Tracking Defense Mechanisms in an EFL Setting: Pseudo-altruism on Top

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Abstract: Ever since Freud (1894) introduced the notion of defense mechanisms, a myriad of researchers has placed paramount importance on this area. Freud's (1894) breakthrough paved the way for pioneering research on defense mechanisms in different realms, including psychology, education, and psychotherapy. The present paper reports the study undertaken on types of defense mechanisms used by Iranian EFL teachers. Furthermore, the significant differences between male and female EFL teachers at different age groups in the use of defense mechanisms are also considered. In the first phase of the study, the focus was on the identification of defense mechanisms teachers generally adopt in their daily activities, while the second phase was exclusive to the deployment of defense mechanisms inside EFL classes. Accordingly, the Defense Style Questionnaire was distributed among 100 EFL teachers, and they were asked to fill in the nine-point Likert scale questionnaire based on what they did in their real lives, not necessarily EFL classes. Next, to capture the in-class atmosphere, the researchers carried out 30 semi-structured interviews with Iranian EFL teachers. All the participants (15 males and 15 females) were teaching in public schools as well as private institutes at the time of the interview. The results of the questionnaire indicated that teachers used two mature defense mechanisms, namely, anticipation (M=13.8) and rationalization (M=13), in their daily lives more than the others. Nonetheless, the results of the interview denoted the dominance of pseudo- altruistic behaviors (N=30), as a neurotic mechanism, in EFL classes. Sublimation and humor (N=29), as two mature defense mechanisms, were also frequently used. On the other hand, splitting (N=2), passive aggression (N=2), and projection (N=3), all of which are considered to be immature mechanisms, were the least-frequently used mechanisms. Moreover, Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis tests signified no significant differences in terms of gender and age in the use of defense mechanisms among Iranian EFL teachers. The authors of the present study hope that the results of the present study can help teachers gain a better insight into the use of defense mechanisms and seek out the most advantageous deployment of mature mechanisms in their classroom practices.

Keywords: Defense Mechanisms, EFL Classroom, Teacher Perceptions.

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Introduction

The race of human species has always been constantly preoccupied with the mind and how it works since the dawn of myths, when Cupid and Psyche was a prevalent tale, to the age of Enlightenment, when modern thinkers and philosophers endowed it with an essential role in keeping man's company on the way to progress. It was Freud who in a groundbreaking theory gave a tripartite shape to the mind: id, superego, and ego, but before that, he had assigned defense mechanism a primary role in his psychoanalysis (cf. Freud, 1894, 1911).

The defense mechanism, according to Freud's early conceptions (1894, 1911, 1926), functioned to screen any idea or material in the mind or psyche without any specific origin but with the aim of guarding the patient against painful feelings and experiences. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Freud (1911), downplaying the external reality, attributed the defense function to the inner drives and gave it a role in counterbalancing the release of the drives. In the second decade of the last century, with his publication of the tripartite model of personality, Freud (1926) assigned the function of defense to the independent ego, implying later on that this function was performed in a variety of forms and mechanisms but with the single purpose of warding off the instinctual drives and safeguarding the ego.

Freud's concepts were a decade later recast by his daughter Anna (cf. Cramer, 2006). She for the first time systematized the variety of defense mechanisms into two: internal and external, and kept the single purpose of protecting the ego, assigned by her father, in place. The former is triggered off when overpowering drives are dreaded by the adults and is named superego anxiety, related to the conscience. The latter is observed in children who fear their parents when they have been disobeyed, which is called objective anxiety.

Fenichel (1945) later elaborated the concepts of defense mechanisms laid out by Freud and put them within a developmental framework. At the early stages, when the organism is inundated with instinctual energy, the passive or inchoate ego gives out an anxiety signal, which in turn sets off the defense mechanism. If this function fails, a panic reaction follows. The second defense mechanism is associated with exterior prohibitions. Fenichel (1945) believes that when a child is cut off narcissistic supplies (food, safety, and protection) from an external person such as his mother, he experiences fear of loss. He finds himself away from pleasurable feelings like well-being and protection, which jeopardizes his self-cohesion and self-esteem. Later on, when the infant grows into adulthood, his developed ego confronts these feelings by emitting signals of defense mechanism which is felt as guilt by an internalized conscience. Besides these conceptions and definitions, the most recent conceptualization of defense mechanisms is by Cramer (2006) who

maintains that it is an essential part of our inner life interfering with perceiving the world outside and contributes to our habituating while functioning in a sly way that eludes our consciousness.

Alongside the defense mechanisms, there exist some defense strategies that individuals deliberately employ to manage the undesirable situations they are stuck with. These strategies are termed coping mechanisms, which, although share a single purpose with defense mechanisms, differ from them in some respects. Most important of all is that coping mechanisms are performed consciously producing purposeful effects whereas defense mechanisms are totally inadvertent functions conducted without the conscious awareness of the individual. The next difference is that the aim of coping mechanisms is to resolve an issue, solve a problem, or deal with a situation, leading to a desirable external effect, but defense mechanisms absolutely lack such conscious intentionality and produce no external results. As implied in the previous comments, coping mechanisms are a response to and indicated by the situation and environment in which the individual finds himself, while defense mechanisms constitute dispositions and personality of the individual. The last difference is that coping mechanisms are generally considered as normal psychological reactions that any healthy individual would show in a given situation, but defense mechanisms are professionally thought of as psychopathological functions (Cramer, 2006, 2014).

