Negative Labeling as a Crucial Psychological Variable in Teaching EFL Learners

Zari Saeedi*

Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics Allameh Tabataba'i University

Kobra Alavi

M.A. in TEFL, Allameh Tabataba'i University

Abstract

One of the psychological variables which may have a long-lasting effect on our life is labeling, and students' accomplishments might be severely undermined through the teacher's labeling. In spite of this issue, few studies have been carried out on the ramifications of labeling in the educational contexts, in general, and EFL classrooms, in particular. The current study is an attempt to investigate the occurrence possibility of negative labeling and how such labels eventually influence students' psychological/academic potentials. Since it was not possible to expose the students to the experience of negative labels in their real situations, the 100 high-school female participants of the study were asked to make predictions on social/academic success of a fictitious student who was labeled as dyslexic (Hunt, 2006). Besides, they were given a modified 11-item questionnaire (Mwania & Muola, 2013) about their experiences of being labeled. The participants were also asked to fill in the Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory (SEI) (1967) to determine if there is a relationship between their labeling experiences, their self-esteem and their reported academic achievements. The collected data was then processed using SPSS. The findings of the study indicate that teacher's negative labeling was significantly related with students' self-esteem, their academic potentials, and their future life/success/expectations. The study bears some significant implications for teachers' education since the findings show that the negative ramifications of labeling in EFL contexts should be taken into more serious consideration in teaching.

Authors' emails: saeedi.za@gmail.com; kobra.alavi@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

As Gold and Richards (2012) state, the main question to deal with in educational contexts is if teachers are supposed to label or not to label the learners. In other words, what difference do words really make? (Kurcinka, 1991). According to some psychologists (Becker, 1973; Tannenbaum, 1938), the use of the words to label can have both positive and negative effects on people's future life but despite this pivotal role not much research has been done to determine whether labels affect the students' academic achievements. In education the derogatory labels given by teachers/peers to the pigeonholed students based on their cultural/socioeconomic status may hinder their success forever and give them predisposed attitudes of their academic potentialities making them believe that they cannot overcome their problems (Nygard, 2011).

According to Ercole (2009), building positive relationships between teachers and students is significant and teachers' attitudes have an impact on students' involvement at schools, inevitably leading to the academic success. Ercole (2009) also adds that encouraging the students regularly raises their motivation and make them understand that they are great students, whereas "those who do not receive positive feedback inevitably abandon their motivation to do well" (p. 6). When teachers label the students negatively, it may hurt their confidence and cause a damage that might not be compensated. Some studies show that negative labeling is menace to high self-esteem (e.g., McDermitt, 1993; Mutie & Ndambuki, 1999). One of the most widely accepted definitions of self-esteem belongs to Branden (1995) who defines healthy self-esteem as the willingness to consider oneself as proficient to deal with the problems of his/her life and the feeling of being happy at the present status. According to Bandura et al. (1982), "self–concept determines our choice of activities; our intensity of efforts, and our persistence in the face of obstacles and unpleasant experiences, in part by reducing the anxiety that might interfere with performance of the activity" (as cited in Mwania & Muola, 2013, p. 1). As Bodenhausen, Galinsky, Groom, and Hugenberg (2003) believe:

> There is pain in being a member of any stigmatized group. We propose that this pain, in the form of threatened self-esteem, poorer work outcomes, and generally fewer chances to achieve desired life outcomes, is both elicited by and reinforced by the negatively valenced labels that are used to refer to these stigmatized groups. (pp. 250-251)

In line with the research on negative labeling and its relationship with such personality variables as self-esteem, the thrust of the present study is to investigate its existence possibility in classroom settings and how such labels eventually influence the students' personal/social/academic capability.

LITRETURE REVIEW

Teaching is one of the most important professions in the world because the future of the world can be determined by the future life of young learners. This makes the relationship between the teachers and students a crucial issue. Some teachers or parents label the children as good or bad individuals. Dweck, Davidson, Nelson, and Enna (1978) maintain that, "the performance of children is affected by the way teachers give them feedback about their performance" (as cited in Mwania & Muola, 2013, p. 2).

The students' cultural/socioeconomic status, previous academic achievements, evaluations received from the welfare agencies or psychological clinics are some elements that can cause a teacher to make a set of expectations leading to materialize those expectations/labels (Nygard, 2011). As McDermitt (1993, p. 269) asserts, "labeling is believed detrimental to self-esteem." Mutie and Ndambuki (1999) argue that pre-adulthood is the significant time of growing self-esteem. People with high self-esteem perform academically well. The positive and negative outlooks towards "self" signify the success and failure (Bandura et al., 1982, cited in Mwania & Muola, 2013). That is why the negative labels seem to play a crucial role in education (Cahape Hammer, 2012; Solvang, 2007).

An example of this was an experiment conducted by Rosenthal and Jacobson in a public elementary school in 1965. In this study the teachers were informed that "certain children could be expected to be 'growth spurters', based on the students' results on the Harvard Test of Inflected Acquisition" (1968, p. 16). In fact, there was no test and those children named as "spurters" were selected accidentally. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) strived to find out whether the changes in the teacher's expectation would make the changes in the students' achievements as well. The results of their experiment indicated that one individual's assumptions of another person's action may come "to serve as a self-

fulfilling prophecy (SFP)" (p. 20). This phenomenon is known as "Pygmalion effect", or "Rosenthal effect." They observed that, "when teachers expected that certain children would show greater intellectual development, those children did show greater intellectual development" (p. 85). In another study, Persaud (2000) investigates the reactions of an elementary school teacher and two students of immigrant status: Salma and Nawad. He aims on "othering" processes of the education system spotlighting on the disabled students who study at school.

