

# EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Academic Favoritism: A Questionnaire Development and Validation Study

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## ABSTRACT

Although the concept of favoritism has received attention in various areas of study such as management, business, and medical settings, this line of research has scarcely been explored in teacher education and especially in L2 acquisition context. The current study aimed to design and validate a scale that could explore English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' perceptions of academic favoritism. After developing the 40-item Academic Favoritism Questionnaire (AFQ), it was administered to the target participants of the study, and the required data were collected from 154 Iranian EFL teachers selected through non-random convenience sampling. The results of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses revealed eight underlying components of the model: damaging collaborative learning, educational inequality, teachers' biased attitudes, teacher-student conflicts, learning barriers, unfair students' treatments, negative learners' experience, and unhealthy academic atmosphere. The study findings may shed light on this obscure topic in the field of education. The study provides important implications for different education stakeholders including researchers, teacher educators, supervisors, EFL teachers, and L2 learners as the findings could increase their awareness of favoritism and its likely influence on their professional practices and environment.

**Keywords:** Academic favoritism, EFL teachers, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, questionnaire development, teacher perceptions

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, the concept of fairness has gained significant momentum in various fields especially academic contexts. From this perspective, issues such as equity, equality, and accountability have gained increasing attention in educational fields (e.g., Tutuncu et al., 2022; Yan et al., 2021). Educational administrators who give credence to their staff based on such values are highly acknowledged and those who prioritize certain individuals over others are often seen as pulling strings in favor of those persons (see Hussain et al., 2020; Santos, 2021; Tsai, 2022). One manifestation of such misconduct is favoritism which could be described as the choice of a person or a group of people with similar rights over other individuals or groups. According to Erden (2014), favoritism refers to a situation in which one intentionally breaches the individuals' rights and justice for the advantage of other groups. Favoritism can happen due to certain irrelevant reasons such as belonging to a favored group, personal favorites and dislikes, as opposed to the privilege and meritocracy. As stated by Nadler and Schulman (2006), it can also be described as giving preferences to relationship and kinship over qualitative factors in choosing a particular group.

Despite the significant growth of research on favoritism in management, business, and social relations, this line of research has received little attention in teacher education in general and L2 learning in particular. Many scholars have pointed out that favoritism is a ubiquitous phenomenon in educational contexts (e.g., Hussain et al., 2013; Tsai, 2022; Turan, 2002). Despite the prevalence of academic favoritism in many educational systems, few studies have explored teachers' perceptions of this concept in the Iranian EFL context. The major problem in the literature is that many studies have pointed out that unethical issues like favoritism, discrimination, and bullying are issues that harm L2 teachers and students, but little research is available on how teachers perceive their impacts. Particularly, the issue of favoritism has been reported as a problem for teachers and students in many TEFL

contexts (e.g., Soodmand Afshar & Movassagh, 2016; Tavakoli & Tavakol, 2018), but there is no unified scale to measure favoritism in TEFL teacher education. The current study thus aims to investigate this issue through the lens of English language teachers. The study aspired to move the field forward by developing a model that could capture EFL teachers' perceptions of academic favoritism. Therefore, the study is significant as it fills the gap in the literature, as well as explores various aspects of this social variable and its importance as perceived by EFL teachers.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Favoritism in Education**

Favoritism is defined as the unfair practice of behaving differently towards certain individuals. According to Arasli et al. (2006), favoritism is a practice of offering special employment and profession-related preferences to socially close people. The existence of favoritism is common in most communities and cultures but more prevalent in small contexts (Sadozai et al., 2012) in which we have strong social or family relationships.

Favoritism in education is not a new phenomenon. Definitely, most of the students have been faced with various types of inequalities and favoritism imposed by the instructors and educational centers. According to Turan (2002), teachers often make attempts to show their commitment. When such commitment intermingles with the professional performance of teachers, they expect to be treated equally fair on the part of their organizations. The same story may occur for the students. That is, when the students feel that the teachers' behavior favors some specific students and groups in educational centers, they may get embarrassed and disappointed. It is generally believed that one important feature of a positive teacher-student relationship is non-involvement in any kind of favoritism (Hussain et al., 2013).

