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The relationship between gender, perception of classroom structure, achievement goals, perceived instrumentality and academic achievement in English course third grad middle school students (English as second language)

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Abstract

The present study wants to answer the question how much cognitive- motivational factors is related to the development course in English (English as second language). This study focuses on the relationship between gender, perception of classroom structure, achievement goals, perceived instrumentality and achievement in English course. In doing so, 336 third grade middle school students from area 12 of Tehran have been selected through a multi-stage sampling. For data analysis of descriptive statistics and to answer the questions from being used hierarchical regression analysis also for finding two gender differences was used analysis of variance (ANOVA) and T-tests. Academic achievement of the students was assessed and valued through the final exam grades. Results of using hierarchical regression showed that variables perception of classroom structure, achievement goals, perceived instrumentality can predict 17.1% changes in academic achievement. The results show gender differences in perception of classroom structure and performance avoidance goals showed that girls earn higher grades than boys, but there is no difference between the other variables in boys and girls. These founds can be concluded that academic achievement in English is not depend on gender variable and variables perception of classroom structure, achievement goals and perceived instrumentality are the important roles in the academic Achievement in English language.

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Keywords: perception of classroom structure, achievement goals, perceived instrumentality and academic achievement in English language

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1. Introduction

Academic achievement is a complicated phenomenon. A lot of psychologists and instructional experts have carried out a number of researches and surveys on some factors and variables that affect academic achievement. Currently, investigation are focused on the interaction of motivational and cognitive factors. In order to determine the relationships between motivational and cognitive factor, social-cognitive approach has been taken into account, which examines action determinators in terms of motivational and cognitive factors. Among these social-cognitive variables are variables of perception of classroom structure, achievement goals and perceived instrumentality. The aim of the present study is to examine the so-called cognitive-motivational variables associated with academic achievement in English as a second language. As we know our global society consists of nations who speak in different languages and have chosen English as their second language. In our country (Iran) teaching English as second language begins at middle school (secondary school) in educational system and most students’ first exposure to this language takes effect in this age. Also, the results of studies on learning second language by children at different ages show that older children (11-15 year-old) are substantially faster in learning second language than younger children (Fathman, 1975). Hence, a number of factors contribute to English (second language) achievement, including: 1- First language talent (Saville-Troike, 1984 and Hakuta, 1990 quoted from Lewelling 1991). 2- Age (snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle, 1997; Collier 1989; quoted from Lewelling 1991; Collier 1987-1988). 3- Academic achievement with out pause (collier and Thomas, 1989; quoted from Lewelling, 1991) and personal differences (Oxford, 1989; quoted from Lewelling,1991) but no significance importance has been put on cognitive-motivational factors, although the mentioned factors that have a relation ship with academic achievement (Green etal., 2004; Naqsh 2006).

As for a lot of studies done inside and outside Iran which examined the relationships of these factors to academic achievement in high-school mathematics, there is no study on the relationship of these variable to other subjects. Although the importance of transaction from elementary to secondary school has been the subject of a number of studies, there are just few ones on the relationships of cognitive-motivational variables to secondary school. Hence, regarding the importance of teaching English as second language in secondary school in our country its part in employment and acceleration in latest technologies one may suppose that as well as the factors mentioned earlier, cognitive-motivational factors (perception of classroom structure, perceived instrumentality, and achievement goals). Have a great impact on academic achievement in English as a second language. According to Ames’s theory (1992) the structure of a class is a context in which learning takes place and it develops a set of assignments, the way of valuation and some information about valuable traits of students, and how their relationships with each other and with their teacher and their assignments are. In this process, he examined the class structure according some factors including: motivation tasks (the level to which the students see the assignments relative and interesting), autonomy support (the level to which the students think that their teacher supports their autonomy by selection and encouraging them to be responsible), and mastery valuation (the level to which the students think that valuation and cognitive performance in the classroom, and also, how learning and competition are emphasized in the classroom, is proper).

Results of numerous studies on perceptions of class structures indicate that perception of classroom structure will lead to various goals (Ames, 1992). Achievement goals is one of the other important factors affecting students’ academic achievement. The achievement goals theory is in a cognitive-social scope which has been one of the most prominent motivational theories existing in past 25 years. (Anderman and Wolters, 2006; Pintrich, 2000). Achievement goals theory has also a focus on students' reasons and aims for involving, selecting and continuing different learning activities (Meece, Anderman & Anderman,2006).