Although their psychopathological facet has mostly received highlights and emphasis from experts, defense mechanisms constitute an integral part of normal psychological development and play a pivotal part in everyday life. As shown by Cramer and Block (1998), psychological anxiety at age 3 could trigger a defense mechanism 20 years later. Therefore, if a developmental view is to be held, a relationship between early childhood and adulthood is not far from common wisdom. That is to say, in an educational setting, the case under investigation here, an abrupt, immature, and unconscious mechanism taken by the teacher inside the class may have devastating effects on the future academic career of the child. That is why every educational system entails scrutiny in terms of the defense mechanisms their educationalists, not solely limited to teachers, adopt in their daily practices.

In a similar vein, positive psychology, with its heavy roots in the humanistic approach well delineated in the field of EFL teaching/learning, has made researchers meticulously study the factors contributing to the prosper of individuals as well as societies, among which are hope, gratitude, resilience, wellbeing, and flow, to name only a few. One of the areas heavily emphasized by positivity psychologists is the positive qualities of learners and teachers. Here, the notion of defense mechanisms and how teachers respond to the learners' (mis)behaviors takes on critical importance. Such knowledge can help educationalists train more tolerant teachers who are emotionally resilient to cope with adversities in class and have enough positive characteristics to

put their true inner soul in action inside language classes to enhance students' learning. The present study revolves around the following research questions:

1. What types of defense mechanisms are used by Iranian EFL teachers?
2. Is there any significant difference between male and female Iranian EFL teachers in the maturity of the defense mechanisms they employ in their classes?
3. Is there any significant difference between young adult and middle-aged Iranian EFL teachers in the maturity of the defense mechanisms they employ in their classes?

Literature Review

Defense Mechanisms in General

According to classical psychoanalysis, defense mechanisms are inadvertently triggered when emotional equilibrium comes under threat (cf. Freud 1926, 1936), the result of which starts to unravel as adaptive or maladaptive behaviors. As various scholars pointed out (e.g., Cramer 2003, 2012; Freud, 1894; Vaillant & Mukamal, 2001), these mechanisms, as opposed to coping styles, are characterized by their unconscious, uncontrolled nature, which can be categorized by the quality of behaving maturely. Among the hierarchy of these mature, intermediate, and immature defenses, the first one modulates distress the best and maintains contact with reality the most. These so-called mature defenses, including altruism, sublimation, anticipation, humor, and suppression are highly evident in people with a high mental and physical wellbeing, whose rate of success in their jobs is noteworthy. Moreover, psychopathologically, these people suffer less. The comparatively prevalent intermediate mechanisms in our daily life, typically referred to as neurotic mechanisms, reaction formation, and displacement have the potential to be changed into maladaptive behaviors. The maladaptive, immature defenses, so-called due to their adverse outcomes, including, denial, projection, acting out, and passive aggression are manifested in those whose potent in the expression and regulation of emotions is trembling (Malone, Cohen, Liu, Vaillant, & Waldinger, 2013).

Malone et al. (2013) instantiated the above-mentioned hierarchy through an illustrative example. An EFL teacher, who suffers from an ailment, whether mental or physical, may resort to mature mechanisms. That is, he/she may do a piece of artistically-talented, creative writing, with sublimation of his/her basic desires, or may welcome a visit to a medical practitioner, helping to suppress the ailment. The teacher can also voluntarily provide students in need with kind help or humorously make an effort to alleviate the distress. On the other hand, he/she may bottle up the flood of emotions, repudiating the presence of such an ailment, and refusing to pay a visit to a practitioner, or on the other hand act aggressively toward the students. This

evidently indicates a maladaptive response to the situation which immaturely leads to mismanagement of the emotions (Malone, et al., 2013). The decision made in this regard can differentiate experienced and well-done teachers from less-qualified educators who may still need further in-service training.

Based on the previous works (not necessarily in the field of language teaching), the authors of the present study hypothesized that humor, rationalization, anticipation, and suppression (as mature defense mechanisms), undoing and pseudo-altruism (as neurotic defense mechanisms), and passive aggression (as an immature defense mechanism) are more frequently used by the language teachers (cf. Craşovan, & Maricuţoiu, 2012; Furnham, 2012; Giovazolias, Karagiannopoulou, & Mitsopoulou, 2017; Heidari Nasab, Mansour, Fallah, & Shoeiri, 2007; Ruuttu et al., 2006).

Age Differences

Taking the changes of mechanisms through the different periods of growing up into account, Cramer (1991, 2006, 2012) established his theory of defense mechanism development on two presumptions. One is that various defense mechanisms prevail at divergent stages of development with different cognitive levels. Two is that each mechanism has its own origin and history, predominant at one point and supplanted at another. In other words, as children grow into adulthood, their defense mechanisms wax and wane, finally giving way to other ones. For instance, denial is the dominant defense during early childhood; then, it recedes until late childhood, being replaced with projection, which dominates early adolescence, too. It, in turn, gradually gives way to identification, which also dominates late adolescence (see Cramer, 1987, 1991, 2003, 2012). The alterations occurring between adolescence and adulthood are shrouded in obscurity as the studies conducted on this issue are rare. However, Vaillant's (1971) longitudinal research shed some light on darker areas by concluding that mature defenses increase with aging, while immature ones decrease. Nevertheless, neurotic denial was observed too frequently to be excluded from mature defenses. These mechanisms fully function in late adulthood as well.

