



# AZERBAIJANI ADAPTATION OF THE PERCEIVED SCHOOL EXPERIENCE SCALE: EXAMINING ITS IMPACT ON PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND SCHOOL SATISFACTION

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## Abstract

*School experience holds significant importance in the realm of educational environments in the 21st century. Thus, the aim of this study was to adapt the Perceived School Experience Scale for application among Azerbaijani adolescents and examine the interconnections between school experience, psychological distress, and school satisfaction. Data were collected from 1095 Azerbaijani adolescents (635 female and 456 male). Throughout the adaptation process, confirmatory factor analysis, assessments of criterion-related validity, and reliability were conducted. Additionally, the associations between school experience, psychological distress, and school satisfaction were explored through mediational analysis. The results from the confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated that the questionnaire encompassed 14 items, featured three school-related protective factors, and displayed an acceptable fit. The scale has been found to have satisfactory reliability coefficients for both its factors and the overall score. Furthermore, the findings established that school experience exhibited positive correlations with school satisfaction while demonstrating negative associations with psychological distress. Finally, the results unveiled that psychological distress played a mediating role in influencing school satisfaction through the pathways of school experience. These findings collectively suggest that the Azerbaijani version of the Perceived School Experience Scale boasts commendable psychometric properties.*

**Keywords:** school experience, school satisfaction, psychological distress, scale adaptation

## Introduction

Nowadays, schools are one of the most important institutions that are affected by the rapid economic, social and technological development. For example, a student in the United States spends about 1,180 hours a year at school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). For this reason, schools are perceived as institutions where students spend a lot of time, which affects their sense of value and significantly affects their lives through the experiences they gain (Aliyev, 2018; Baker et al., 2003). To measure school outcomes, the focus is mainly on academic indicators (grades, attendance rates) and specific behaviors. School satisfaction refers to students' cognitive evaluations of their school experiences (Jiang et al., 2013). School satisfaction has a huge impact on students' quality of life, and schools need to be supportive environments where students feel good and safe (Huebner & McCullough, 2000). Regarding school, students' sources of social support are their teachers, classmates, and

parents (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Since teachers and classmates are the groups with which the closest relationships are formed at school, the social support received from these individuals affects school satisfaction (Danielsen et al., 2009). As it is known, teachers are one of the important sources of social support for students at school (Tian et al., 2016). For this reason, it is noted that developing supportive relationships between teachers and students and creating a safe school environment will help students be healthy and happy (Samdal et al., 1998). As a result, students with high school satisfaction described their teachers as always supportive and caring (Coelho & Dell’Aglia, 2019). School life covers not only academic development, but also the social interactions, out of school activities, and general school environment that adolescents are exposed to on a daily basis (Rustamov et al., 2023). School life also offers a rich social environment in which adolescents interact with peers and develop social skills such as cooperation, communication, empathy, and conflict resolution to shape their social development (Wentzel, 2022). Interactions that take place at school help to form friendships, develop social networks and shape their personalities (Brown & Larson, 2009). In addition, the school environment itself plays an important role in the emotional development of students. A supportive and inclusive school climate can promote positive emotional well-being and mental health (Meehan et al., 2017).

Schools are the most important and predominant social experience sites for supporting students' academic learning activities, as well as meeting their growing social, emotional, and behavioral functions. Additionally, determination to attend school and strive to graduate, academic achievement, developing social skills, and maintaining mental health are cornerstones of these experiences (Butcher & Ball, 2012). When the works are analyzed, it is observed that there are 3 main foundations of school practices. These are school commitment, academic motivation, and academic pressure. In their research, Fredricks et al., (2004) examined school attachment in three different aspects. These aspects are classified as behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. Behavioral aspect refers to the potential of students to participate in school activities. From this perspective, it is clear that the behavioral aspect has an observable content. The emotional aspect shapes the attitude towards other students in the school environment. It has been found that students with high emotional attachment have a positive attitude towards school events. Also, students show enthusiastic and interesting behavior during the lesson. Cognitive engagement represents students' willingness to perform mentally. The mental processes shown against difficult and challenging topics represent cognitive connection (Demir, 2023). The process of students thinking about why and how they learn is also attributed to cognitive connection (Arastaman, 2009). This suggests how and why a student with a high cognitive aspect of school attachment may use effective coping strategies. Research has also shown that high school attachment is negatively associated with depression, anxiety, and stress (McGraw et al., 2008). Booker (2006) found that school engagement had a positive relationship with school satisfaction and a negative relationship with depression. In some research studies, it has been shown that there is a negative relationship between school attachment and school burnout in adolescents (Pilkauskaite-Valickiene et al., 2011). According to these results, students with high levels of school engagement will enjoy school activities and show persistence in their educational activities. Otherwise, in case of low school attachment, students will not want to go to school and will show negative feelings towards school, feeling a sense of unwillingness towards educational activities at school. Academic pressure is the exemplary practices of school staff, including students and teachers, to meet achievement standards and ensure academic achievement (Lee & Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2004). In other words, it is the pressure that students face in the educational environment or for the future. There are several components of academic pressure. At the top of these are undoubtedly the exams within the school, transition exams to secondary education and higher education (Oral et al., 2005). Students trying to cope with the physical and psycho-social-emotional problems brought by adolescence also cause the