Early investigations on achievement goals haven concentrated on two types of learning and performance orientations (Dweck & Leggett, 1988 and Urdan, 1997 quoted from Tapola & Nimivirta, 2008). Students
concentration along with their goal for learning how to comprehend, is to get information and to improve their competence. Students focus on demonstration of their skills with goal orientation and on others’ confirmation by doing their best is a little slight (Tapola & Nimivirta, 2008). Elliot et al. (1999) suggested another kind of goal orientation as avoidance-performance orientation as well as proficiency and approach-performance goals. The main goal in this kind of goal orientation the most important concern of the students is hiding their relative incompetence. Also, Nicols et al. (1985). Believe that students with avoidance orientation have a passive attitude toward learning and do thing that need less work. Achievement goals have a relationship with perceived instrumentality, i.e. the level of students’ giving importance to classroom tasks in reaching their personal goals. (Miller & Brickman, 2004). Perceived instrumentality is one of the motivational variables affecting achievement goals and has an intermediate contribution between perception of classroom structure and academic achievement. Most studies, however, have investigated affective factors on academic achievement of both sexes including Connell & Gunzellman (2004), Yanger & Warrington (2005) and Smith & Wilhelm (2002) investigations, which examined both sexes according to their brain differences, learning styles, and application of instructional strategies and attitude and achievement, respectively. Perception of classroom structure has an impact on adopting achievement goals and, in turn, achievement goals adoption has a direct impact on achievement goals and intrinsic motivation (Church, Elliot and Gable, 2001). Debaker et al. (2004), suggest direct impacts of perception of classroom structure on variables of achievement goals and perceived instrumentality and their indirect impacts on academic achievement. Elliot & Dweck (1988) also showed that when the criterion is normative valuation, children seek performance goals, conversely, when skills become important, they select those learning goals which maximizes learning. Naqsh (2006) suggested that the direct impact of motivational tasks on proficiency goals and the direct impact of autonomy support on perceived instrumentality was significant.

Result of Elliot (1999) & Simon et al.’s (2000) investigations show that perceived instrumentality is an effective factor of achievement goals. Also, other investigations (Devolder & Lens, 1982; Miller et al., 1996; Raynor & Entin, 1982; Vancalster, Lens & Nuttin, 1987) suggest that instrumentality predicts academic achievement positively. Some researchers have examined relationships of achievement goals to academic achievement. As an example, studies have indicated that proficiency goals have a positive and significant relationship with academic achievement. (Church, Elliot & Gable, 2001; Elliot & Church, 1996).

Also, results of some studies show that approach-performance goals positively (Elliot & Mc.Gregore, 2001; Harakowich et al., 1997 & 2000) and avoidance-performance goals negatively (Elliot & Mc.Gregore, 1999; Church, Elliot & Gable, 2001; Elliot & Church 1997) have relationships with academic achievement. On the other hand some studies on the relationships of achievement goals to academic achievement have shown findings contradictory to the above results. As an example results of investigations (Harakowich et al. 2000 & 1999 and Elliot & Mc.Gregore, 2001) did not confirm a significant relationship between proficiency goals and academic achievement. Also, Walter et al., 1996 and Pintrich (2000) investigations rejected any significant relationships between approach-performance goals and academic achievement. In this study sex, as a modifier, was examined. However, very few investigations have been carried out on sex and cognitive-motivational variable and one can point out some studies that have examined relationships of achievement and sexual differences. Studies done by Spinath, Stiensmeier-Pelster, Schone & Dikhauser (2002, quoted from Freuden-Thaler, 2008) show that girls had higher scores in avoidance-performance goals. Also, Pekrun, Elliot & Maier (2006) reported that girls choose learning goals more.

