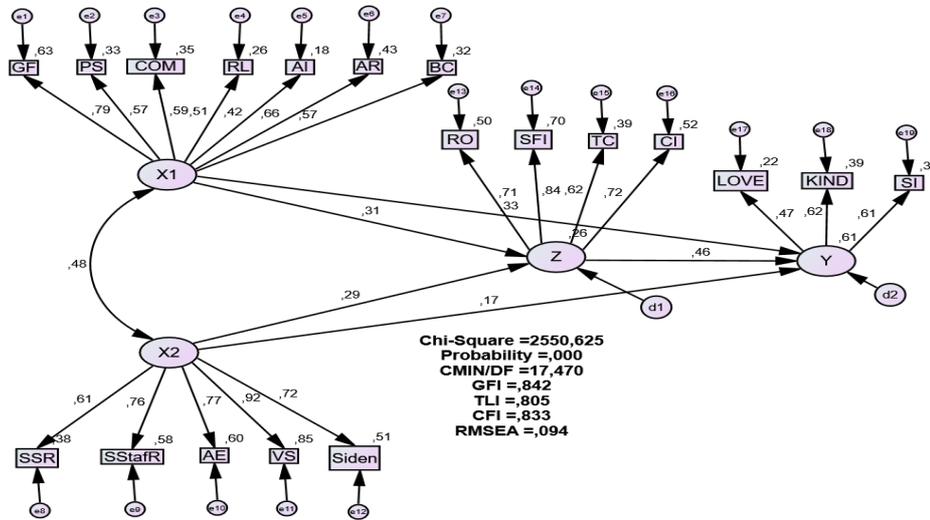


Figure 1. SEM Test Results

Note : X1 : Family functioning, X2 : School culture, Z : Spirituality, Y : Character strength

Based on the results obtained, it can be concluded that GFI, TLI, CFI, RMSEA is included in cutoff value/cutoff fit category but still indicating goodness of fit. The major hypothesis in the study was declared acceptable. The research model fit because each independent variable could contribute individually to form character strength, and mediator variables also contributed to forming the character strength of the human dimension. Complete goodness of fit fulfillment information is presented in the following table.

Table 3
SEM Test Results Based on Goodness of Fit

Goodness of Fit	Acceptable Value	Criterion	Model Test Results	Result description
The Goodness of Fit Index	GFI \geq .9	Good Fit	.842	Cutoff Value
	GFI \leq .9	Cutoff Value		
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)	RMSEA \leq .08	Good Fit	.094	Cutoff Value
	RMSEA \geq .08	Cutoff Value		
TLI (Turker Lewis Index)	TLI \geq .95	Good Fit	.805	Cutoff Fit
	.90 \leq TLI < .95	Acceptable Fit		
	TLI \leq .90	Cutoff Fit		
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	CFI \geq .95	Good Fit	.833	Cutoff Fit
	.90 \leq CFI < .95	Acceptable Fit		
	CFI \leq .90	Cutoff Fit		

Results of the Minor Research Hypothesis Test

The correlation coefficient of 0.327 between family functioning and the character strength of the human dimension was known to exhibit a more significant influence than that between school culture and the strength of the character of the human dimension, which was 0.171. Meanwhile, spirituality and the character strength of the human dimension had a significant correlation coefficient of 0.464. A summary of test results is presented in the following table:

Table 4
Minor Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis minor	Estimate	P <.05	Conclusion
there is a positive influence of family functioning on student's character strength in dimension of humanity	.327	.000	Accepted
there is a positive influence of family functioning on student's character strength in dimension of humanity	.171	.000	Accepted
there is a positive influence of spirituality on student's character strength in dimension of humanity	.464	.000	Accepted
there is a positive influence of family functioning on spirituality	.306	.000	Accepted
There is a positive influence of school culture on Spirituality	.287	.000	Accepted
there is an influence of family functioning on The student character strength in dimensions humanity with spirituality as mediator	.142	.000	Accepted
there is an influence of school culture on the strengthening of student character in the dimension humanity with spirituality as mediator	0,133	0,000	Accepted

The next step was to do a post-hoc analysis of mediation using bootstrapping method to examine whether the association between predictor and outcome was significantly reduced when the mediator was introduced into the model. According to Holmbeck (2002), post-hoc analysis of mediation is crucial to avoid making false conclusions about the relationship between variables. The criterion "descends to non-significance" can lead to incorrect conclusions about the data. False negatives and positives can result from this strategy, which assumes that there is mediation when the A-C relationship falls from significant to non-significant with the addition of a mediator. The result of Post hoc analysis using bootstrap method between family functioning and character strengths showed spirituality had significant mediation effect with lower bound = .112, and upper bound = .209, with $p = .001$

Table 5

Summary of Post hoc analysis using bootstrap method between family functioning and character strengths

	Lower-bounds family functioning	Upper-bounds family functioning	Two-tailed Sig
Character strengths	.112	.209	.001

Note. Significantly greater ($p < .05$) * $p < .01$

The result of Post hoc analysis using bootstrap method between school culture and character strengths showed spirituality had significant mediation effect with lower bound = .078, and upper bound = .183, with $p = .032$

Table 6

Summary of Post hoc analysis using bootstrap method between school culture and character strengths

	Lower-bounds school culture	Upper-bounds school culture	Two-tailed Sig
Character strengths	.078	.183	.032