The results of studies done on the relationship between the level of maturity and age do not coincide. There are a number of scholars who believe that no systematic relationship can be found which indicates that the use of a specific defense mechanism is associated with a given age group (see Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Rohsenow, Erickson, & O'Leary, 1978; Vaillant, Bond, Vaillant, 1986; Whitty, 2003). Conversely, the number of researchers who state that there are specific-group differences in the use of defense mechanisms in different age

groups is not low (see Costa Jr, Zonderman, & McCrae, 1991; Diehl, Coyle, & Labouvie-Vief, 1996; Diehl et al., 2013; Di Giuseppe, Gennaro, Lingiardi, & Perry, 2019). There are, however, other studies verifying the alterations occurring in the use of defense mechanisms in adulthood (see Helson & Moane, 1987; Helson & Wink, 1992; Vaillant, 1976). Although the results of cross-sectional and longitudinal studies done in this case vary as to the variations, constancy, and permanency of defense mechanisms in early and late adulthood, all put emphasis on the fact that even stable mechanisms are subject to a change, that is to say, constancy does not impede changes in the use of mechanisms (Cramer, 2003). Our older adults may unconsciously use the same immature or neurotic defense mechanisms as our younger adults; nonetheless, this does not indicate that the mechanism has been fossilized, and no change may occur. As indicated in the literature, alterations may occur in the use of mechanisms in different periods of adulthood.

The present study hypothesized that the relationship between the degree of maturity of defense mechanisms and age in EFL adult teachers is not predetermined, static, and fixed. That is to say, it was supposed that the neurotic and immature defense mechanisms in early adulthood be changed to mature defenses in middle ages and late adulthood (Cramer, 2014; Diehl, et al., 1996; Diehl et al., 2013; Di Giuseppe, et al., 2019; Giovazolias, et al., 2017).

Gender Differences

There are a number of scholars who believe that no major difference can be found between males and females in the use of specific defense mechanism (see Abid & Riaz, 2017; Andrews, Singh, & Bond, 1993; Drapeau et al., 2011; Zoccali, et al., 2007). Conversely, it is still widely accepted that males and females utilize different defense mechanisms to one degree or another (Cramer, 2006; Furnham, 2012; Gleser & Ihilevich, 1969; Massong, Dickson, Ritzler, & Layne, 1982; Petraglia, Thygesen, Lecours, & Drapeau, 2009). Women usually respond internally to their surroundings, while men deploy externalization as an unconscious defense mechanism (Cramer, 1987, 2002). Cramer (2002) attributes such a difference to the process of socialization, where womanhood denotes being complaisant, thus avoiding external aggressive responses, while hostile behaviors displayed by men are quite socially acceptable. Hence the use of denial and identification among females exceeds that of projection among males (Petraglia, et al., 2009). Nonetheless, Vaillant (1993) and Watson and Sinha (1998) found that altruism, though being an external mechanism, is rated higher among females in comparison to males.

The controversial results do not eradicate here; the results of the study done by Watson

and Sinha (1998) yielded that the use of splitting, isolation, suppression, denial, and devaluation, a number of which are internally-governed, was greater among males. This has led the researchers to conclude that the deployment of defense mechanisms differed among males and females, though the type and choice of mechanisms by men and women is still a place of argument. In line with Cramer (2002) and Petraglia, et al. (2009), the present study hypothesized that the use of defense mechanisms among male and female EFL teachers in Iran differs, even though the extent of the difference and the choice of mechanisms cannot be specified in advance. More specifically, the authors expected to trace mature defense mechanisms, including sublimation and anticipation, as well as neurotic defenses, including pseudo-altruism and idealization in females more than males. Males were supposed to exploit externalized immature defense mechanisms, including passive aggression, greater than females (cf. Cramer, 2006; Diehl et al., 2013; Feldman, Araujo, & Steiner, 1996; Foto-Özdemir, Akdemir, & Çuhadaroğlu-Çetin, 2016; Furnham, 2012).

Method

Participants

The participants who filled out the questionnaire were 100 Iranian (44 males and 56 females) EFL teachers, teaching in public schools and private institutes in two cities (Isfahan and Kashan). The convenience or availability sampling technique was used in this study to select individuals based on their gender and age. The EFL teachers were in their twenties, thirties, forties, and fifties. Teachers held BA, MA, and Ph.D. degrees in English Literature, English Translation, and Teaching English as a Foreign Language. For the second phase of the study, 30 EFL teachers were selected using the purposive sampling technique based on two criteria. Firstly, EFL instructors with different age groups were invited. Secondly, both males and females were selected. Accordingly, 15 males and 15 females were chosen for the interview. The detailed information of the participants is provided in Table 2.