Freudenthaler, Spinath and Neubauer (2008) have shown that boys get higher scores than girls in avoidance-performance goal orientation and approach-performance. Therefore the present study seeks to examine contribution of each cognitive-motivational variables and differences between two groups of male and female students and these variables in academic achievement in English (as a second language) by hierarchical regression analysis, regarding the importance of these variables in previous studies.
2. Methodology

2.1. Design
The method adopted in the present study is a descriptive non-experiment. Since the aim of this study is to predict changes in variable (criterion) in terms of changes in independent (predictor) variables, hierarchical regression analysis was used. Thus, in this study, variables have been analysed based on the construction of research plans, their relationship in previous studies and based on theoretical and empirical framework.

2.2. Population and Sampling
The population of the present study is all 3rd grade secondary-school students of secondary schools of Region 12 in Tehran.

2.3. Instruments
After that the individuals were selected through multi-stage sampling. In this method regarding the sample size some of the schools were first chosen randomly and then from each school one or two classes were examined as a sample. The following was explained prior to questionnaires distribution and responding:
- Clarifying the objectives to the participants.
- Free responding to the questionnaire.
- Noticing participants' secrecy of information.
- Presenting research results to the school.

The questionnaire was distributed randomly in each class. And then Blackburn questionnaire (1998) was used to measure perception of class structure, which has three subscales of motivational tasks, autonomy support, and the scale of proficiency valuation. Motivational task scale is measured by 15 buoys and autonomy support scale is measured by 8 buoys and proficiency valuation scale is measured by 12 buoys. In order to determine the validity of the questionnaire, Cronbach alpha coefficient was used. Cronbach alpha coefficient was reported 0.85 for motivational tasks, 0.65 for autonomy support, and 0.80 for proficiency valuation by Blackburn (1998). Naqsh (2006) has calculated Cronbach alpha as 0.71, 0.68 and 0.68 for subscales of motivational tasks, autonomy support, and proficiency valuation.

In present study this coefficient was 0.82, 0.72, and 0.72 for subscales of motivational tasks, autonomy support and proficiency valuation, respectively.

In order to measure the scale of perceived instrumentality Miller et al (1996) questionnaire was used, which measures the level of instrumentality of English (as a second language) has 6 buoys and students have to show their opinions about each expression choosing one of the five items from absolutely wrong to absolutely right. Cronbach alpha method was used to evaluate the validity of the questionnaire. Miller et al (1996) have reported Cronbach alpha as 0.9 for perceived instrumentality. In present study Cronbach alpha was 0.8.

To measure achievement goals, subscales of achievement goals revised from patterns of adaptive learning (Midgley et al, 2000) was used. Subscales of proficiency goals with five buoys, subscales of approach-performance goals with five buoys and subscales of avoidance-performance goals with four buoys are evaluated. Cronbach alpha was used to ensure the scales's validity. Cronbach alpha coefficient reported by Midgley et al (2000) was 0.86, 0.86 and 0.75 for proficiency, approach-performance, and avoidance-performance goals, respectively. In this study Cronbach alpha was 0.77 for proficiency goals, 0.81 for approach-performance goals, and 0.67 for avoidance-performance goals.

In order to examine the validity of class structure, perceived instrumentality and achievement goals constructs, conformational factor analysis was used. Results indicated that all questions about above variables have an important and significant contribution to measurement of factors of perception of class structure, perceived instrumentality, and achievement goals.

Also, in order to evaluate achievement in English (as a second language), final scorer (as final exams are all the same for all 12 regions) were used.
3. Research Findings
In order to examine the relationships of perception of class structure, perceived instrumentality and achievement goals to academic achievement in English (as a second language) and analysis of inferred data, descriptive indices (mean and standard deviation) of research variables are presented:

Table 1. Descriptive indices of research variables.

| Variables                           | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-------------------------------------|------|----------------|
| Motivation Tasks                    | 44/17| 9/41           |
| Mastery Valuation                   | 37/49| 7/38           |
| Autonomy Support                    | 24/83| 6/04           |
| Performance Avoidance Goals         | 17/01| 3              |
| Mastery Goals                       | 21/46| 3/44           |
| Performance Approach Goals          | 19/77| 4/24           |
| Perceived instrumentality           | 25/43| 5/18           |
| Academic Achievement                | 14/89| 4/16           |

Table 2. Correlation matrix of research variables.