In Riddick's (2000) study of dyslexia, she observed that many kids with dyslexia felt stigmatized "because of visible signs like their poor spelling or handwriting or because they always finished last not because of the label dyslexia" (p. 658). In other words, the students in her study were not directly labeled as dyslexic but they were indirectly stigmatized because of the effects dyslexia had on their ability and potentiality. Dyslexia is a kind of reading disorder with difficulties in reading quickly, spelling words, pronouncing words when reading aloud, writing words, "sounding out" words in the head, and understanding what one reads. Distinctly, the social/academic achievements are viewed as less possible for a dyslexic person (Hunt, 2006; Riddick, 2000) while many famous people who suffered from dyslexia such as Leonardo da Vinci and Hans Christian Andersen, etc. (Davis & Braun, 2010) proved the opposite and that even dyslexic people can have great achievements. Davis (1994, as cited in Solvang, 2007), an American dyslexia activist, points out that "dyslexics learn differently. They are picture thinkers, they are intuitive, and they have special gifts in seeing things in multidimensional perspectives. These abilities are above the average, but are seldom developed in school" (p. 88).

Hunt (2006) found that negative labeling often results in stigmatization and negative judgments. He claimed that the important differences subsist between the labels even to the "dyslexic students" and to those who "needed glasses." His research also suggests that not all labels are regarded equally and "the specific learning disability labels affect the perceptions of the labeled individual differently" (p. 11). The findings of Ercole's (2009) study indicate that labeling in the classroom setting is a real happening especially when the students shift to the more advanced levels of education. His study inspected how labeling theory can unavoidably be utilized in the classroom to explain the concepts of the "deviant academic vs. deviant criminal behavior" (p. 6).

With regard to the significance of the student-teacher relationship, Mwania and Muola (2013) maintain that the teachers' positive feedback increases the students' self-esteem and boosts them to work assiduously. In such studies the word label is considered as the key term borrowed from the social labeling theory. "Labeling theory is the main contribution of symbolic-interaction analysis" (Macionis, 2008, p. 225). According to Barrick, "the first seeds of labeling theory were planted by Tannenbaum (1938)'' and he was the first who presented the notion of "tagging" (2007, p. 7). Tannenbaum believes that the individual's identity may have been influenced by an initial tagging/labeling and "the person becomes the thing he is described as being'' (1938, p. 21). Becker's (1973) book "Outsiders" was also greatly effective in the evolution of this theory. He maintains that:

> One of the most important contributions of labeling theory has been to focus attention on the way labeling places the actor the circumstances which makes it harder for him to continue the normal routines of everyday life and thus provokes him to abnormal actions. (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951; Ray, 1961; cited in Becker, 1973, p. 179)

Most criminology scholars pay attention to the concept of labeling theory. Lemert, in particular, described this theory in 1951. He announced two kinds of deviance: primary deviance and secondary deviance. The first one is a criminal act and the second one is the society's response towards the individual who has been named as being delinquent (Lilly, Cully, & Ball, 2007, c.f. Ercole, 2009; Rosenberg, 2010). In literature negative labels can sometimes lead to more serious consequences even though the cases are rare in education. Formal labels have an impact on the repetitive actions of crime since such labels change an individuals' self-esteem ultimately to a situation that s/he starts to pigeonhole him/herself as a criminal (Ebrahimi Ghavam, 2010; Shoemaker, 1944) and "s/he becomes what people said and act accordingly" (Knutsson, 1977, p. 10) . The three similar notions of "Self-fulfilling Prophecy (SFP), Pygmalion Effect (PE), and the recent concept of Expectancy Effects (EE)", have been widely known in educational psychology literature (McGrew & Evans, 2004, p. 11). The concept of the studies on negative labeling has then been dragged to the educational settings. Lilly, Cully, and Ball (2007) (cited in Ercole, 2009) believe in the presence of negative labeling in the educational environments and

explain that former teacher judgment can be "problematic" particularly for those students who are biased negatively. Those individuals who are labeled as poor students are under the pressure of this label and cannot get a chance to vindicate and convince their teachers that they can be good students (Ercole, 2009).

Providing a list of old negative labels compared with the new exciting ones (Table 1), Kurcinka (1991) maintains that "words really do make a difference and negative labels can also contain favorable contradiction" (pp. 30). Although some Iranians (e.g., Ebrahimi Ghavam, 2010) have studied the effects of negative labeling in criminology, few research studies, as far as the researchers of this study have examined, have been carried out to investigate its effects in an academic community. This provided the incentive for the researchers of the present study to take one step in this regard and investigate the effect of negative labeling on the students' psychological status and academic achievements in the EFL contexts.

Table 1. The list of redesigned labels prepared by Kurcinka (1991, p. 30)

Old Negative Labels:	New Exciting Labels:
Demanding	holds high standards
Unpredictable	flexible, a creative problem solver
loud	enthusiastic and zestful
argumentative	opinionated, strongly committed to one's goals
stubborn	assertive, a willingness to persist in the face of obstacles
noisy	Curious
wild	Energetic
extreme	Tenderhearted
inflexible	Traditional
manipulative	Charismatic
impatient	Compelling
Anxious	Cautious
explosive	Dramatic

picky	Selective
Distractible	Perceptive

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of the present study is to investigate the existence possibility of negative labeling in English learning classroom settings and its relationship with such personality variables as self-esteem and how such labels eventually influence the students' personal/social/academic capability. The questions addressed in this study are:

1. To what extent is negative labeling related to the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners' self-esteem (i.e. in students who experienced negative labeling in comparison to those who did not).
2. How is negative labeling related to the students' academic potentials?
3. How do the learners express their expectations about the future social/academic condition/success of a fictitious student who was labeled dyslexic or reading disability and was named 'Ali'?

In other words, the problem the researchers were trying to focus on was whether labeling has an unpredictable influence on the students' educational/social lives.

METHOD

To fulfill the purpose of the study and to provide answers to the formulated research questions, a variety of instrumentation was utilized following a detailed procedure, which is elaborated on below by first describing the research participants.