Table 1. *Demographics of Questionnaire Participants*

Gender	N	Major	N	degree	N	Teaching Experience	N	Age	N
Males	44	English teaching	60	BA	66	1-5 years	4	Twenties	45
Females	56	English translation	28	MA	22	5-10 years	47	Thirties	21
		English literature	8	Ph.D.	12	10-15 years	10	Forties	27
		linguistics	4			15-20 years	8	Fifties	7

20-25 years	8
25-30 years	17
More than 30	6

Table 2. *Demographics of Interview Participants*

Gender	N	Major	N	degree	N	Teaching Experience	N	Age	N
Males	15	English teaching	28	BA	16	1-10 years	10	Twenties	7
Females	15	English translation	1	MA	12	11-20 years	10	Thirties	11
		English literature	1	Ph.D.	2	21-30 years	10	Forties	6
								Fifties	6

Instruments

The Defense Style Questionnaire

The Defense Style Questionnaire (DSQ; Andrews et al., 1993) used in this study includes 40 items in a 9-point Likert format, every two items of which are for one defense mechanism. The questionnaire assesses 20 defense mechanisms, including sublimation, humor, anticipation, and suppression (mature defenses), rationalization, projection, passive-aggression, acting out, isolation, devaluation, autistic fantasy, denial, displacement, dissociation, splitting, and somatization (immature defenses), and undoing, pseudo-altruism, idealization, and reaction formation (neurotic defenses). The scores for defense mechanisms and defense styles are calculated by averaging the ratings for the related items. The reliability and validity of the DSQ were originally established by Andrews et al. (1993). The reliability of this three-factor questionnaire ranged from .59 to .89. The construct validity of the questionnaire revealed three factors, namely, mature, immature, and neurotic (Andrews et al., 1993).

The authors of the present study made use of the Persian-translated version of the inventory (Heidari Nasab et al., 2007) to ensure full comprehension of the respondents (see Appendix A). This version was shown to be highly reliable (α =.81-.87) for Iranian university students. The content validity of this questionnaire was evaluated through expert judgments, that is, 15 psychologists confirmed that the content of the questionnaire was representative of the entire domain of defense mechanism. The construct validity of the translated questionnaire signified a three-factor inventory, namely, mature, immature, and neurotic.

Semi-structured Interview Questions

Thirty participants were purposively interviewed with predetermined questions. All questions were designed to explore the kind of defense mechanisms utilized by EFL teachers in the classroom and differences of genders and age groups in the use of defense mechanisms. It was a semi-structured interview (see Appendix B) whose items were created by the researchers and were examined, modified, and validated by three experts in the field of TEFL. To retain the whole data, the interviews were recorded with the interviewees' agreement. These questions evaluated three classifications of defense mechanisms including, immature, mature, and neurotic. In this phase, the questions were delivered in Persian to ensure maximum comprehensibility.

Procedure

The results were obtained through data triangulation and several sources. The subsequent stages were set in this study. First of all, inspired by the researcher, the teachers conducted the survey by understanding the objectives of the study and the process of completing the questionnaire either through hard copies or email. Thereafter, the volunteer EFL teachers filled out the questionnaires and gave them back to the researcher or sent them via email. In summer 2019, both male and female teachers were opted based on convenience sampling to identify types of defense mechanisms that they broadly used in their daily activities. After the questionnaires were fully assembled, SPSS (Statistical Packages for Social Sciences) was used for an in-depth analysis.

In autumn 2019, 30 volunteer teachers, having the requisite criteria, attended the interview. Each interview took about 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' prior consent. The interview questions comprised tacit references to defense mechanisms. The interviewer bore the burden of confidentiality of the recorded data to be purely employed for educational purposes. Likewise, having elaborated on the aim of the interview, the researchers initiated to ask questions in sequence. Ultimately, the interviews were transcribed and coded by the researchers for further analysis.

Data Analysis

Analyzing Questionnaire Data

The questionnaire data were analyzed quantitatively. To do so, SPSS was employed. To answer the first research question (i.e. the types of defense mechanisms), descriptive statistics, including the mean, frequency, and standard deviation were used to analyze the results obtained

from the questionnaire. To find the answer to the second research question (i.e. gender differences), first the normality of the data was examined, and since the data were not normally distributed, Mann-Whitney U Test was performed to compare the mean. Concerning the third research question (i.e. age differences in the use of defense mechanisms), subsequent to inspecting the normality of data, Kruskal-Wallis Test was performed to compare the mean.

Analyzing Interview Data

The interview data were analyzed quantitatively. To do so, SPSS was employed. For the purpose of answering the first question of the study, i.e., the types of defense mechanisms, the interviews were transcribed, codified, and analyzed. To find the answer to the second research question, i.e., gender differences, Mann-Whitney U Test was run to compare the mean of the two groups. Concerning the third question, i.e., age differences, Kruskal-Wallis Test was performed to compare the means.

Results

Types of Defense Mechanisms Used

To answer the first research question (what types of defense mechanisms are used by Iranian EFL teachers?), descriptive statistics was obtained. Table 3 shows the results of descriptive statistics. The scores obtained for the use of each defense mechanism ranged from 2 (hardly used) to 18 (mostly used). Considering the standard deviation of each defense mechanism, none of the teachers scored more than 15; thus, it cannot be concluded that they had almost always used the defense mechanism in their daily lives. The results of the questionnaire showed that the most frequently used defense mechanisms were anticipation (M=13.88), rationalization (M=13.47), pseudo altruism (M=12.50), humor (M=11.79), and undoing (M=10.62). In contrast, the least-frequently used defense mechanisms were projection (M=5.77), displacement (M=6.38), passive-aggression (M=7.01), splitting (M=7.18), and denial (M=7.53), all of which were considered immature defenses. As illustrated in Table 3, mature defense mechanisms were used above the mean score, while immature and neurotic were utilized below the mean score. Thus, EFL teachers used mature defenses more than immature and neurotic defense mechanisms.