formation of educational pressure. Academic motivation, which includes concepts such as general student interest, participation, and joy of learning, is an important aspect of student success and students' feelings about school (Long et al., 2007). Research shows that high academic motivation is positively related to academic achievement (Eccles et al., 2006; Ratelle et al., 2007). Also, research results show that higher academic motivation is associated with higher skill awareness and lower levels of corresponding anxiety (Gottfried, 1990).

### *Research Problem*

Academic activities represent an important stage in a person's life and involve a complex interaction of various factors that can significantly affect the general well-being and psychological state of people. At the center of this complex network are the constructs of academic engagement, academic pressure, academic motivation, school satisfaction, life satisfaction, and distress that shape the overall educational experience. Findings regarding the relationship between these concepts provide valuable insights into the interrelationship of these variables and contribute to our understanding of the factors that influence overall adolescent well-being. The observed positive correlation supports existing research that individuals who are satisfied with their school experiences tend to exhibit higher life satisfaction (Gilman & Huebner, 2003; Suldo et al., 2008). The present findings not only promote academic achievement but also contribute to students' overall quality of life, and this is centered on the constructs of academic engagement, academic pressure, academic motivation, school satisfaction, life satisfaction, and distress that shape the educational experience. Numerous studies have shed light on the complex relationships between these constructs, and how they intersect and influence students' mental health and academic results (Kutuk, 2023; Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2014; Suldo et al, 2011). However, the study also revealed a significant negative relationship between school satisfaction and stress, suggesting that lower levels of school satisfaction are associated with higher levels of psychological distress among adolescents. This finding is consistent with research emphasizing the role of academic stressors and negative school experiences in the development of emotional distress among students. Interestingly, the relationship between school satisfaction and life satisfaction appeared to be partially mediated by distress. This suggests that the effect of school satisfaction on life satisfaction is partially mediated by its effect on psychological distress.

In this research, the Perceived School Experiences Scale (PSES) was aimed to be adapted for use in Azerbaijan, which has a unique cultural and educational context. Its successful adaptation for Azerbaijan has the potential to improve students' perceptions of school experiences in this specific cultural environment. As with the adaptation of the scale in other countries, the process of adapting it for use in Azerbaijan included several main steps, including translation, cultural evaluation, and psychometric evaluation. Psychometric assessment is the cornerstone of scale assessment. Similarly, exploratory factor analysis was conducted, and internal consistency was assessed to examine the reliability and underlying factor structure of the adapted PSES in this study (Anderson-Butcher et al, 2012).

### *Research Focus*

The aim of this research was to adapt the Perceived School Experience Scale so that it may be applied in the Azerbaijani setting. This research explores a model that studies the intermediary functions of psychological distress in the connection between school experience and school satisfaction.

### *Research Aim and Research Questions*

In this study, the aim was to adapt the Perceived School Experiences Scale (PSES) for use in Azerbaijan, which has a unique cultural and educational context. Its successful adaptation for Azerbaijan has the potential to improve students' perceptions of school experiences in this specific cultural environment. As with the adaptation of the scale in other countries, the process of adapting it for use in Azerbaijan included several main steps, including translation, cultural evaluation, and psychometric evaluation. The research questions (RQ) are provided below.