Participants

The participants of the present study were 100 high-school students from Alborz Industrial city (located in Qazvin province of Iran) that had registered in the summer English make-up classes which were held for the students' enhancement of English language proficiency. Due to some limitations of the study, the researchers were forced to collect the data from just females within the age range of 15-16 years who had finished studying at the first grade and were all of different levels of language

proficiency based on the school English tests and evaluation system. It should be noted that the used tests were standardized by the English Language Teaching Department of the Ministry of Education. To assure the maximum cooperation of the participants they were informed that they would receive course credit for taking part in the research study.

Instrumentation

In order to scrutinize if there is a compatibility between the participants' labeling experiences, their self-esteem and the level of their academic achievements in the English course and the scores obtained from their reported formative/summative evaluation scores (mainly mid-term and final scores with the maximum of 20) four types of instruments have been utilized in the present study. As mentioned earlier, the English tests used by the school had been standardized by the English Language Teaching Department of the Ministry of Education.

The first instrument utilized in the study was the self-esteem Scale. As Mwania and Muola assert, "persons with high self-esteem are more effective and do better at a given level of intelligence than persons with low self-esteem" (2013, p. 1). That is why the researchers first checked the students' self-esteem using: the modified version of the Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory (SEI) (1967), which has been modified for Iranian school contexts by Ravansanji psychometrics institute (www.ravansanji.com), with 58-item and the maximum score of 58 and the reliability of 0.70.

It should be noted that even though the Coopersmith questionnaire was developed some years ago, it has widely been used in some recent studies such as Shahani Yeylagh et al. (2008) and Mwania and Muola (2013) to determine the level of the participants' self-esteem. The reason for administering the self-esteem questionnaire was that this variable might be affected by the negative labeling experience as highlighted in a number of studies (e.g., Dweck et al., 1978; Mwania & Muola, 2013).

The second instrumentation was the Crowne and Marlowe Social Desirability Scale (1960) with 33 items (maximum score: 33) and the reliability of 0.70. Similar to Coopersmith's (1967) questionnaire, this scale has also widely been used in some studies (e.g., Nordholm, 1974; Hunt, 2006; Sarbescu et al., 2012) i.e. even some scholars whose research projects have been carried out recently (e.g., Sarbescu et al., 2012) considered this scale as an efficient instrument. In addition, some

studies have shown that the internal consistency of this scale is quite acceptable, producing a coefficient of 0.73 and its reliability calculated in a number of investigations (e.g., Hunt, 2006; Nordholm, 1974; Sarbescu et al., 2012) is presented in Table 3 below. The intension behind using this instrument was to test the hypothesis that those students who score high on this scale may indeed be those who would rate the fictitious student (with the pseudonym of Ali who was introduced in the fourth used instrument of this study) more positively. The review made by King and Bruner (2000) (c.f. Sarbescu et al., 2012) highlights the point that, "social desirability bias plays an important role in suppressing or obscuring relationships among variables, as well as in producing artificial relationships among independent and dependent variables" (p. 38). As Mick (1996, cited in Sarbescu et al., 2012) asserts, "socially desirable responding is the tendency of individuals to make themselves look good according to current cultural norms" (p.38). In other words, "People who score high on this trait tend to present a favorable image of themselves by not giving an honest answer, especially on controversial or sensitive issues (e.g., race, attitudes)" (Saebescu et al., 2010, p. 38). According to Saebescu et al., "one of the mostly used instruments for measuring social desirability is the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (SDS) (1960)" (2010, p. 38). The third used instrument was an 11-item (with maximum score of 11) modified questionnaire (Mwania & Muola, 2013) (r = 0.71) about the students' personal experiences of being labeled. The reason for using the version which was modified by Mwania and Muola (2013) was that the items were matched and much geared towards the intended local context and the students' culture and age by providing more elaborating questions; and the forth instrumentation was the Hunt (2006) questionnaire (with 13 items) assessing the predictions the students made on the social/academic success of a fictitious student/teenager was the fourth used scale in the study. The character or the fictitious student introduced in this scale was named 'John' in the original version of Hunt's questionnaire but the researchers decided to change the name to 'Ali' in order to match it with the local culture/context. The fictitious student was indeed labeled as 'dyslexic' in the questionnaire distributed among the students in order for them to predict Ali's academic/social success in future by answering the related five questions (4, 6, 8, 10, 11). In fact, since it was not ethically possible to expose the students to negative labeling experience, they were asked to fill in a questionnaire on the story of the fictitious student

(Ali) who was labeled negatively. It should be noted that all the questionnaires were translated into Persian by two experts and in order to assess the validity of the translation procedure, the back translation technique was utilized. In the process of administering the questionnaires, the researchers briefed the participants about the whole process and provided them with any help they needed in understanding, responding and filling in the questionnaires. In order to compute the reliability coefficient of the questionnaires, (except questionnaire 4 which demanded the participants to justify their answers in one or two sentences), the Kuder-Richardson formula was utilized on 40 randomly selected cases of the collected data. Table 2 below displays the list of the instruments which the researchers used in the study and Table 3 shows the reliability coefficient of these instruments.