Education literature has shed light on the effects of teacher favoritism on students' achievement in the classroom. Chiu et al. (2013) studied the effect of teachers' favorites and its effects on non-favorite students, popular favorite

students, and unpopular favorite students. Results indicated teachers' favorites indirectly enhance classroom conflict and maladjustment among learners. Because of this, the ability of these students to learn may be negatively influenced. Furthermore, life-long behaviors, attitudes, and self-esteem may also be affected. Other types or forms of favoritism, including nepotism or cronyism, have been shown to bring unintentional consequences and yet may be viewed as a strategy for retaining or hiring a key person for a leadership position (Chervenak & McCullough, 2007). Such topics should be researched in more detail especially in the field of education. This study was a step toward identifying the underlying components of favoritism as an unfair treatment of students through the lens of EFL teachers in academic contexts.

## **Previous Studies**

Research, recently growing in number, has been conducted, directly and indirectly, on different aspects of favoritism and its impacts on students, teachers, employees, and so on. Several studies have been carried out by different scholars to show the effects of favoritist behaviors of school principals on teachers' organizational commitment (Aydoğan, 2008, 2009, 2012; Okcu & Ucar, 2016; Polat & Kazak, 2014); teachers' favoritism and its impact on academic sabotage (Hussain et al., 2020); favoritist behaviors of school managers based on teachers' viewpoints (Ayдын, 2015; Geçer, 2015; Karademir, 2016); the relationship between nepotism and organizational commitment (Argon, 2016; Karahan & Yılmaz, 2014); optimal favoritism in auctions and contests (Salcı, 2015); nepotism, cronyism, and job satisfaction (Chandler, 2012); favoritism and organizational trust (Demaj, 2012), favoritism under social pressure (Garicano et al., 2005); nepotism and employee satisfaction (Laker & Williams, 2003); and finally, parental favoritism (Moharib, 2013).

Aydoğan (2009) made an effort to clarify whether there existed favoritism in Turkish teaching, learning and academic system. Instructors

expressed that the administrators partially showed bias in their behavior, albeit the so-called favoritism, according to the school in the study. Aydoğan conducted the research to identify favoritism in Turkish colleges and determine the type of favoritism prevalent in the system and to show the viewpoints of the faculty members and staff on the causes of favoritism. In the mentioned research, traces of favoritism were discovered in the functions and duties of the dean, the director, and the principal of the department, in choosing teachers and academic staff, in providing materials for teaching at universities, in the lack of efficient communication with some faculty members, during the launch of new departments, in the formation of the faculty committee, and in the establishment of new units.

In the study conducted by Polat and Kazak (2014), the researchers made an attempt to describe the association between the favoritism perceptions and behaviors of school administrators and how teachers perceived organizational justice. The research findings revealed an inverse correlation between the favoritism behaviors exhibited by school administrators and teachers' perceptions of organizational justice. Similarly, a study by Karahan and Yilmaz in the same year found that as exposure to nepotism increased, there was a corresponding decline in employees' commitment levels to the organization.

Okcu and Ucar (2016) sought to examine the favoritism perceptions and behaviors of school administrators on the teachers' organizational commitment. As an outcome of their study, they determined that the behavior and perceptions of the administrators lay at low levels based on teachers' perceptions. Additionally, it was recognized that a moderate and negative association level existed between administrators' favoritism perceptions and/or behaviors and the organizational commitment of teachers. Finally, Tsai (2022) explored whether undue preference leads to unfairness and how favoritism influences teacher treatment and student achievement. The study collected data from both male and female students and teachers. Data analyses revealed that "teacher favoritism toward students with a higher previous class

rank increases the likelihood of these students consulting with their teacher on academic, emotional, and friendship issues” (p. 1).

Although, some aspects and outcomes of favoritism have been researched in other contexts, such as organizational settings, the findings may not be generalizable to the socio-cultural and academic properties of Iranian EFL context. Due to the fact that the studies on favoritism are scarce and highly debatable in global scale, this study can be considered as one of the few attempts at localizing this subject area in an EFL context. Hence, the present research study aims at providing a vivid picture of favoritism from an academic angle with a focus on the roots and consequences of this phenomenon when practiced by EFL instructors.

## **Purpose of the Study**

As the relevant literature indicates, favoritism is a prevalent issue across different educational and professional settings. However, few studies have systematically investigated EFL teachers’ perceptions and experiences of this concept in academic contexts. The researchers of the present study aimed to explore the Iranian EFL teachers’ understanding of academic favoritism by means of a newly developed questionnaire that could discover their perceptions of this unfair preferential treatment of L2 learners in academic contexts. To achieve this aim, the present study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are Iranian EFL teachers’ perceptions of academic favoritism?
2. What are the underlying components of the Academic Favoritism Questionnaire?