The results of the interview differed slightly from that of the questionnaire. Although pseudo altruism (M=12.50), as a neurotic defense mechanism, was not scored the highest mean in the questionnaire, it was reported to be used by all 30 teachers in the EFL classroom. It seems that EFL teachers were apt to help learners. Sublimation (M=8.69) and humor

(M=11.79), as mature defense mechanisms, were used by 29 teachers; only one teacher did not make use of the given defenses. Denial (M=7.53), as an immature defense mechanism, contrary to the results of the questionnaire, was used by 27 teachers. Idealization (M=9.93) and isolation (M=7.86), as neurotic defense mechanisms, were also used by 26 teachers. On the other hand, displacement (M=6.38), projection (M=5.77), splitting (M=7.18), and passive aggression (M=7.01), as immature defense mechanisms, were reported to be employed by 7, 3, 2, and 2 teachers, respectively. It was demonstrated that most of the teachers did not resort to these immature defense mechanisms based on both the interview and questionnaire.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics of Defense Mechanisms Used by EFL Teachers*

Defense	Category	Mean Q	SD Q	Frequency Int
Sublimation	mature	8.69	4.10	29
Humor	mature	11.79	3.71	29
Anticipation	mature	13.88	3.14	24
Rationalization	mature	13.47	2.60	21
Suppression	mature	10.47	3.44	16
Projection	immature	5.77	3.65	3
Passive-Aggression	immature	7.01	3.56	2
Acting Out	immature	8.59	3.52	13
Isolation	immature	7.86	4.14	26
Devaluation	immature	8.93	3.70	23
Austic Fantasy	immature	8.84	4.23	22
Denial	immature	7.53	3.59	27
Displacement	immature	6.38	3.87	7
Dissociation	immature	10.34	3.11	19
Splitting	immature	7.18	3.84	2
Somatization	immature	10.39	4.04	22
Undoing	neurotic	10.62	4.12	10
Pseudo-Altruism	neurotic	12.50	3.31	30
Idealization	neurotic	9.93	4.08	26
Active reaction	neurotic	8.61	3.58	13

The Relationship between Gender and Defense Mechanisms

Since EFL teachers' behaviors in the classroom were at the center of attention, analyzing the second research question was based on the result of the interview. To answer the second research question (is there any significant difference between male and female Iranian EFL

teachers in the maturity of the defense mechanisms they employ in their classes?), the data were initially examined in terms of normality. Since the data were not normal, a nonparametric test was performed. Since two groups were involved, Mann-Whitney U Test was performed. As shown in Table 4, the mean scores of females and males' defense use were more than 0.05 in all 20 defense mechanisms. Thus, the relationship was not meaningful and the null hypothesis could not be rejected, rather it should be accepted.

Table 4. *Mann-Whitney U Test related to Gender*

Defense mechanisms	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]
Projection	105.000	225.000	-.598	.550	.775[b].
Austic Fantasy	97.500	217.500	-.812	.417	.539[b]
Passive-Aggression	112.500	232.500	.000	1.000	1.000[b]
Displacement	90.000	210.000	-1.273	.203	.367[b]
Devaluation	105.000	225.000	-.424	.671	.775[b]
Splitting	112.500	232.500	.000	1.000	1.000[b]
Isolation	97.500	217.500	-1.056	.291	.539[b]
Idealization	112.500	232.500	.000	1.000	1.000[b]
Dissociation	105.000	225.000	-.372	.710	.775[b]
Sublimation	105.000	225.000	-.362	.317	775[b]
Acting Out	105.000	225.000	-1.000	.717	.775[b]
Active Reaction	105.000	225.000	-.362	.717	.775[b]
Denial	105.000	225.000	-.598	.550	.775[b]
Somatization	97.500	217.500	-.812	.417	.539[b]
Suppression	87.000	207.000	-1.202	.229	.305[b]
Humor	105.000	225.000	-1.000	.317	.775[b]
Undoing	82.500	202.500	-1.523	.128	.217[b]
Rationalization	105.000	225.000	-.392	.695	.775[b]
Pseudo-Altruism	112.500	232.500	.000	1.000	1.000[b]
Anticipation	97.500	217.500	.000	.369	.539[b]

The Relationship between Age and Defense Mechanisms Used

To answer the third research question (is there any significant difference between young, adult, and middle-aged Iranian EFL teachers in the maturity of the defense mechanisms they employ in their classes?), the mean of the scores of the participants in different age groups in the interview section was examined. The reason behind it was that teachers' subconscious behavior toward learners was considered with an expert eye. The results revealed that the mean scores of the participants in all 20 defense mechanisms were more than 0.05. Thus, the relationship was not meaningful and the null hypothesis could not be rejected, rather it should be accepted. Therefore, age did not make any difference on the maturity of defense mechanisms used by thirty Iranian EFL teachers.