Table 2. The list of the instruments used in the study

Names of the Questionnaires	Number of items
1.Coopersmith (1967)	58
2. Crowne and Marlowe Social Desirability Scale (SDS) (1960)	33
3. Modified Questionnaire based on Hunt (2006)	13
4. Modified Questionnaire based on Mwania and Muola (2013)	11

Table 3. Kuder-Richardson reliability coefficients on variables measured in the questionnaires of the present study

Variable	Coefficient
Social Desirability	0.70
Self-esteem	0.70
Teacher's Negative Labeling	0.71

Data Collection Procedure

At the beginning stage of the study, the participants were asked to fill in the self-esteem questionnaire adapted from Coopersmith's (1967) scale revised by the Psychometrics Center including 58 yes/no statements. In this questionnaire in order to verify the responses provided by the learners, eight items which were determined by the developer of the questionnaire in its rating Key, were considered to check the honesty of

the participants and actually acted as a lying poll. That is, if students scored 7 or 8, they would be excluded from the analysis pertaining to self-esteem hypotheses. The cut-off point of this questionnaire is 23 (i.e. higher scores indicate higher self-esteem). They were also asked to fill in the 33-item questionnaire of Crowne and Marlowe Social Desirability Scale (1960) for which some researchers (e.g., Hunt, 2006) hypothesize that "those individuals who scored high on this scale would rate the fictitious student more positively in all conditions than the students with average or low scores" (p. 10). That is, the student who scored high tend to evaluate the fictitious student more positively which may not be based on real situations while those students who had average or low scores think more realistically and do not evaluate the fictitious student in an extreme positive way.

The cut-point was considered 16, meaning that the individuals who scored 16 and above were categorized as maintaining the high social desirability. Since it was not possible to expose the students to the experience of negative labeling in their real situations, they were asked to explain what they thought about the story of the future social/academic life of a fictitious student who was labeled as dyslexic. The students were provided with a brief explanation in Persian that dyslexia is a kind of reading or writing disability (dyslexic students sometimes may read reversely i.e. instead of 'saw' they read 'was'). Before the students were asked to explain about the future of the fictitious student, they were provided with a description of a fictitious student and his present life academic/social status (based on Hunt, 2006).

After reading the description in the questionnaire about the fictitious student (Ali), the participants were asked to complete another questionnaire (Hunt, 2006) which included a number of items related to their demographic/factual information as well as their judgments about the fictitious student's future. 'Ali' was the chosen name for the fictitious student and was evaluated in two aspects: the academic success and the social success. Ali's academic success was determined by his total future success (as asked in question 4: How successful do you think Ali will be in the future?) as well as his ability to graduate high school with honors (question 6: How likely is it that Ali will graduate high school with honors?). Ali's social success was determined by question 8 (How well do you think Ali is liked by his peers?) and question 10 (How liked is Ali by his teachers?).

After each judgment was made, the participants were asked to justify their answers in a sentence or two. Each item was rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 'very unsuccessful' to 'successful', 'very uninterested' to 'interested', or 'very preventive to progress' to 'does not impede the progress.' As a measure to identify the teachers' labeling of the students, they were also given an 1-item modified questionnaire (Mwania & Muola, 2013) about the students' own experiences of being labeled. The highest score was 11 and the cut-point was considered 6 by the developers of the questionnaire. It means that the individuals who scored 6 and above were considered in the high negatively-labeled group and those who scored below 6 in non-negatively labeled one. The negative labeling variable was in fact assessed through two questionnaires. The first one was based on Hunt's (2006) study and the other one which was administered at the very end of the present study was carried out based on Mwania and Muola's (2013) research and the students were supposed to fill in the questionnaire with respect to their own negative labeling experience.

The questionnaires were left at the disposal of the participants at the school setting and the researchers also ignored the gender variable since they did not have an access to the male participants. Due to the restrictions at school with regard to the time pressure and the educational system syllabus, the researchers were not allowed to provide instructions for the participants of the four classes under the study. Therefore, the researchers asked for the students' scores gained in their English language learning course during the mid-term and final English exams. The students received a course credit for participating in this research study and the administration of all the four questionnaires took about 45 minutes.

Data Analysis

The statistical analyses i.e. the descriptive and inferential calculations were performed using SPSS (version 22) after the data collection procedure was carried out. With regard to the inferential statistics, the Pearson correlation and regression analyses were performed and for the descriptive statistics such parameters as the means, standard deviations, and percentages were determined. The research findings are presented in the three following sections: the descriptive results, the main outcomes related to the research questions, and the secondary findings.

RESULTS
Descriptive Results

Table 4 displays the summary of the descriptive findings including the standard deviations, the means, minimums and maximums of the social desirability, self-esteem, teacher negative labeling, and the students' English midterm/final/total average scores. The reason for considering the mid-term, final and the total scores was to cross check the reliability of the findings and the effect of passing time. The mean score of the social desirability variable, as demonstrated in Table 4 below, is 21.78 while the score of the individual who completely pretend to be socially desirable i.e. the maximum score is 31. Moreover, the corresponding mean score for self-esteem is 29.17 and for the teacher negative labeling is 4.36.

Table 4. Descriptive findings of the variables of the study

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Social Desirability	21.78	4.69	9.00	31.00
Self-esteem	29.17	9.94	10.00	49.00
Teacher's Negative Labeling	4.36	3.13	0.00	11.00
English Mid-term Score	14.16	3.28	7.00	20.00
English Final Score	13.32	3.38	5.00	20.00
Total Average Score	12.69	2.37	7.00	17.45

The participants were asked if they had the same experiences as the described fictitious student. The results indicate that in response to question 13 (Have you ever had the similar experience like 'Ali'?) of Hunt (2006) questionnaire, 23 out of 100 participants stated that they had the same problems as the fictitious student and had been negatively labeled. In addition, by utilizing the self-esteem lying poll questions mentioned earlier, the researchers distinguished those students' responses which were not answered honestly. Then these individuals' responses were excluded from the sample (eleven out of 100 students who scored 7 and above were excluded) because their answers in the Social

Desirability Scale showed that they had the tendency to look good and therefore were not honest enough in their responses. That is, the students with too high social desirability scores were excluded from the study since they evaluated the fictitious student in an extreme positive way.

Main Results

With regard to the third research question (How do the learners express their expectations about the future social/academic condition/success of a fictitious student who was labeled dyslexic and was named 'Ali'?), Pearson correlation test was performed to investigate whether there is a relationship between negative labeling and the individuals' expectations about the fictitious student's future social/academic condition. Table 5 below shows the amount of the correlation coefficient between the two variables, which makes it evident that the correlation coefficient between negative labeling and the individuals' expectations on the fictitious student's future academic condition variable, social, and social/academic condition variables assessed through the Social Desirability Questionnaire (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960) is negative.