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

As the study was conducted in the Iranian educational context and aimed to explore the EFL teachers’ perceptions of academic favoritism, the data were gathered from different teacher participants in each of its stages. At the

piloting stage, the developed questionnaire was administered online to 50 EFL teachers who were similar in major characteristics to the main study population. The teachers' experience ranged from 2 to 15 years and their age ranged from 23 to 48. They held educational degrees in ELT, English Literature, and English Translation Studies. These teachers were selected non-randomly and based on convenience sampling.

In the second stage of the study, which was the questionnaire validation phase, 154 teachers participated in the data collection process of the study. The EFL teachers were from different experience levels (1 to 27 years) and almost similar to those who participated in the piloting stage, all working in language schools. The teachers were in the age range of 20 to 50 and held BA, MA, and PhD degrees in the same fields of study mentioned above. The participant teachers were selected non-randomly based on their willingness, consent to cooperate, availability, and through convenience sampling.

## **Design of the Study**

This study was conducted to develop a research instrument which could assess Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of academic favoritism. The development of this questionnaire was done in two phases. The purpose of the first phase was to collect the required information via the relevant literature review and expert opinion to obtain the preliminary themes and statements from the participants for the creation of the research instrument items. In the second phase, the aim was to develop, pilot, and validate the first draft of the survey instrument with a relatively large sample representative of the target population. This procedure was used to develop a questionnaire is one of the most commonly employed procedure for designing and validating a new research instrument (Dornyei, 2003). Therefore, the study enjoys a quantitative research design comprising a number of statistical analysis processes including exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis to check the construct validity in addition to determining the face and content validity of the scale.

## **Data Collection and Instrument**

After carefully reviewing the pertinent literature on favoritism specifically in the academic context (e.g., Aydogan, 2008, 2012; Okcu & Ucar, 2016; Polat & Kazak, 2014, Turan, 2002), the information and content required for the construction of the questionnaire were provided for the generation of the questionnaire items. After this initial step, in order to ensure the face and content validity of the designed questionnaire and to check the representativeness, accuracy, intelligibility, and appropriateness of the items included in the first draft of the questionnaire, three university professors who were experts in the field of applied linguistics were consulted to evaluate the items and rate their suitability and relevance to the construct. In fact, they rated the items on a 4-point Likert-type scale from 1 (not important to be included) to 4 (extremely important to be included) in the target scale. Thus, based on the gathered data from the experts, those items that were found to be ambiguous or malfunctioned were eliminated from the first draft, so the items were reduced from 40 to 27. The initial pool of questions, as mentioned earlier, included items that were developed based on the literature on favoritism as contextualized in the Iranian language education setting. The newly developed questionnaire was comprised of two parts: Part 1 of the questionnaire asked for the respondents' demographic information and part 2 consisted of close-ended statements allowing the participants to provide their feedback on a scale of one to five. The respondents replied to each question by selecting one of the response options on a Likert-type scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The questionnaire with 27 items was then piloted to 50 English language instructors. At this stage, the reliability of the research instrument was calculated using Cronbach's alpha, as reported below.

Next, the researchers developed Google Forms to collect the required quantitative data from the target population. In other words, the questionnaire link was forwarded to 200 teacher participants who agreed to take part in the present study by completing the questionnaire forms. From among the



population who met the study criteria, 154 EFL teachers who knew the researchers and had agreed to participate in the survey, completed the questionnaire. The rest seemed either unwilling to respond or missed the opportunity to provide the feedback within the allocated time limit. The collected data were then used to determine the construct validity of the instrument through conducting exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, according to which the questionnaire could be validated.

## **Data Analysis**

To address the research questions of the study, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to validate the questionnaire. In order to ensure the normality of the distribution, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was run. Then, the descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted.

## **RESULTS**

The present study aimed at developing a research instrument, namely the Academic Favoritism Questionnaire, to investigate the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions toward academic favoritism. The development of the mentioned instrument was done in different stages. In order to find the necessary information for the generation of the questionnaire items, a comprehensive literature review was done by the researchers. Furthermore, an initial interview was conducted with five university professors, experts in the field of applied linguistics. They had worked on aspects of ethics in applied linguistics and were, to a great extent, familiar with different conditions under which favoritism prevails, is likely to be more pertinent, and could be practiced by EFL teachers. After obtaining the required content, the first draft of the questionnaire was developed. The constructed questionnaire was first pilot-tested and then underwent validation process as explained in the following sections.