RQ1. Is the PSES adapted for use with Azerbaijani adolescents a valid measurement tool for assessing bullying?

RQ2. Does the adapted PSES Scale demonstrate sufficient reliability?

RQ3. What is the relationship between school experience and psychological distress, and school satisfaction?

RQ4. Does psychological distress mediate the relationship between school experience and school satisfaction?

## **Research Methodology**

### *General Background*

The study that was conducted for this study made use of a survey design that was cross-sectional as its methodology. A number of steps were required in order to modify the Perceived School Experiences Scale so that it could be used with Azerbaijani adolescents. These steps included translation, back-translation, expert reviews, and pilot testing. Using a sampling method known as convenience sampling, data were obtained from 1095 adolescents in Azerbaijan. Analyses including confirmatory factor analysis, criterion-related validity, and reliability were carried out in order to conduct the evaluation of the modified questionnaire's psychometric properties.

### *Sample*

The study encompassed a sample of 1,894 teenagers ranging in age from 11 to 16 years (with a mean age of 12.78 years and a standard deviation of 1.58). In order to increase the representativeness of the sample, a large amount of data was obtained. Within the cohort of teenagers under study, a total of 635 individuals self-identified as female, representing 58% of the overall population. Conversely, there were 456 participants who identified as male, constituting 42% of the sample. In relation to their social connections with fellow students inside the educational context, a considerable percentage of participants, specifically 64.3%, expressed contentment with their peer relationships ( $n = 704$ ). In contrast, a proportion of 19.0% of participants expressed a degree of partial satisfaction ( $n = 208$ ), and 16.7% of participants reported a sense of unhappiness with their peer interactions ( $n = 192$ ). In relation to their interpersonal connection with educators, a significant proportion of the respondents had a favorable attitude, with 66.9% ( $n = 727$ ) indicating contentment. In the study, it was found that 15.0% of participants expressed a level of partial contentment ( $n = 164$ ), whilst 18.4% indicated dissatisfaction with their connections with teachers ( $n = 192$ ).

School psychologists helped participants access an online survey instrument to collect data. This study used convenience sampling to pick schools that were easily accessible and fit the study's goals. School psychologists recruited adolescents from their schools and offered online survey links. Before starting the online survey, the study's aims were explained, and all

participants gave informed consent. After this, the survey began with a section for personal information and then included the study's assessment scales.

### *Instrument and Procedures*

The Perceived School Experience (PSES) was developed by Dawn Anderson-Butcher et al., (2012). The scale consists of three protective factors related to the student's school experiences. These factors include: School connectedness (e.g., I have meaningful relationships with teachers at my school), Academic press (e.g., My school values students' learning) and Academic motivation (I have enjoyed my school experience so far) PSES is composed of 14 items (e.g., Decisions at my school always focus on what is best for learning.) Items were assessed on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree).

The High School Satisfaction Scale was prepared by Ernesto Lodi, Diego Boerchi, Paola Magnano and Patrizia Patrizi (2019). The scale consists of 20 items (e.g., I am satisfied with taking this school). Items estimate students' satisfaction at school using the 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all and 5 = completely). The Internal consistency of this scale ranges from 0.818 to 0.926. The High-school Satisfaction Scale (H-Sat Scale) assesses five dimensions of school satisfaction: appropriateness of choice (CH), quality of school services (SE), relationships with classmates (RE), effectiveness of study habits (ST) and usefulness for a future career (CA).

Children and Adolescents Psychological Distress Scale (CAPDS-10) - was developed by De Stefano (2022). There are 10 items in this scale (e.g., I felt down, sad or unhappy). This scale evaluates distress using a 4-point Likert scale. (0=absolutely not and 3 = almost every day). The internal consistency of the Children and Adolescents Psychological Distress Scale was satisfactory with a Cronbach's alpha = .86.

### *Translation Procedure*

The translation technique adhered to a standardized approach, as outlined by Beaton et al. (2000) recommendations. At the outset, a pair of bilingual translators undertook the task of independently translating the original English version of the Perceived School Experiences Scale (PSES) into Azerbaijani. Subsequently, a thorough examination of the two translations was undertaken, and any inconsistencies were thoroughly examined and resolved through collective agreement. A full assessment of the translated version was conducted by a committee comprising translators and the research team. During this process, required alterations were made to ensure cultural appropriateness and enhance the understandability of the items. The revised Azerbaijani version was thereafter submitted to a process of back-translation into English. This task was carried out by another translator who possessed multilingual proficiency but was intentionally kept unaware of the original rendition. The version of the text that was translated back into its native language was subsequently compared to the original text, and any differences or inconsistencies were promptly examined and remedied. The aforementioned meticulous procedure ultimately led to the development of the ultimate Azerbaijani iteration of the PSES, which was later subjected to psychometric evaluation.