While this relationship with the social condition and social/academic condition is statistically significant (sig. = 0.00 and 0.00, respectively), it is insignificant in the case of the academic condition. In addition, the correlation coefficients, as demonstrated in Table 5 below, are (-0.19) for the academic condition, (-0.63) for social condition, and (-0.88) for social/academic condition. The results of the analyses revealed that when Ali, the fictitious student, was presented as dyslexic, this label had a considerable impact on the participants' perceptions of his likelihood of graduating with honors (as stated in question 11: Do you think that dyslexia disability would be very preventive to Ali's academic progress?). Moreover, the findings of the analysis of the participants' perceptions on Ali's social success with his peers (questions 8) showed that the label significantly influenced the participants' expectations.

Table 5. Pearson correlation of the participants' negative labeling and their expectations on fictitious student's academic condition, social condition and social/academic condition

Variables	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level
Academic Condition	-0.19	0.06

Social Condition	-0.63	0.00
Social/Academic Condition	**-**0.88	0.00

The influence of the negative labeling variable on the participants' expectations about the fictitious student's future social/academic condition which had statistically significant correlation was assessed by using the regression analysis. The result of the regression analysis indicate that the relationship between the social condition, social/academic condition, and the teacher negative labeling is meaningfully significant (sig. = 0 .00, df =3). Table 6 below demonstrates the test statistics, the significance of the coefficient and regression coefficient about the relationship between the social condition and social/academic condition and negative labeling. It is observed that the regression coefficient is meaningful and negative. The coefficient of 0.35 for social condition means that the individuals will suggest an unpleasant (0.35) future social condition for the fictitious student if the students' negative labeling increases for one unit. The coefficient for social/academic condition with the same interpretation is 0.42 i.e. for each unit of increase in the negative labeling of the participants, the extent for their unpleasant prediction of the fictitious student's social/academic condition will be 0.42.

Table 6. Regression coefficient of the study findings on fictitious student's future social condition and social/academic condition

Variables	Regression Coefficient	Test Statistic	Significance Level
Social Condition	-0.35	-4.14	0.00
Social/Academic Condition	-0.42	-4.96	0.00

The data was also analyzed by taking the participants' social desirability scores into account. The result showed that the social desirability variable did not significantly affect on any perceptions of the individuals. The following Table 7 demonstrates the correlation coefficient between the individuals' social desirability scores and their judgments on the fictitious student's social/academic condition. It is observed that the

correlation coefficient between individuals social desirability variable and their judgments on the fictitious student's future academic condition, social condition and social/academic condition variables is not statistically significant. That is, there is no meaningful relationship between the individuals' judgments on the fictitious student's future academic condition, social condition and social/academic condition variable and their social desirability scores.

Table 7. Pearson correlation of individuals' social desirability scores and their judgments on the fictitious student's future academic condition, social condition and social/academic condition

Variables	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level
Academic Condition	0.06	0.52
Social Condition	0.04	0.68
Social/Academic Condition	0.03	0.73

The correlation coefficient test was performed to investigate the relationship between the amount of the students' self-esteem and their success in their English course (mid-term/total average scores) and the teacher negative labeling. Table 8 below presents the findings of the amount of these variables' correlation coefficient. The analysis demonstrates that the correlation coefficient between the students' scores and their self-esteem and teacher negative labeling is negative. Whereas the relationship between the students' self-esteem, academic achievement (English mid-term/total average scores) and negative labeling is statistically significant, the relationship between the English final scores and the teacher's negative labeling is not significant.

Table 8. Pearson correlation of students' self-esteem, academic achievement (English midterm/final/total average scores), and teacher's negative labeling

Variables	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level
Self-esteem	-0.57	000.
English Midterm Scores	-0.21	0.03
English Final Scores	-0.13	0. 20
Total Average Scores	-0.24	0.01

The multiple regression analysis was performed to investigate the amount of each variable effect for all the factors which had significant correlation with the teacher's negative labeling. The result of regression analysis show that the relationship between self-esteem, English midterm and total average scores and teacher negative labeling is statistically significant (sig. = 0.00, F= 9/23) and the amount determined by the coefficient model is 0.36. The following Table 9 shows the regression variables and significance coefficient of the performed statistic test about the relationship between self-esteem, academic achievement (English mid-term/final/total average) variables and teacher negative labeling. The findings indicate that the correlation coefficient for all the variables is negative i.e. there is a negative relationship between self- esteem, academic achievement and teacher's negative labeling. The regression coefficient of self-esteem variable and the teacher's negative labeling is significant with the coefficient 0.57 i.e. the individuals' self-esteem will decrease (0.57) if the researchers add one unit on the variable of the teacher's negative labeling.

Table 9. Regression coefficient of students' self-esteem, academic achievement (English mid-term/total average scores) and teacher's negative labeling

Variables	Regression Coefficient	Test Statistic	Significance Level
Self-esteem	-0.57	-5.71	0.00
English Midterm	-0.10	-0.82	0.41
Total Average	-0.08	-0.59	0.55

The Secondary Findings of the Research

The present research study compared the negatively labeled and non-negatively labeled students' self-esteem and social desirability in order to provide an answer to the first research question: To what extent is negative labeling related to the EFL learners' self-esteem (i.e. in students who experienced negative labeling in comparison to those who did not). Table 10 and Figure 1 below demonstrate the means and standard deviations of the two groups of the negatively labeled and non-negatively labeled students' self-esteem and social desirability. An independent t-test was performed, which displayed that the non-negatively labeled

students' self-esteem is significantly higher than the negatively labeled ones (Sig= 0.00). In addition, the negatively labeled students portray less social desirability than the non-negatively labeled students.