### ***Checking the Reliability of AFQ***

To check the reliability of the mentioned questionnaire, it was piloted with 50 EFL teachers who were similar in characteristics to the participants in the

main phase of the study. As mentioned previously, the piloting stage also helped with reducing the questionnaire items. Using Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient, it was shown that the scale enjoyed a reliability index of .84.

***Conducting Exploratory Factor Analysis for AFQ***

To ensure the validity of the constructed questionnaire, two types of factor analysis were run. First, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted. The EFA is utilized for reducing data to a smaller set of summary variables. This statistical technique explores the underlying theoretical structure of the phenomena. It identifies the structure of the relationship between the variable and the respondents, and in this study, it was performed to check the underlying factors of the survey instrument.

The AFQ consisting of 40 items with a Likert-scale format was administered, in its preliminary form, to a sample of 154 participants. The data, which resulted from the questionnaire administration, were subjected to a factor analysis using Principal Components Analysis with iteration and an oblique (Direct Oblimin) rotation.

**Table 1:** Results of KMO and Bartlett's Test for Academic Favoritism

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.662
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3262.846
	Df	780
	Sig.	.000

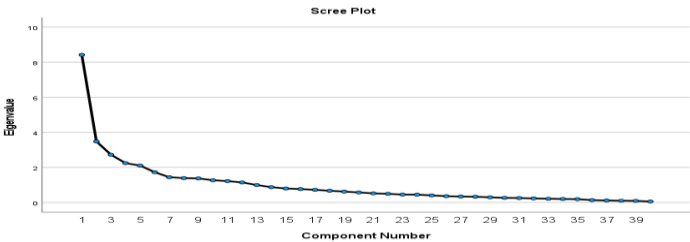
The researchers, under the supervision of the statistician in charge, checked the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity in order to verify that the data set is suitable. In this study, the KMO value is .662 and Bartlett's Test is significant ( $p = .000$ ). The KMO value more than .6 and Bartlett's Test significant value show the suitability of the data; therefore, factor analysis is appropriate.

**Table 2:** Results of Total Variance Explained for AFQ

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	8.417	21.043	21.043	8.417	21.043	21.043	5.354
2	3.481	8.702	29.745	3.481	8.702	29.745	3.692
3	2.723	6.807	36.551	2.723	6.807	36.551	3.632
4	2.244	5.609	42.161	2.244	5.609	42.161	5.570
5	2.105	5.263	47.423	2.105	5.263	47.423	2.802
6	1.726	4.315	51.738	1.726	4.315	51.738	2.268
7	1.580	3.600	55.338	1.440	3.600	55.338	2.637
8	1.519	3.472	58.810	1.389	3.472	58.810	2.259
9	1.371	3.427	62.237				
10	1.266	3.165	65.403				
11	1.217	3.043	68.446				
12	1.142	2.855	71.301				
13	.994	2.485	73.785				
14	.872	2.181	75.967				
15	.796	1.989	77.955				
16	.765	1.912	79.867				
17	.721	1.802	81.669				
18	.668	1.671	83.340				
19	.622	1.554	84.894				
20	.572	1.431	86.325				
21	.521	1.301	87.626				
22	.494	1.234	88.860				
23	.451	1.127	89.987				
24	.446	1.116	91.103				
25	.403	1.009	92.111				
26	.359	.897	93.009				
27	.339	.848	93.857				
28	.326	.815	94.672				
29	.295	.738	95.410				
30	.262	.656	96.067				
31	.252	.630	96.697				
32	.233	.583	97.280				
33	.211	.526	97.806				
34	.199	.497	98.303				
35	.189	.471	98.775				
36	.133	.334	99.108				
37	.114	.285	99.393				
38	.098	.245	99.638				
39	.090	.224	99.863				
40	.055	.137	100.000				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Then, Principal Component Analysis revealed the presence of 12 factors emerging for the items with the Eigenvalues of more than 1 (see Table 2). To make a decision about the true number of factors, the Scree test, a more reliable source, was run. Using Scree test, it was not clear how many components for further analysis should be retained (see Figure 1); therefore, the researchers conducted parallel analysis.