| Variables                          | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | 6    | 7    | 8    | 9    |
|------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Motivation Tasks                   |      | 1    |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Mastery Valuation                  | 0/69**|      | 1    |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Autonomy Support                   | 0/77**| 0/67**|      | 1    |      |      |      |      |      |
| Performance Avoidance Goals        | 0/32**| 0/28**| 0/27**|      | 1    |      |      |      |      |
| Mastery Goals                      | 0/40**| 0/37**| 0/35**| 0/57**|      | 1    |      |      |      |
| Performance Approach Goals         | 0/28**| 0/27**| 0/26**| 0/71**| 0/54**|      | 1    |      |      |
| Perceived instrumentality          | 0/31**| 0/27**| 0/32**| 0/37**| 0/59**| 0/34**|      | 1    |      |
| Academic Achievement               | -0/15**| -0/03| -0/21**| -0/09| 0/18**| 0/13**| 0/15**|      | 1    |
| Gender                             | 0/13**| 0/23**| 0/26**| 0/13**| 0/03| 0/06| 0/05| 0/06|      |

(\**P < 0/01, *P < 0/05\)

Results shown in table 2 show that among correlated variables to academic achievement in English (as a second language), autonomy support has the highest correlation (r = 0.21) to English, and after this, proficiency variables, perceived variables, motivational tasks, approach-performance goals, respectively, have highest correlation to academic achievement in English, and the correlations of avoidance-performance goals and proficiency valuation to academic achievement in English are not significant. Also, mutual correlation of gender and variables of research indicate that gender has the highest correlation to proficiency valuation, after that autonomy support, motivational task, and avoidance-performance goals have highest correlations with gender. Correlation matrix of research variables for boys indicated that among correlated variables to academic achievement in English, autonomy support has the highest correlation (r = 0.23) and after that approach-performance and motivational tasks have the highest correlation to academic achievement in English, and the correlation of proficiency valuation, avoidance-performance goals, proficiency goals and perceived instrumentality to academic achievement are not significant. Correlation matrix of research variables for girls also indicated that from among correlated variables with academic achievement in English, proficiency goals have the highest correlation with achievement in English (r = 0.34) and after that, perceived instrumentality and autonomy support were of the highest correlation to academic achievement in English. As mentioned earlier, hierarchial regression analysis in a sequence of stages based on variables relationships in previous studies, was used to examine academic achievement according to classroom structure, perceived instrumentality and goal orientations.
Table 3. A summary of hierarchical regression analysis of academic achievement in English according to applied variables.

| Variables                        | R   | R Square | Adjusted R Square | R Square Change | F    | F Change | Sig  |
|----------------------------------|-----|----------|-------------------|-----------------|------|----------|------|
| Perception of Classroom Structure| 0.265 | 0.070 | 0.059             | 0.065           | 6/24 | 7/77     | 0.001|
| Perceived instrumentality        | 0.353 | 0.125 | 0.111             | 0.055           | 9/36 | 20/34    | 0.001|
| Achievement Goals                | 0.375 | 0.171 | 0.12              | 0.046           | 6/68 | 6/08     | 0.03 |

Table 4. Coefficients of hierarchical regression analysis of academic achievement in English according to variables.

| predictors                | B    | Std.Error | β    | t      | Sig |
|---------------------------|------|-----------|------|--------|-----|
| Constant                  | 16/806 | 1/199    | 0.14 | 0.015 | 0.001|
| Motivation Tasks          | -0.250 | 0.040 | -0.056 | -0.627 | 0.531|
| Mastery Valuation         | 0/126 | 0.044 | 0.223 | 2/863 | 0.004|
| Autonomy Support          | -0.217 | 0.061 | -0.314 | -3/549 | 0.001|
| Constant                  | 13/485 | 1/379    | 0.982 | 0.001|
| Motivation Tasks          | -0.041 | 0.039 | -0.092 | -1/052 | 0.294|
| Mastery Valuation         | 0/117 | 0.043 | 0.208 | 2/734 | 0.007|
| Autonomy Support          | -0.246 | 0.060 | -0.356 | -4/114 | 0.001|
| Perceived instrumentality | 0/199 | 0.044 | 0.248 | 4/511 | 0.001|
| Constant                  | 11/734 | 1/592    | 0.732 | 0.001|
| Motivation Tasks          | -0.056 | 0.039 | -0.127 | -1/431 | 0.153|
| Mastery Valuation         | 0/107 | 0.043 | 0.189 | 2/487 | 0.013|
| Autonomy Support          | -0.237 | 0.060 | -0.344 | -3/987 | 0.001|
| Perceived instrumentality | 0/138 | 0.052 | 0.171 | 2/653 | 0.008|
| Mastery Goals             | 0/125 | 0.108 | 0.090 | 1/155 | 0.049|
| Performance Approach Goals | 0/168 | 0.092 | 0.139 | 1/829 | 0.038|
| Performance Avoidance Goals| -0.079 | 0.074 | -0.081 | -1/067 | 0.287|