Table 10. Comparison between negatively labeled and non-negatively labeled students' self-esteem and their social desirability

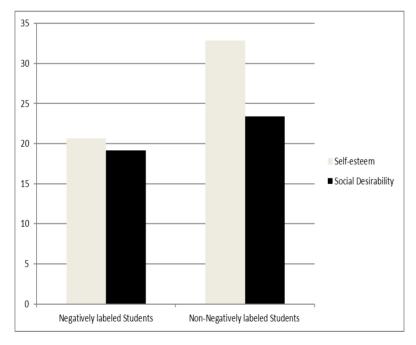| Variables /Group	Mean & SD (Negatively Labeled Students)	Mean & SD (Non-Negatively Labeled Students)	T-Test Analysis Result
Self-Esteem	20.62±7.60	32.87±6.98	t= 7.11 Sig= 0.00
Social Desirability	19.38±4.23	23.25±4. 23	t= 4.70 sig= 0.00

Figure 1. Comparison between negatively labeled and non-negatively labeled students' self-esteem and their social desirability

Table 11 and Figure 2 present the means and standard deviations of the English scores of the two groups of the negatively labeled and non-negatively labeled students. In terms of the second research question

(How is negative labeling related to the students' academic potentials) and according to the independent t-test analysis, it is observed that the non-negatively labeled students' midterm and total average scores are higher than the negatively labeled ones since the t-test index for the difference between the two groups with regard to their self-esteem (0.00) and their social desirability (0.00) were significant. However, the final scores in both groups showed no statistically significant differentiation.

Table 11. Comparison between negatively labeled and non-negatively labeled students' English midterm/final/total average scores

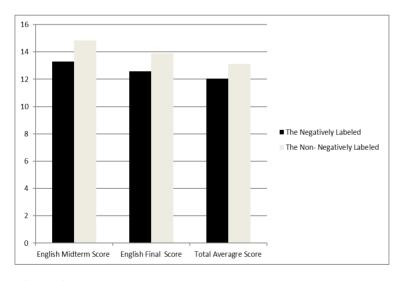| Variables / group	Mean & SD (Negatively Labeled)	Mean & SD (Non-Negatively Labeled)	Test Result
English Midterm Scores	13.07± 3.48	14.31±2.99	t= 2.28 sig = .02
English Final Scores	12.57±3.83	13.75.±2.97	t= 1.85 sig = .06
Total Average Scores	12.04 ±2.25	13.11±2.16	t= 2.33 sig = .02

Figure 2. Comparison between negatively labeled and non-negatively labeled students' english midterm/final/total average scores

DISCUSSION

The findings of the current research support and are in line with the outcomes of the previous study that supports the idea that "labeling leads to negative evaluations" (Hunt, 2006, p. 11). As the findings of the present research study demonstrated in Tables (8) and (9) show, negative labeling can play a negative role in the students' psychological status and self-esteem (sig. = 0.00). That is, with regard to the first research question (To what extent is negative labeling related to the EFL learners' self-esteem), the result of the data analysis procedure indicates that the negative relationship between the two variables i.e. negative labeling and self-esteem is statistically significant with a high index considering the selected probability level of .05 in the present study. In terms of the second research question (How is negative labeling related to the students' academic potentials) the findings of the study show that the students' negative labeling experience can affect their academic achievement since there is a statistically significant negative relationship between the two variables (negative labeling and academic achievement) with regard to the students' English mid-term/total average scores (sig. = 0.02) in the studied EFL contexts. As the findings of the current study demonstrated in Tables (5), (6), (7) show and with regard to the third research question (How do the learners express their expectations about the future social/academic condition/success of a fictitious student who was labeled dyslexic and was named 'Ali'?), the relationship between the negative labeling and the individuals' expectations on the future social/academic and also social conditions of a negatively labeled fictitious student is negative with the significance index of 0.00 (as demonstrated in Table 6).

Therefore, all teachers need to be educated on how to avoid using destructing terms in classrooms. Hallahan and Kauffman (1994) believe that labeling ruins self-esteem and motivation to learn, and Stainback and Stainback (1987) assert that "it is detrimental and leads to the de-individualization and stereotyping of students" (p. 67).

One of the results of being negatively labeled is "alienation" which has been investigated notably in some criminological studies. As the people do not feel convenient to be next to a physically disabled person, they worry the nearness to an individual that is labeled as criminal (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996, cited in Ercole, 2009). Ercole (2009) asserted that, "isolation" as another consequence of negative labeling can

be resulted in. Not only criminals but the students who do not act well academically also feel that they do not belong to their own community and even successful students may suffer from the feelings of academic inability.

Briscoe, Arriaza, and Henze (2009) advocate that having some degree of "self-monitoring is the first stepping stone in the path to ridding our daily talk of deficit labels'' (p. 144) and substituting positive language in order to operate properly. Kurcinka (1991) believes that positive words that parents employ to define their children as "creative, curious, and zestful" can construct good sense of self-esteem. Positive words can create positive images in our kids; strengthening them to change their wrong actions into pleasing ones. "In other words, kids who like themselves, behave themselves'' (2009, p. 32).

As Vygotsky (1978) maintains, "teaching and learning is a social affair, neither is possible without other people" (c.f. Bunch, 1999, p. 33). That is, the learning ability is reinforced through the feedback we receive from other people in the social context. As Nygard (2011) asserts, students can get a better view of themselves if knowledgeable teachers use positive terms and quit using harmful labels. They can forgive and accept that a classroom difficulty is not only connected to personal value but also to behavior if the failed students experience even one small step of success by their kind teachers. "Success, too, can beget success. Focusing on the past successes can motivate a child to strive for the future ones" (par. 2).