**Figure 1.** Scree Test of the Items of Academic Favoritism Questionnaire

To be sure about the number of factors, Parallel Analysis was conducted as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Results of Parallel Analysis of Academic Favoritism

Run MATRIX procedure:		
PARALLEL ANALYSIS:		
Principal Components		
Specifications for this Run:		
Ncases: 154		
Nvars: 40		
Ndatsets: 100		
Percent: 95		
Random Data Eigenvalues		
Root	Means	Percentile
1.000	<b>2.136</b>	2.260
2.000	<b>2.004</b>	2.090
3.000	<b>1.893</b>	1.979
4.000	<b>1.800</b>	1.872
5.000	<b>1.724</b>	1.781
6.000	<b>1.642</b>	1.705
7.000	<b>1.441</b>	1.649
8.000	<b>1.382</b>	1.570
9.000	1.452	1.513
10.000	1.395	1.440
11.000	1.340	1.385
12.000	1.289	1.336
13.000	1.237	1.277
14.000	1.190	1.232
15.000	1.140	1.187
16.000	1.096	1.134
17.000	1.052	1.086
18.000	1.011	1.046
19.000	.972	1.008
20.000	.932	.969
21.000	.898	.931
22.000	.860	.900
23.000	.824	.857
24.000	.790	.827
25.000	.753	.789
26.000	.719	.748
27.000	.684	.726
28.000	.652	.686
29.000	.625	.656
30.000	.591	.627
31.000	.559	.589
32.000	.529	.561
33.000	.498	.526
34.000	.467	.495
35.000	.435	.464
36.000	.407	.435
37.000	.373	.402
38.000	.344	.368
39.000	.309	.336
40.000	.265	.303
----- END MATRIX -----		

In order for determining the number of factors to retain for rotation, a combination of parallel analysis and minimum average partial methods were employed; it was revealed that eight factors would be sufficient for an optimal balance between comprehensiveness and parsimony, benefitting from these criteria. Therefore, the results of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) showed that the questionnaire identified eight factors.

### ***Conducting Confirmatory Factor Analysis for AFQ***

Most commonly used in statistics of social research, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), a particular form of factor analysis, is used to check whether measures of a construct are consistent with a researcher's understanding of the nature of that construct (or factor). The main objective of CFA is to check whether the data fit a hypothesized model which is generally based on a theory or previous research. Jöreskog and Sörbom (1996) developed the CFA which almost replaced older methods of measuring construct validity. The results of this analysis confirmed that the loaded eight factors fitted the model with 40 items. The factorial validity of the AFQ was tested using confirmatory factor analysis with Principal Components Analysis procedure. All the 40 items were included in the hypothesized model of the original version loading on eight distinct factors. In pursuit of the factorial structure verification of the questionnaire, the model was tested.

**Table 4:** Results of Total Variance Explained in CFA for Academic Favoritism Questionnaire

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	8.417	21.043	21.043	8.417	21.043	21.043	5.354
2	3.481	8.702	29.745	3.481	8.702	29.745	3.692
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7	1.440	3.600	55.338	1.440	3.600	55.338	2.637
8	1.389	3.472	58.810	1.389	3.472	58.810	2.259
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37	.114	.285	99.393				
38	.098	.245	99.638				
39	.090	.224	99.863				
40	.055	.137	100.00				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

**Table 5:** Communalities of the Items of AFQ

	<b>Initial</b>	<b>Extraction</b>
Q1	1.000	.581
Q2	1.000	.381
Q3	1.000	.642
Q4	1.000	.644
Q5	1.000	.636
Q6	1.000	.605
Q7	1.000	.597
Q8	1.000	.439
Q9	1.000	.573
Q10	1.000	.552
Q11	1.000	.507
Q12	1.000	.732
Q13	1.000	.536
Q14	1.000	.652
Q15	1.000	.725
Q16	1.000	.596
Q17	1.000	.694
Q18	1.000	.490
Q19	1.000	.528
Q20	1.000	.361
Q21	1.000	.537
Q22	1.000	.735
Q23	1.000	.527
Q24	1.000	.648
Q25	1.000	.716
Q26	1.000	.708
Q27	1.000	.678
Q28	1.000	.572
Q29	1.000	.596
Q30	1.000	.554
Q31	1.000	.611
Q32	1.000	.645
Q33	1.000	.569
Q34	1.000	.580
Q35	1.000	.494
Q36	1.000	.312
Q37	1.000	.557
Q38	1.000	.628
Q39	1.000	.786
Q40	1.000	.602
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		

The results of Table 5 indicate that all of the items fit the other items in its components. Low values (less than .3) could indicate that the item does not

fit well with the other items in its components. All of the items of the questionnaire had values more than .3.