Table 5. *Kruskal-Wallis Test related to Age*

Defense mechanisms	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Projection	2.474	3	.480
Austic Fantasy	1.727	3	.631
Passive-Aggression	6.806	3	.078
Displacement	.870	3	.833
Devaluation	8.321	3	.040
Splitting	3.578	3	.311
Isolation	4.157	3	.245
Idealization	.282	3	.963
Dissociation	3.763	3	.288
Sublimation	1.727	3	.631
Acting Out	3.736	3	.291
Active Reaction	2.330	3	.507
Denial	5.728	3	.126
Somatization	3.824	3	.281
Suppression	6.210	3	.102
Humor	1.727	3	.631
Undoing	4.181	3	.243
Rationalization	.733	3	.865
Pseudo-Altruism	.000	3	1.000
Anticipation	3.722	3	.293

Discussion

The main goals of the present study were to investigate special kinds of defense mechanisms used more repeatedly in EFL classrooms as well as gender and age-related differences in defense mechanisms in a sample of Iranian EFL teachers.

The result of the study proved that some special kinds of defense mechanisms were used more frequently by EFL teachers such as pseudo altruism (neurotic), sublimation (mature), humor (mature), and denial (immature). In contrast, they used undoing (mature), displacement (immature), projection (immature), and splitting (immature) infrequently. Furthermore, the results reported that EFL teachers communicated with their students through mature and neurotic defenses more than immature defense mechanisms, mature and neurotic defenses undoubtedly presented elements that were beneficial and unique. Neurotic defenses, being devoid of any adverse emotion, demanded concentration, otherwise, they may be converted into immature defense mechanisms. This might be attributable to the fact that immature defenses included repressing undesirable feelings.

The survey data partially comported with those of Crașovan and Maricuțoiu (2012) who found that altruism, self-assertion, self-observation, and rationalization were used more frequently by the participants. Other studies proved that humor was more frequently used by participants (Furnham, 2012; Heidari Nasab, et al. 2007; Ruuttu et al., 2006). All these three studies came to an agreement with this study that humor was used more frequently by EFL teachers.

This study also presented findings regarding sex differences in the self-reported use of defense mechanisms in EFL teachers. The paucity of meaningful differences between defense mechanisms use in males and females was surprising and outcomes were not under the auspices of previous findings. It lent support to previous researches, demonstrating no gender differences in the use of defense mechanisms for gender stereotypes (Abid & Riaz, 2017; Andrews, et al., 1993; Drapeau et al., 2011; Zoccali et al. 2007). Some earlier studies under this topic have enumerated incompatible data. As the first instance, Cramer (2006) professed that projection and turning against the self were used by men more than women. Feminine defense mechanisms were internally directed defenses, such as turning against the self, denial, reaction formation, and reversal. As the second instance, Furnham (2012) purported that males used the defense of distortion, identification, introjections, and idealization more than females. Females used sublimation more than males. Males utilized externalizing or immature defenses (often involving stereotypical aggression and projection) more than females.

Furthermore, this study investigated age-related differences in the self-reported use of defense mechanisms in EFL teachers. In spite of the research hypothesis, the results did not

provide convincing support for the third hypothesis. The results revealed that different age groups were not significantly different in the maturity of defense mechanisms used by EFL teachers. However, the findings from the interview reflected that there was no significant difference between the use of mature and immature defense mechanisms, more mature defenses were utilized in comparison to immature defense mechanisms in a vulnerable position in the classroom. Thus, it provided partial support for the third hypothesis. To reiterate, maturity in defense mechanisms was defined as dealing effectively with a state of tension rather than neglecting it.

The result of this study was in agreement with that of Whitty (2003) indicating that there was no significant difference in the maturity of the use of defense mechanisms between the middle-age (age: 40-47) and the elders (age: 63-70). Despite the current research results, other studies showed age-related differences in the use of defense mechanisms. As a notable example, Diehl et al. (2013) considered the use of defense mechanisms in different age groups, such as adolescence (age: 15-45), middle-age (age:46-59), and old age (age: 60-older). It was revealed that defense mechanisms of sublimation and suppression were applied mostly by adults, middle-aged, and early old age (age: 60-69) participants and it was usually unalterable into late old age (age: 70 and older). The defense mechanism of intellectualization was utilized largely by adults and middle-aged participants and remained fixed until late middle age, and began to decrease henceforth, and the use of doubt, displacement, and regression were reduced from adulthood to early old age, then its use developed again after the age of 65. As another contradictory remark, Di Giuseppe et al. (2019) reflected that the maturation of defense mechanisms was dependent on age maturation. Minor Image-Distortion defense mechanism was obvious across adulthood. Younger adolescents intended to utilize less-adaptive defense mechanisms, whereas, older teens utilized high-neurotic and adaptive defense mechanisms more. From a clinical point of view, it was obvious that each personality disorder scale was displayed by particular defense mechanisms that people used frequently across various situations.

The findings of this study illuminated the existing body of research exploring teachers' defense mechanisms in EFL settings. Unlike some previous studies in which the significance of defense mechanisms in normal individuals and psychiatric patients across different age groups and genders have been emphasized, this study adopted a self-reported defense mechanism questionnaire and interviews investigating the EFL teachers' perspectives. The lack of appropriate demeanor toward stressful situations posed a challenge to many practicing EFL teachers when it came to dealing with learners. The results of the present research might

call for the conduction of further empirical research into Iranian EFL teachers' defense mechanisms, and also stressed EFL teachers' training programs in the field of defense mechanisms.