The aim of the educational system is preparing a parallel chance for the students to be educated and making them ready for future life, so the teachers do not have the right to ruin the students' potential to be successful by using the negative labels. As Dewey (1916) notes, "the school was to be more than a place for transmitting knowledge; it was to offer hope for creating a better, more just and equitable world" (cited in Cassidy & Jackson, 2005, p. 435). Lee (1996) maintains that the teachers' high expectations can block the students' motivation and make them encounter failures over and over and "as a result, vicious cycles are created and prophecies of teachers are self- fulfilled'' (c.f. McGrew & Evans, 2004, p. 22).

As Ercole (2009) states, teachers are more eager to offer extra "time and energy" to those students who display the capability of being successful but this does not mean that those who do not participate in class activities are not talented, may they need more supporting to get rid

of the fear of the new environment so as to perform academically well. Compatible with the mentioned literature on negative labeling, the researchers of the present study found negative labeling a noticeable barrier to the path of the students' academic success and made an attempt to examine the occurrence possibility of negative labeling in the EFL classroom setting and make inquiry with regard to its resultant effect on the students' academic potentials.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Since the effect of negative labeling issue on the students learning potentiality has not received much attention in EFL contexts, the researchers of this study mainly strived to identify the impact of the teacher negative labeling on the students' academic achievements in English classrooms. The findings of the study support the claim that the relationship between the negative labeling and the individuals' expectations on a fictitious student's future social/academic condition is negative. However, contrary to what was hypothesized, dyslexia was not viewed as negatively as it was claimed. That is, the fictitious student was viewed socially and academically unsuccessful but the relationship between his academic condition and negative labeling was not so significant (sig. = 0.06) while in Hunt's (2006) study this label was viewed academically so negative (perhaps because dyslexia was not explained adequately for the participants of his research). However, the participants of this study were provided with a detailed description of the dyslexia disability since as Hunt (2006) guesses, "it is possible that familiarity with the disability plays an important role in individuals judgments'' (p. 11).

As mentioned earlier, in order to assess the effect of the teacher negative labeling on the students' academic performance, an 11-item modified questionnaire based on Mwania and Muola (2013) which was related to their personal experiences of being negatively labeled and the way the teacher responded to the academic performance of the students was used. As the results indicate the amount of the effect of the teacher's negative labeling at the beginning months of the school year was more noticeable since the students' self-esteem and their English midterm/total average scores were lowered due to the negative labels used by the teacher.

However, what is particularly significant about this finding is that the teacher's negative labeling had not a large impact on the students' final scores. The rationale behind this might be this idea that after passing some time, the students were accustomed to their teacher's negative labeling accepting the negative label as their actual characteristics and probably that is why the correlation coefficient between negative labeling and their English final score was not statistically significant.

It was also found that social desirability had no effect on the participants' judgments but the individuals who showed higher self-esteem had more tendency to portray social desirability. In addition, it was later found out that 23 participants of the present research study mentioned in one of the items of the questionnaire that they themselves actually suffered from dyslexia even though studying the dyslexic students was not a focus of the current study, it has some important messages to the researchers in our field. It shows that the teachers may not be aware of the number of dyslexic students in their classes and keep labeling them negatively, which might have some ramifications and impede those students' success.

The findings of the present study bear some implications not just for teachers and those in charge of teacher education but also for educational psychologists and evaluation/testing researchers since it draws the teachers' attention to the importance of their interpretation of the tests results and the labels they use in judging the students. In addition, the findings can be helpful in future studies to investigate the difference between the dyslexic individuals' achievement and that of the non-dyslexic ones who are labeled negatively. The results of the negative labeling studies, including the present one, as Mwania and Muola (2013) point out, can also help teachers "to boost students' level of self-esteem and lead to the improvement of academic performance" (p. 1). According to them, negative labeling studies could be helpful for the Ministry of Education to observe the essentiality of instructing more teacher solicitors to reinforce the positive self-esteem.

In sum, the findings of the present study highlight the importance of the formal and informal assessment of the students in the ELT contexts since the teachers might use some inappropriate labels to address the students based on the formal tests/evaluation results or even the informal questioning of the students, which may have some negative effects on their self-esteem and academic achievements. As Rist (1977) maintains, "a major emphasis has been placed upon the role of [academic]

institutions in sorting, labeling, tracking, and channeling persons along various routes depending upon the assessment the institution has made of the individual" (p. 155). This shows the significance of responsibility of the teachers, in general, and language teachers, in particular, in making the future of the world by paying more attention to the type of labels they use in addressing the learners.

Bio-data

Zari Saeedi received her Ph.D. from the British University of Trinity College and is an assistant professor at Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran. She has taught various B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. courses in different universities, taken part in different national/international conferences, and presented/published papers on a range of topics including neuro/psycholinguistics and brain functioning, language learning and culture, technology-assisted language learning, and Role and Reference Grammar Theory of linguistics.

Kobra Alavi received her M.A. from Allameh Tabataba'i University and has been teaching different B.A. courses at the English Language Department of Imam Khomeini international university. Her main area of interest is psycholinguistics. She has also presented on applied linguistics issues in different national conferences.

References

Bandura, A., Reese, L., & Adams, N. E. (1982). Microanalysis of action and fear arousal as a function of differential levels of perceived self-efficacy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 43*, 5-21.

Barrick, K. (2007). *Being labeled a felon and its consequences for recidivism: an examination of contingent effects*. Doctoral Dissertation, Florida State University.

Becker, H. S**.** (1973). *Outsiders: Studies in sociology of deviance*. New York: The Free Press.

Bodenhausen, G., Galinsky, A.D., Groom, C., & Hugenberg, K.(2003). The reappropriation of stigmatizing labels: implications for social identity. *Research on Managing Groups and Teams, 5*, 221-256.

Branden, N. (1995). *The six pillars of self-esteem*. New York: Bantam.

Briscoe, F., Arriaza, G., & Hnze, R.C. (2009). *The power of talk: how words change our lives.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Bunch, G. (1999). *Inclusion: How to*. Toronto: Inclusion Press.