As shown in Table 4, results of classroom structure show that motivational tasks can not predict achievement in English. However, proficiency valuation, perceived instrumentality and goal orientation in subscales of proficiency goals, and approach- performance goals can predict a positive and significant relationship to achievement in English. Also, autonomy support has a negative and significant relationship to achievement in English.

Finally, in order to test the differences between boys and girls in classroom structure and achievement goals multivariable variance analysis was used. Results show that girls got higher scores in components of perception of classroom structure (motivational tasks, proficiency valuation, and autonomy support) than boys. Regarding proficiency goals and approach- performance goals there was no significant difference between boys and girls. But in avoidance- performance goals, girls average (17.435) was higher that that of boys (16.651).

In order to test the difference in perceived instrumentality and academic achievement in English, T-test was used for independent groups. One of the presuppositions in this test, is to regard the principle of variance homogeneity; Leven results show in perceived instrumentality show that this principle has been taken into account and these results can be reported with certainty.
However, in perceived instrumentality, regarding the meaningfulness of Leven Test the second row has been reported. Any way reviewing T-test results show that boys and girls don’t show a significant difference in perceived instrumentality and achievement in English.

4. Conclusion:
As suggested previously, the aim of the present study was to examine relationships of perception of classroom structure, perceived instrumentality, and achievement goals to academic achievement in English of secondary-school students.
The results indicated that classroom structure, perceived instrumentality and achievement goals can predict academic achievement in English. Also, results from perception of classroom structure is along with researches done by researchers like Church, Elliot and Gable (2000), De Backer et al, 2004; Greene et al, 2004, Harder et al 2007 an Naqsh (2006).
In this study, motivational tasks have no significant relationship to academic achievement in English although the mean of girls is higher than the mean of boys which is contradictory to previous studies. It seems that results can be dependant on motivational tasks with instructional conditions, environmental factors and the subject, that is it is possible that in secondary school, students do not still have a conception of the relationship between English (as a second language) with their needs and do not encourage themselves to study it. Regional conditions in which the study has been carried out is of great importance. It is possible that the results will change if environmental condition changes.
Results of perceived instrumentality with academic achievement in English is analog with research results of Simon et al, 2000; Raynor, 1969; Raynor & Robin 1971; Dewelder & Lens, 1982; Van Calster, Lens & Nuttin, 1987.
In this study the factors of proficiency goals, and approach-performance goals have a significant relationship to academic achievement the result of which was analog to other's (Wolters et al, 1998; Raynor & Robin, 1971; Dewelder & Lens, 1982; Van Calster, Lens & Nuttin, 1987).
In this study there was a meaningful relationship between proficiency goals, and approach-performance goals and academic achievement in English which is analog with the results of Wolters et al, 1996 (Church, 2001; Elliot & McGregor, 2001).
In the context of boys and girls differences in perception of classroom structure, perceived instrumentality, goal orientation, and academic achievement in English, results indicated that girls got higher scores than boys in subscales of perception of classroom structure. Results of proficiency valuation were analog with results of mathematics.
Also, in goal orientations, results show that girls and boys have no significant differences in components of proficiency goals and approach-performance goals; however, girls have higher mean than boys in avoidance-performance goals. These findings are along with the results of Epsinat et al (2002).
Finally, there has been showed no significant differences between both sexes regarding perceived instrumentality of English in this study. The results of Hedjazi & Naqsh studies(2007) indicated that perceived instrumentality of mathematics is higher in boys than girls, but this is not a significant difference.
According to this study, it seems that academic achievement in English is not a dependent variable on gender, and that both sexes put equal importance on achievement in English, and that English is not a subject restricted to female or male zone. Regarding the positive relationship of proficiency valuation to academic achievement one can infer that when students’ perception of class valuation is not based on social analogy and handing in assignment at a certain time, they perceive making mistakes as part of their learning, and they can choose learning strategies of higher levels. Also they can show their actual learning with no anxiety, and therefore they can get higher scores in English. Also, regarding negative relationship of autonomy support and academic achievement in English one can say that because teaching English begins at secondary school and after checking students responses to personal questions enclosed
with questionnaires, most of them indicated economical, emotional, and behavioral depriva-
tions in their families and parents illiteracy and overcrowded families add to these problems. There fore the more the teacher supported their learning through selection, encouragement and responsibility, because of the above problems and that it was impossible for them to attend open classes of English to improve their second language, they got embarrassed and this embarrassment was an obstacle on their way of achievement in English. Positive and significant relationship of perceived instrumentality and academic achievement in English may result from this issue that students who attend these classes have a perception of instrumentality of present tasks and academic achievement in higher levels, and that they perceive the instrumentality of learning English as a way of communication in education, business and media, and this have led them to academic achievement in English. Regarding the findings of this study one can define proficiency goals and approach-performance goal with academic achievement as follow: When the students are trying to find a new skill and development of personal competencies in English classes, if they face a situation that needs a challenge, they won’t feel fear and also they don’t pay attention to others’ opinion about them and they only try to understand the subject, thus, this will lead them to achieve in English.