**Table 6:** Pattern Matrix for Academic Favoritism

	Component							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Q39	.912							
Q40	.620							
Q25	.577							
Q38	.571							
Q37		.692						
Q33		.674						
Q19		.530						
Q5			.759					
Q6			.721					
Q30			.623					
Q17				.741				
Q34				.677				
Q27				.657				
Q16				.632				
Q31				.538				
Q35					.570			
Q26					.524			
Q22					.513			
Q7						.696		
Q2						.673		
Q9						.550		
Q11							.697	
Q4							.597	
Q29							.512	
Q23								.502
Q14								.547
Q15								.501

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.  
Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

The results of Table 6 show the factor loading of each of the variables. The items with factor loading less than .5 were deleted. Items 24, 3, 13, 20, 21, 18, 10, 32, 36, 1, 12, 8 and 28 had factor loading less than .5. Therefore, the final version of the questionnaire had 27 items in the form of statements. The main loadings on component 1 are items Q39, Q40, Q25, and Q38; the main loadings on component 2 are items Q37, Q33, and Q19; the main loadings on



component 3 are items Q5, Q30, and Q6; the main loadings on component 4 are items Q17, Q34, Q27, Q16, and Q31; the main loadings on component 5 are items Q26, Q35, and Q22; the main loadings on component 6 are items Q7, Q9, and Q2; the main loadings on component 7 are items Q11, Q29, and Q4; and the main loadings on component 8 are items Q14, Q23, and Q15.

The 27 items of the Academic Favoritism Questionnaire were subjected to Principal Components Analysis (PCA) using SPSS version 24. The suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed prior to performing PCA. Correlation matrix inspection showed the presence of many coefficients of .5 and above. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure value was .662 and a Bartlett's test reached statistical significance, which supported the factorability of the correlation matrix. For facilitating the interpretation of these eight factors, oblimin rotation was carried out. The rotated solution divulged the presence of simple structure, with factors demonstrating a number of strong loadings on each factor.

Principal Components Analysis revealed the presence of 12 factors with eigenvalues more than 1, explaining 71 % of the variances cumulatively. An inspection of the Scree test did not reveal a clear break after the factors. Therefore, parallel analysis was conducted. Only eight factors/components with eigenvalues more than the corresponding criterion values for a randomly generated data matrix of the same size were revealed by parallel analysis. The eight-factor solution elaborated a total of 58.8% of the variance. Reviewing the literature, the researchers called them damaging collaborative learning (component 1), educational inequality (component 2), teachers' biased attitudes (component 3), increased teacher-student conflict (component 4), language learning barriers (component 5), unfair students' treatment (component 6), negative learner experiences (component 7), and unhealthy academic atmosphere (component 8), as the consequences of academic favoritism.

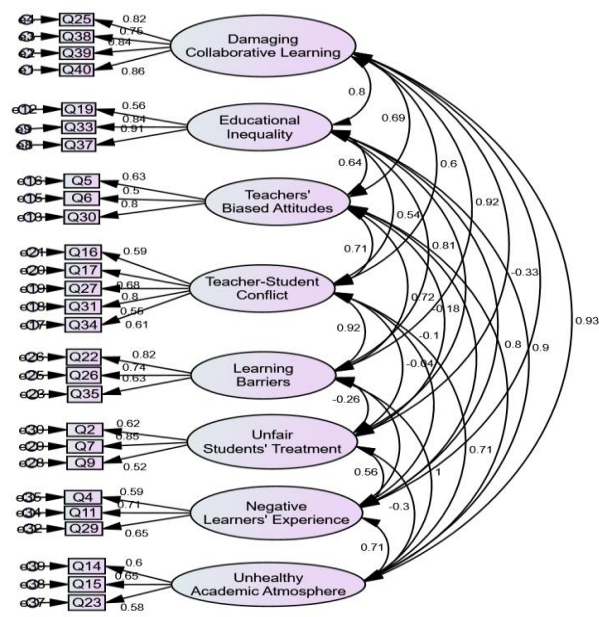


Figure 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis, the Structural Model

Table 7: The Goodness of Fit Estimation

Criteria		Threshold			Evaluation
		Terrible	Acceptable	Excellent	
CMIN	944.277				
DF	297				
CMIN/DF	3.179	> 5	> 3	> 1	Acceptable
RMSEA	.072	> 0.08	< 0.08	< 0.06	Acceptable
CFI	.908	< 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.95	Acceptable
NFI	.711	< 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.95	Acceptable
GFI	.909	< 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.95	Acceptable

In Table 7, the result indicated that five determiners are the ratio of CMIN-DF, goodness-of-fit index (GFI), normed fit index (NFI), comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The model fit indices are all within specifications. Therefore, CMIN/DF is 3.179

(spec.  $\leq 3.0$ ), GFI = 0.909 (spec.  $> 0.9$ ), NFI = 0.711 (spec.  $> 0.9$ ), CFI = .908 (spec.  $> 0.9$ ), and RMSEA = 0.072 (spec.  $< 0.080$ ).