Conclusion

In summary, having been given careful consideration to some main points in the literature, it was safely concluded that defense mechanisms as subconscious behaviors did play a role in humans' lives. At issue here were types of defenses and differences in the use of the defense mechanisms among different age groups and genders.

A 40-item Defense Style Questionnaire (DSQ; Andrews et al., 1993) was delivered to 100 Iranian EFL teachers in order to find out the types of defense mechanisms that teachers broadly used in their daily activities. In this questionnaire, every two items were for one defense mechanism, categorizing into three categories, including immature, mature, and neurotic (Giovazolias, et al. 2017). Thirty Iranian EFL teachers were purposively interviewed with 20 predetermined questions to identify types of defense mechanisms used in EFL classrooms. The findings of the present study based on the questionnaire reflected that EFL teachers utilized some defense mechanisms such as anticipation, rationalization, pseudo altruism, and humor. Additionally, the results of the interview indicated that they utilized some defense mechanisms continually in the classrooms such as pseudo altruism, humor, sublimation, and denial. In contrast, some defense mechanisms were used rarely such as splitting, passive aggression, projection, and displacement. Controversially, different genders and age groups did not have a meaningful difference in the use of defense mechanisms. Both instruments reflected that most of the teachers utilized pseudo altruism, humor, and anticipations as mature defense mechanisms.

Despite due consideration in designing this study, it had two limitations– both representing threats to the generalizability of the net result. First, the research participants were not recruited through a random sampling procedure. Second, the study included only a small sample of EFL teachers. Thus, further researches in the field of defense mechanisms, with the use of the random sampling method and a large sample of teachers or learners, merit consideration. Notwithstanding its limitations, the current study redounded immensely to the extant literature in two major ways. One concerned the recognition of defense mechanisms used in EFL classes, and the other pertained to scrutinizing the nature of defense mechanisms, notably concerning the relationships among defense mechanisms, gender, and age in EFL settings. As such, the present study gave the literature a boost on defense mechanisms in EFL

educational environment. In addition to invaluable contributions made to the dominant literature, far-reaching consequences also had wider implications for EFL teachers. With fathoming out the nature and types of defense mechanisms, as well as, their inclination to use various defense mechanisms, teachers can become mentally alert to the management of stressful situations in the classroom. Such perception might provide against anxiety promisingly. It was desired that educational practices that took teachers' defense mechanisms into account be more conducive to teaching and learning.

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Appendix A.

Defense Style Questionnaire

پاسخ دهنده گرامی:

پرسشنامه حاضر در برگیرنده عبارتهایی در مورد نگرشهای شخصی شماست و بدین خاطر پاسخهای درست و غلط در آن وجود ندارد. لطفاً میزان موفقیت خود را با جمله ها با انتخاب یکی از گزینه ها (از ۱ کاملاً مخالف تا ۹ کاملاً موافق) اعلام فرمایید.

پیشاپیش بخاطر صرف دقت و دقت نظر از شما سپاسگزارم.

سن:								جنسیت: مذکر☐ مونث☐ رشته تحصیلی:
مدرک تحصیلی: دیپلم☐ فوق دیپلم☐ لیسانس☐ فوق لیسانس☐ دکترا☐								
سابقه تدریس: ندارم☐ دارم☐ .... سال	محل تدریس: متوسطه اول☐ متوسطه دوم☐ دانشگاه☐ موسسات آزاد☐							

کاملاً مخالفم								کاملاً موافقم	سوالات
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸	۹	۱. من از کمک کردن به دیگران احساس رضایت می کنم و اگر این فرصت از دست برود غمگین می شوم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸	۹	۲. قادرم تا پیدا شدن فرصتی مناسب برای حل یک مشکل آنرا از ذهنم بیرون کنم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸	۹	۳. از طریق انجام کاری سازنده و خلاق مثل نقاشی یا ساختن وسایل چوبی با اضطرابم کنار می آیم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸	۹	۴. قادرم برای هر آنچه که انجام می دهم دلایل خوبی پیدا کنم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸	۹	۵. تقریباً به سادگی قادرم خودم را بخندانم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸	۹	۶. مردم تمایل دارند با من بد رفتاری کنند.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸	۹	۷. اگر کسی به من حمله کند و پولم را سرقت کند ترجیح می دهم به او کمک شود تا اینکه تنبیه گردد.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸	۹	۸. مردم می گویند که من واقعیت های ناخوشایند را نادیده می گیرم گویی که اصلاً وجود نداشته اند.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸	۹	۹. من با خطرات به گونه ای برخورد می کنم که گویی سوپرمنم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸	۹	۱۰. به خاطر اینکه می توانم افراد را سرجایشان بنشانم. (روی آنها را کم کنم) به خودم می بالم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸	۹	۱۱. اغلب وقتی چیزی مرا آزار می دهد بطور آنی و بدون فکر عمل می کنم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸	۹	۱۲. وقتی اوضاع برایم خوب پیش نمی رود از نظر جسمانی بیمار می شوم و احساس کسالت می کنم.

۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۱۳. من شخص باز دارنده ای هستم (در برابر دیگران خودم را بیش از حد کنترل می کنم).
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۱۴. من از رویاهایم (خیالپردازی هایم) بیش از زندگی واقعی‌ام لذت می برم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۱۵. من دارای استعدادهای خاصی هستم که به من اجازه می دهد زندگی بی دردسری داشته باشم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۱۶. وقتی که اوضاع بر وفق مرادم پیش نمی رود همیشه دلایل مشخصی وجود دارد.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۱۷. آنچه در خیالپردازی هایم انجام می دهم، بیش از کاری است که در زندگی واقعی ام انجام می دهم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۱۸. من از هیچ چیز نمی ترسم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۱۹. گاهی فکر می کنم که فرشته ام و گاهی نیز تصور می کنم که شیطان هستم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۲۰. احساس صدمه و یا آسیب مرا آشکارا پرخاشگر می کند.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۲۱. من همیشه احساس می کنم که یک آشنا شبیه به فرشته نجات نگهبان من است.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۲۲. تا جایی که می دانم مردم یا خوب هستند یا بد.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۲۳. اگر رئیسم از من عیب جویی کند ممکن است در کارم اشتباهی مرتکب شوم یا کارم را خیلی کند انجام دهم تا عیب جویی اش را تلافی کنم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۲۴. من کسی را می شناسم هر کاری از او بر می آید و کاملاً منصف است.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۲۵. اگر احساساتم مزاحم کارم شوند می توانم آنها را نادیده بگیرم. (بر روی آنها سرپوش بگذارم).
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۲۶. من معمولاً می توانم جنبه های مفرح و خنده دار یک وضعیت ناگوار و دردناک را ببینم (در کنار چیزهای دردناک می توانم جنبه های جالبی را نیز دریابم).
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۲۷. وقتی که مجبورم کاری را که دوست ندارم انجام دهم، سردرد می گیرم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۲۸. من اغلب با افرادی که حقشان است که از دستشان عصبانی باشم خیلی خوب رفتار می کنم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۲۹. دنیا با من سر سازگاری ندارد.

۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۳۰. هر گاه قرار است با مشکلی مواجه شوم سعی می کنم راجع به ابعاد (کم و کیف) آن فکر کنم و راه های مقابله با آن را بیابم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۳۱. پزشکان هرگز نمی فهمند که ناراحتی من چیست.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۳۲. هر جایی از حقم دفاع می کنم، بخاطر رک بودنم از دیگران عذرخواهی می کنم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۳۳. وقتی که افسرده و یا مضطرب هستم با غذا خوردن حالم بهتر می شود.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۳۴. اغلب به من گفته می شود که احساساتم را نشان نمی دهم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۳۵. اگر بتوانم از قبل پیش بینی کنم که چه چیزی ناراحتم می کند بهتر می توانم با آن کنار بیایم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۳۶. هر چه هم شکایت و گلایه کنم فرقی نمی کند چون هرگز پاسخ رضایت بخشی دریافت نمی کنم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۳۷. در موقعیت هایی که به نظر بسیار تکان دهنده می رسند اغلب هیچ احساسی ندارم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۳۸. برای رهایی از افسردگی و اضطراب به طور افراطی به وظایف و کارهای محوله ام متوسل می شوم.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۳۹. در شرایط بحرانی علاقه مندم با کسانی دوست شوم که مشکلات یا نیازهایی شبیه به من داشته باشند.
۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸		۹	۴۰. اگر افکار خصمانه ای داشته باشم احساس می کنم لازم است کاری برای جبران آن انجام دهم.

Appendix B.

Semi- structured Interview Questions

1. Projection: How is the students' relationship with you? Do they have incompatible behavior toward you?

2. Austic Fantasy: What do you imagine about students? Do the students in your dream differ from real time?

3. Passive Aggression: What is your reaction if students bugged you? Do you improve your teaching and try to remove faults or get back at him?

4. Displacement: What do you do after being angry with students to feel better? Have you ever overeaten to reduce stress?

5. Devaluation: What do you do when students misbehave toward you? Do you cut them down to size or not reflect any significant feelings?

6. Splitting: What do you think about students? Do you think all of the students are bad or all of them are good?

7. Isolation: How do you feel in challenging situations of the classroom? Do you show your feelings or inhibit them?

8. Idealization: What do you think about yourself as a teacher? Do you think that you are a just and fair teacher?

9. Dissociation: What is your reaction toward a challenging situation of the classroom? Do you go through it peacefully?

10. Sublimation: What do you do to relieve anxiety of your job tasks? Do you stick to your job tasks or do creative things?

11. Humor: What do you do to change unpleasant atmosphere of the classroom? Are you able to laugh yourself and your students in challenging situation of the classroom?

12. Undoing: What do you do when you want to compensate your aggressive behavior toward students? Do you apologize to them?

13. Rationalization: What do think about students' behaviors? Do you think that their behaviors have certain reasons?

14. Pseudo Altruism: How do you feel when you help students in learning or morality?

15. Anticipation: What is your reaction before encountering a challenging situation of the classroom? Do you try to predict it and plan how to contend with it?

16. Acting Out: How do you behave when students bother you? Have you ever acted impulsively when they disturbed you?

17. Active Reaction: how do you behave when a student insults you? Do you behave properly and be friendly in this situation?

18. Denial: What is your reaction toward unpleasant behavior of the students? Have you ever ignored them?

19. Somatization: What physical illnesses do you experience due to nervousness in challenging situation of the classroom?

20. Suppression: What is your reaction toward problems or feelings interfere with your job tasks? Can you keep the lid on your feelings or problems until you have time to cope with it?