Regarding the positive relationships of approach-performance goals to academic achievement in English one can suggest that when students in English classes want to be seen higher than others, some excitement grows in them which encourages, them to be more active to have more concentration on homework, and to make homework interesting.

Regarding the results of differences in girls and boys in perception of classroom structure, the level of lesson relevance and being interesting, teacher’s support for being responsible for learning and that how is it emphasized for girls and boys to compete in the classroom, are among factors that have an impact on both sex’s perception. It seems that higher scores of girls than boys in avoidance-performance goals stems from culture. Parents’ expectations and how they treat, especially for mothers. Always leads children to be better in all contexts. In Iranian society, what is very strong is to confirm girls by others and to hide lack of competency and this can have an impact on their academic achievement goals and choosing avoidance performance goals. Today because of technological developments, globalization, communication developments, environmental conditions, and the impact of English on learning other sciences, as well as the increasing need to English and ignoring sexual clichés related to English, both sexes apparently have a positive attitude towards learning English. Any way English is one of the subjects which has a great impact on: determining one’s perception of classroom structure, how students perceive the class is interesting, do they think that their teacher is encouraging them, to self-learning, and that how learning is emphasized, to choose goals and the level of their instrumentality. The effective level of cognitive-motivational variables is different when studying on mathematics from when studying English. In previous studies basic subject have been examined, but English is a subject that comes in secondary school. That how students perceive classroom structure and its goals and instrumentality has made us study on it. In this study the relationship of these variables to academic achievement in English has been relatively evaluated, but more investigations need to be done on whether motivational tasks have a significant relationship to academic achievement, whether the relationship of autonomy support is negative, and that girls get higher scores than boys in choosing avoidance-performance goals.

Therefore, as regards the questions about cognitive-motivational variables in the present study are not tangible in our educational context it seems necessary to examine buoys rendering according to Iranian culture and instructional context, and then to apply them in studying in different levels. Also, future studies, it seem necessary for researcher to examine motivational-cognitive variables with factors like parents expectations, teachers’ attitudes, teaching styles, family structure, and school instructional programs and, generally, all variables that can have a contribution to these variables but they have been ignored.
Therefor, considering the contribution of Proficiency goals and perceived instrumentality to academic achievement in English we recommend the bodies working in education to design a context of education that leads to adoption of proficiency goals and instrumentality of assignment in future successes. Since girls got higher scores in avoidance-performance goals, it is recommend that society, parents and teachers avoid considering girls better in different contexts, and be aware of consequences of this belief on students academic achievement. It should also be noted that this research has a limitation that is low precision of students responses. Also, in the process of conducting the research it was clear that interviews associated with questionnaires can provide the researcher with useful information about the variables used in the study.

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