**Table 8:** Final Version of Academic Favoritism Questionnaire after Removing the Problematic Items

No	Item	SD	D	U	A	SA
1	It is the policy of the institute that the students should always be treated in a rather fair manner.					
2	Students might sometimes feel embarrassed and disappointed if not favored by their teacher.					
3	It is a positive feature of a class not to be involved in any kind of unfair teacher-student relationship.					
4	Teachers should always avoid any bias when assessing academic excellence.					
5	Teachers are always capable of avoiding discrimination in the classroom.					
6	It is not always easy to treat students in an equal manner in the classroom.					
7	Treating students in an unequal manner could facilitate language learning.					
8	No interest in student learning can be seen if teachers display an unfair behavior in the classroom.					
9	A biased teacher-student relationship could always lead to other students' lack of enthusiasm in learning.					
10	Mutual understanding between teachers and their students results in students' passion for learning.					
11	Teachers' and students' mutual respect leads to students' academic success.					
12	Academic success achieved not for the students' abilities, but for their relationships can sometimes threaten educational equality.					
13	Treating some students in a more favorable manner might have damaging results in other students' achievements.					
14	Favoring special students in class without considering their abilities and qualities by giving higher scores should be wholly eliminated.					
15	Favoring special students in class decreases the degree of students' motivation for learning.					
16	Favoring special students in class makes other students uninterested in group-work.					
17	Teachers favoring a special group of learners in class might unwillingly cause successful students' failure in achieving their academic aims and objectives.					
18	The less a teacher favors a student or a group of students in class, the better he or she creates a healthier academic atmosphere.					

- 19 English language curricula and courses should be carefully planned free from biased attitudes.
  - 20 Injustice in class awakens actions full of revenge in academic contexts.
  - 21 Committed teachers never practice favoritism in their professional career.
  - 22 Students' life-long behaviors might be negatively affected by an unfair teacher favoring special students in the classroom.
  
  - 23 Unfair teachers favoring talented students in the classroom lead to unfriendly conflicts and rivalry among students.
  - 24 Teachers with a high degree of commitment to their professional career, rarely favor a special learner or a group of learners to others.
  - 25 Students' positive attitudes and feelings might be impaired by favoring attitudes of teachers.
  - 26 Students' engagement and interaction in the classroom are lowered by favoring behaviors of teachers.
  - 27 Learners are more enthusiastic for acquiring knowledge as long as they are kept away from favoring behaviors.
- 

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions of academic favoritism. To this end, a 27-item questionnaire was developed. The results of the study revealed that the scale involved eight components. The first component was how academic favoritism damages "collaborative learning". This finding is in line with the earlier arguments made by Tsai (2022) and Tutuncu et al. (2022). Tsai argued that one of the major negative dimensions of academic favoritism is influencing students' collaborative morale because it includes some students and excludes some others. Additionally, Tutuncu et al. stated that favoritism puts some students in the center and peripheralizes others. These results show that academic favoritism plays a central role in students' collaborative learning because some may feel that they are under-attended, which alienates them from their peers.

Educational inequality was another negative contribution of academic favoritism in the eyes of the teachers. Issues of educational inequality have been of central concern to favoritism scholars. In this regard, Hussain et al. (2013) and Hussain et al. (2020) have emphatically pointed out the

significance of establishing equality in educational terms. The major reason for the importance of equality is that teachers and students need to feel and experience an environment in which they are not treated unequally despite the prevalence of sources of inequality in the society. In this study, it was found that issues of inequality were a central concern of the teachers. This finding shows that when favoritism extends to educational work, it brings about negative effects that become key to teachers' perceptions and practices.

The third dimension of the teachers' perceptions pertained to the biased attitudes that teachers may develop due to favoritism. The point of bias has been highlighted by a number of previous researchers. For example, Yan et al. (2021) discussed how bias comes to shape both teachers' and students' perceptions of educational work when they are exposed to academic favoritism. In another study, Polat and Kazak (2014) reported similar findings in relation to teachers' and administrators' perception of how bias forms the major share in perceptions about favoritism. This finding shows that bias should be dominantly avoided in educational work because favoritism may bring about negative attitudes in students. This point was highlighted by Okcu and Ucar (2016), which is in line with the findings of the current study.