Cahape Hammer, P. (2012) Effects of disability labels on student with exceptionalities. In Yetty A. Shobo, Anduamlak Meharie, Patricia Cahape Hammer, and Nate Hixson, *West Virginia Alternate Identification and Reporting Program: An Exploratory Analysis.* Available at: http://wvde.state.wv.us/research/reports2012/EvaluationofAIR2011Final06 2812.pdf

Cassidy, W., & Jackson, M. (2005). The need for equality in education: An intersectionality examination of labeling and zero tolerance practices. *McGill Journal Of Education*, *40*(3), Winter.

Coopersmith, S. (1967). *The antecedents of self-esteem*. San Francisco: Freeman.

Crowne, D. P., & Marlowe, D. (1960). A new scale of social desirability independent of Psychopathology. *Journal of Consulting Psychology, 24*, 120-125.

Davis, R. D., & Braun, E. M. (2010). *The gift of dyslexia: Why some of smartest people can't read… and how they can learn*. Retrieved from http://www.enbookfi.org

Dweck, C. S., Davidson, W., Nelson, S., & Enna, B. (1978). Sex differences in learnt helplessness. The contingencies of evaluative feedback in the classroom; and an experimental analysis. *Developmental Psychology, 14*(3), 268-276.

Ebrahimi Ghavam, S. (2010). *Nazariehaye bezehkari: arzyabi va tabein raftarhaye bezehkarane.*Tehran: entesharate daneshgahe NAJA.

Ercole, J. (2009)**.** *Labeling in the classroom: Teacher expectations and their effects on students' academic Potential*. Retrieved from *Honors Scholar Theses*. Paper 98.

Gold, M. E., & Richards, H. (2012). To label or not to label: The special education question for African Americans. *Educational Foundation, 26*(1-2), 143-156.

Hallahan, D.P & Kauffman, J.M. (1994). Toward a culture of disability in the aftermath of Deno and Dunn. *The Journal of Special Education*, *27*(4), 496-508.

Hunt, F. G. (2006). The effects of labeling and social desirability on perceived success of a learning disabled student. *Journal of Undergraduate Psychological Research, 1*, 9-12.

Knutsson, J. (1977). *Labeling theory: A critical examination*. Stockholm: Scientific Reference Group, Sweden.

Kurcinka, M. S. (1991). *Raising your spirited child*. New York: HarperCollins.

Lemert, E. (1951). *Social pathology: A systematic approach to the study of sociopathic behavior*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Lilly, J., Cully, F., & Ball, R. (2007). *Context & consequences.* London: Sage Publications.

Macionis, J. J. (2008). *Sociology*. London: Pearson Education.

McDermitt, R. (1993). The acquisition of a child by a learning disability. In S. Chaikin & J. Lave (Eds.), *Understanding practice* (pp. 269-305). New York: Cambridge University Press.

McGrew, K. S., & Evans, J. (2004). *Expectations for students with cognitive disabilities: Is the cup half empty or half full? Can the cup flow over?* (Synthesis Report 55). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

Mutie, E. K. & Ndambuki, P. (1999). *Guidance and counselling for schools and colleges*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.

Mwania, J. M. & Muola, J. M. (2013). Teachers' Labeling of students and its effect on Students' Self-concept. *International Journal of Education and Research, 1*(10), 1-8.

Nordholm, L. A. (1974). A note on the reliability and validity of the Marlowe-Crowne scale of social desirability. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 93, 139-140.

Nygard, D. (2011). *Negative labels: How do they impact the academic success of a student?* Retrieved from http://voices.yahoo.com/negative-labels-they-impact-academic-success-4149237.html

Persaud, N. (2000). *Labeling: Its effects on labeled students.* Presented at International Special Education Congress: Including the Excluded. University of Manchester 24th-28th July.

Ray, M. (1961). The cycle of abstinence and relapse among heroin addicts. *Social Problems, 9,* 132-140.

Riddick, B. (2000). An examination of the relationship between labeling and stigmatization with special reference to dyslexia. *Disability & Society*, *15*(4), 653-667.

Rist, R. C. (1977) On Understanding the Processes of Schooling: The Contributions of Labeling Theory. *Exploring Education* (2nd ed.), Allyn & Bacon, 2001: 149-157.

Rosenberg, M. (2010). Lemert, E.M.: Primary and secondary deviance. In F. Cullen & P. Wilcox (Eds), *Encyclopedia of criminological theory* (pp. 551-553). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. (1965). *Pygmalion in the classroom*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Sarbescu, P., Rusu, S., & Costea, I. (2012). The Marlowe-Crowne social desirability scale in Romania: The development of a 13 item short form. *Romanian Journal of Experimental Applied Psychology, 3*(2), 37-44.

Shahani Yeylagh, M.*,* Mikaeili, N., Shekarkan, H., & Haghigh, J. (2008). Barresi shio koodak azari va pishbini ein motaghayer az tarigh salamat omoomi valedein, sazgari, ezat nafs va amalkard tahsilie danesh amooz va motaghayerhaye jameiatshenakhti dar danesh amoozan dokhtare azardideh va adie doreh rahnamaei shahre ahvaz. Majaleye Oloom Tarbiati va Ravanshenasi, Doreye sevom, sale chaharom, shomare 1 va 2, 167-194.

Shoemaker, D. J. (1994). *Theories of delinquency: An examination of explanations of delinquent behavior.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Solvang, P. (2007). Developing an ambivalence perspective on medical labelling in education: case dyslexia. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, *17*(1-2), 79-94.

Stainback, W., & Stainback, S. (1987). Integration versus co-operation: A commentary on "Educating children with learning problems: A shared responsibility." *Exceptional Children, 54*, 66-68.

Tannenbaum, F. (1938). *Crime and the community*. New York: Columbia University Press.