### *Data Analysis*

The aim of the study was to assess the psychometric properties of the PSES, including its structural validity, reliability, criterion-related validity, and predictive validity. The assessment of structural validity was conducted by employing Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) with the use of maximum likelihood estimation. A comprehensive analysis was conducted on several goodness-of-fit indices, which encompassed the chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) to the degree of freedom (df)



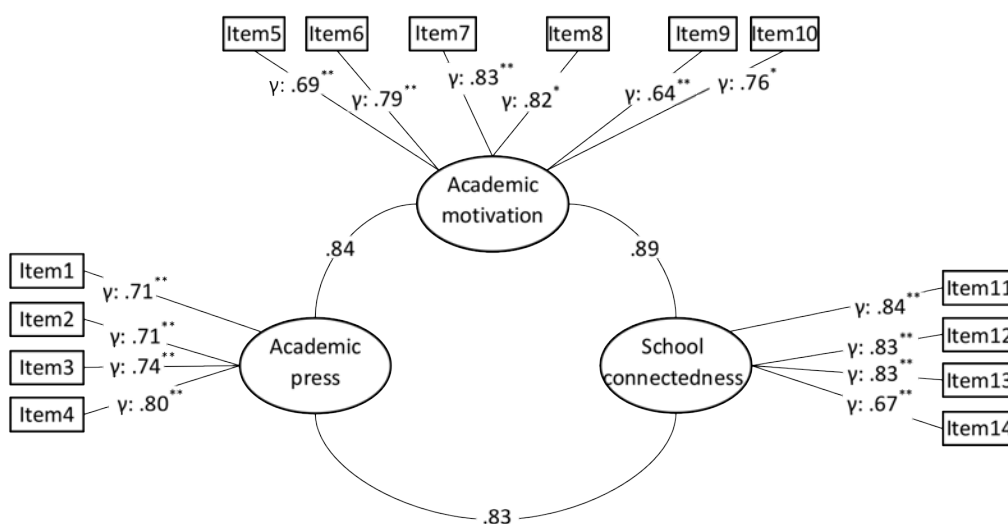
ratio, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Normed Fit Index (NFI), the Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Tucker Lewis Index (TLI), the Standardized Root Mean Square Residuals (SRMR), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA).

The scale's internal consistency was assessed by calculating Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , McDonald's omega, and Guttman's lambda coefficients. In order to examine the criterion-related validity, the present study sought to analyze the associations between scores on the PSES and child-adolescent psychological distress, and high school satisfaction utilizing correlational analysis. The present study employed a mediation model, namely model 4 of the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2018), to investigate the potential mediating role of psychological distress in the relationship between perceived school experience, as assessed by the PSES, and high school satisfaction.

### Research Results

The structural validity of the Azerbaijani PSES was assessed, and the results indicated a strong three school-related protective factors, including school connectedness, academic press, and academic motivation. The validity of this structure was supported by the significant factor loadings seen for all items in the Azerbaijani PSES. The model's statistical fit indices were found to provide additional support for its validity. Specifically, the  $\chi^2(74, N = 1091) = 341.47, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 4.61$ , indicated that the model was statistically significant. In addition, the model demonstrated strong conformity based on a range of goodness-of-fit measures, such as Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .971, Normed Fit Index (NFI) = .964, Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = .965, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = .965, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) = .028, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .057. It is imperative to acknowledge that the four elements incorporated in the model exhibited noteworthy interconnections, so offering supplementary substantiation of the structural soundness of the Azerbaijani PSES.