Note. Significantly greater ($p < .05$) * $p < .01$

Discussion

The results showed that the student character strength was formed by *nurture* effect and *nature* effect. In line with cognitive and social theory, Bandura explained that environmental factors, as models or figures, play an important role in setting social and moral behavior examples. The stronger the role of a model or character is in student life, the stronger the motivation to imitate the model or the character becomes (Muali & Naily Rohmatika, 2019). Family is student's immediate environment, so what they observe in their family becomes a powerful learning in shaping behavior. Students can behave exactly as the family teaches or by behavioral adaptations according to their internal factors. Based on the results of the study, family functioning had a more significant influence than school culture did in shaping the strength of student character in the human dimension. Family influence is significant because family is the closest space for teenagers to get to know themselves. Family is the

initial window to build a *world view* for teenagers since childhood. Interactions within the family have the most extended period compared to those in other places. The ideal family will be a role model for teenagers in behaving both with family members and with people other than family members. Teenagers learn many things at home. Family interaction teaches them to communicate, manage emotions, maintain relationships, and control attitudes. Teenagers who are well-educated in the family often become polite and helpful, communicate well, and maintain an attitude to avoid hurting others.

Adolescence is a critical and conflict-prone period. Entering adolescence, the closeness between children and parents often decreases. Adolescents' need to socialize and build relationships with others is increasing, and it is easy for misunderstandings to arise between adolescents and parents. The results showed that the family played a significant role in shaping human behavior in adolescence. Families must create comfortable interactions to ensure physical and emotional health for all family members.

Family is the closest environment for teenagers to share their grievances and needs. The family will still be able to function if there is good interaction between family members in doing tasks to maintain the growth and welfare of each member (Walsh, 2003). Family functioning refers to how all family members can communicate with each other, work together, and help each other, which influences the physical and emotional health of family members (Epstein-Lubow et al., 2009).

Adolescents who begin to stabilize in character growth (Ferragut et al., 2014) will more easily understand role models in the family to behave according to norms prosocially and avoid antisocial behavior. Families that instill positive values will further improve self-control skills of adolescents over deviant behavior (Witten et al., 2019). Good functioning of a family is reflected in the closeness between each family member, the emotional bond between family members, comfort to tell complaints in daily life, joint solutions to problems faced together, care and attention to the difficulties of each family member, and opportunities to express opinions to each other. This behavior in the family will indirectly establish feelings of love, affection, and care in each family member.

The results showed that family interaction that significantly influenced students' good behavior was *affective responsiveness*, which is the ability of family members to respond with appropriate emotions to various situational contexts that may occur in family life. Students in adolescence experience many things that are often not as expected. Students will quickly feel angry, agitated, disappointed, and offended. Every family member who can respond appropriately to each student's needs will make the student feel loved, cherished, and cared for. Affective responsiveness from family provides much positive energy for people to establish good behavior in themselves. Students will more easily show similar kindness behavior to themselves and others.

Giving a positive response to a child's protest and anger is one of the challenges that are cognitively and emotionally draining in parenting, especially if the child shows distaste for the parent. However, the study results showed that parents who can respond positively to various situations of a child's sadness will generate positive energy in children, strengthen relationships with children, and produce good emotional management and regulation in children (Ziv et al., 2020).

Schools are often referred to as second homes for students. Schools have social patterns of the learning environment, such as interactions and relationships of school members, shared values and norms, and the development and growth of school members, commonly referred to as school culture (Moos, 2002). School culture is modeling in school that students need in order to impact their character to prepare for a promising future (Denbow, 2004; Silvera, 2017). While at school, students are fond of making friends with their peers and are relatively easier to engage in group activities. Students in adolescence are pleased to form like-minded groups for joint activities so that they will highly anticipate the presence of friends to find excitement in doing each activity.

The influence of school culture is essential in shaping the character strength of adolescent. The results showed the role of school culture in *shared values and approaches*, namely, togetherness in maintaining the school system, had a high score in building good behavior. Suitable school activities are reflected in the existence of a well-regulated school program, vision and mission statements, and values that students and the entire school community can well understand. It is also manifested in students and staff who get good acceptance from the entire school community and uphold school values, clear and

mutually understood school rules, and the entire school community together achieving expected school goals. Shared values and approaches make student behavior well monitored and immediately get proper handling if there is a potential deviation so that good behavior will always be maintained by the entire school community.

Internal factors in students play an essential role in the perceptual acuity of understanding *rewards* or *punishments* related to right or wrong behavior of the model imitated. Internal processes within themselves make students decide which behavior to demonstrate (Laila, 2015). The ability to understand right and wrong in behavior is related to the natural spirituality in humans with senses of need and seeking meaning in life.

The high correlation coefficient in this research model was shown by the internal factor of adolescents, which was the influence of spirituality as a mediator on the strength of student character in the human dimension. Another research (Kor, 2017) explained that adolescents have a stable intrinsic part in self-development, namely spirituality, so the development of spirituality among adolescents becomes essential in character strength.

Conclusion

A good family and school will open the space of awareness for adolescent students to interpret life and faith. Students' character strength is formed from the learning process in families and schools that use awareness of meaningful values of self, others, nature, life, and relationships with God. The results showed that adolescents' most significant part of spirituality was *seeking insight* or *wisdom*. Spirituality will grow well in a good environment. Students in adolescence become increasingly curious about all of God's creations. Students will try to find simple meanings and be wiser according to their abilities.

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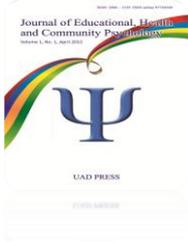
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