Another side of academic favoritism was the conflicts that it brings about for teacher-student relationships. Numerous studies have pointed out the significant role that academic favoritism plays in negative attitudes toward both teachers and students (e.g., Aydogan, 2009; Okcu & Ucar, 2016; Tsai, 2022). The results of the current study align with previous studies and show that teacher-student relationships form a major part of academic favoritism. This finding reveals that, as Moharib (2013) states, when teachers favor some students over others, they deprive those excluded ones from benefiting from teachers' positive behaviors. Thus, teachers should attend carefully to their behaviors in treating students because students could easily misinterpret teachers' behavioral treatments.

Learning barriers was a further side effect of academic favoritism. This finding has little been reported in earlier studies as most of them have pointed out the negative behavioral effects of this unfair treatment of

individuals (e.g., Argon, 2016; Geçer, 2015; Salcı, 2015; Karademir, 2016; Okcu & Ucar, 2016). This result shows that favoritism is not just limited to general dimensions of learning. The major reason for the emergence of learning barriers may be that when teachers prioritize some students over others, they marginalize those students, and thus, they can become less positively affected by learning facilities and affordances. This indicates that academic favoritism not only influences students' perceptions and engagement, but also comes to shape their learning process.

Unfair student treatment and negative experience were the other negative outcomes of academic favoritism as perceived by EFL teachers. Similar results have been reported in the literature by Garicano et al., (2005), Demaj (2012), Chandler (2012), and Moharib (2013). However, the findings reveal that L2 students are negatively affected by teachers' practice of favoritism, and generally treat each other unkindly when they are in persistent contact with forms of academic favoritism and experience unfair treatment of their teachers. Thus, EFL teachers should be mindful of how they behave towards their students as they are usually considered a role model and might be followed by students over time; this could negatively influence students' learning process and their future professional conduct and judgment.

The final dimension of academic favoritism was creating an unhealthy atmosphere. Yan et al. (2021) stated that organizational politics such as nepotism and favoritism have a predilection to abuse official operating principles, everyday normal routines and approaches solely in order to boost self-interests. Other scholars have also pointed out that favoritism is likely to create an atmosphere that complicates effective interpersonal relationships (e.g., Karahan & Yılmaz, 2014; Polat & Kazak, 2014; Tsai, 2022; Yan et al., 2021). It can cause dissatisfaction, insecurity and even revengeful desire among students. The results of this study add new findings to the literature by showing the central role of learners in teachers' perceptions of favoritism. Teachers and educators should realize how their favoritist behavior and practices could set examples for the learners, directly affect their learning

outcomes, and most importantly complicate teachers' work within language institutes and educational centers.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the present study and the results of statistical analyses showed that overall, eight underlying components or factors constitute teachers' perceptions of academic favoritism including damaging collaborative learning, educational inequality, teachers' biased attitudes, teacher-student conflicts, learning barriers, unfair students' treatments, negative learners' experience, and unhealthy academic atmosphere.

The outcome of the study adds to the literature by offering a novel scale that can be used by future researchers in their further investigation of and studies on teachers' favoritism behaviors and practices in academic contexts. The scale could be used across different educational contexts to provide a more comprehensive picture of prior research and understanding of this negative concept and its underlying components specifically in academic settings. The scale could also be used in teacher education programs to inform prospective instructors of the range of issues that account for favoritism behaviors affecting classroom environment and its impact on student learning. The findings of this study will benefit stakeholders in the fields of education, especially foreign language learning. Teachers, teacher educators, supervisors, institutional managers, education researchers and policy makers, school principals, and language learners could all learn from the outcomes of this study as they are now equipped with a valid and reliable research instrument to examine Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of academic favoritism. They can expand and use their knowledge of this concept and its different facets when trying to make sound decisions and carrying out their responsibilities in different educational settings.

The study had limitations that could be addressed in future research. first, the study was merely quantitative in approach. Future researchers can use a wider scope employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches and

collect data by means of different research instruments like interviews, observations, narrative techniques, and so on to gain a better and more in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions of academic favoritism. Considering the limited sample of the present study, it is recommended that future studies of this kind are conducted with a larger sample producing more rewarding outcomes.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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