**Figure 1**  
*Standardized factor loading of the Perceived School Experience Scale – Azerbaijan*



The scale's internal consistency dependability was rigorously assessed by the use of three unique coefficients: Cronbach's alpha, McDonald's omega, and Guttman's lambda. The findings repeatedly show a high level of reliability. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient produced

a result of .939, indicating the scale's high level of dependability. Furthermore, the McDonald's omega coefficient, which is well recognized as a dependable metric, produced a result of .940. In addition, Guttman's lambda coefficient yielded a value of .942, providing confirmation that the items comprising the scale successfully assess the identical underlying construct. Collectively, these results provide substantial support for the strong validity of the PSES (see Table 1 for further information).

**Table 1**  
*Reliability coefficients for PSES*

	Overall	Academic press	Academic motivation	School connectedness
Cronbach $\alpha$	.939	.830	.888	.868
McDonald $\omega$	.940	.829	.889	.873
Guttman $\lambda_6$	.942	.791	.874	.841

In order to assess the criterion-related validity of the three factors in the PSES, namely school connectedness, academic press, and academic motivation, the study utilized two distinct measures: the Child and Adolescent Psychological Distress Scale and the High School Satisfaction Scale, as detailed in Table 2. It is imperative to acknowledge that all correlation analyses yielded statistically significant results ( $p < .001$ ).

As anticipated, there was a consistent negative association seen between the characteristics contributing to perceived school experience and psychological distress, with correlation coefficients ranging from  $r = -.379$  to  $-.485$ . On the other hand, these characteristics had significant positive associations with high school satisfaction (ranging from  $r = .680$  to  $.793$ ). The results of this study highlight the criterion-related validity of the Azerbaijani adaptation of the PSES.

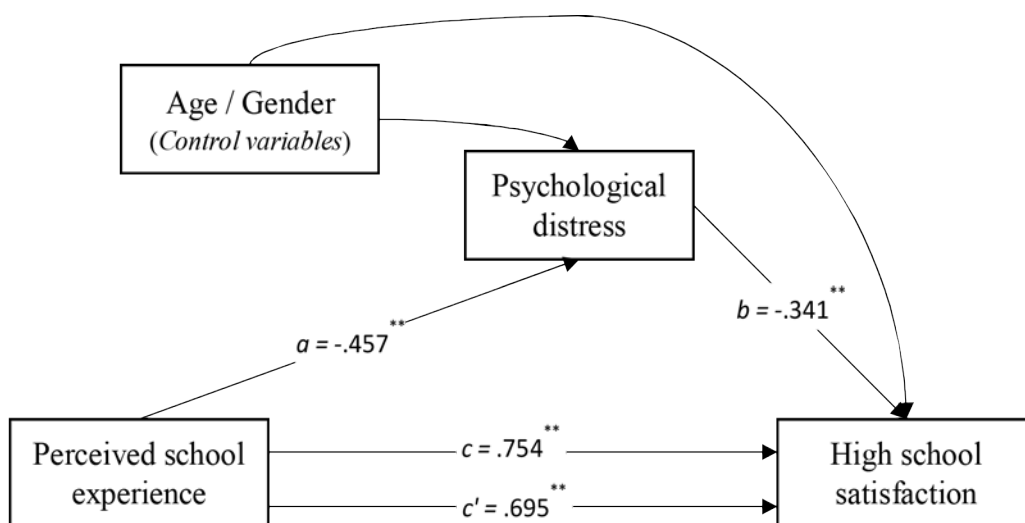
**Table 2**  
*Criterion-related Validity of the PSES*

Variable	Psychological distress	High school satisfaction
Overall Perceived School Experiences Scale	-.482**	.793**
Academic Press Scale	-.379**	.680**
Academic Motivation Scale	-.485**	.734**
School Connectedness Scale	-.436**	.754**

Note. \*\* $p < .001$

The analysis also encompassed an inquiry into whether psychological distress functioned as a mediation variable in the association between perceived school experience and high school satisfaction, as illustrated in Figure 2. Bootstrap studies were conducted to assess the mediation effect, revealing that psychological distress played a significant mediating role in the relationship between perceived school experience and high school satisfaction. The Bootstrap coefficient was found to be .085, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .051 to .120. Furthermore, it was determined that there is a statistically significant relationship between perceived school experience and psychological distress ( $\beta = -0.457$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating a direct connection between these two factors. In a similar vein, the study found a strong relationship between perceived school experience and high school satisfaction ( $\beta = .754$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Figure 2**  
*Predictive Validity of Perceived School Experience*



## Discussion

Measuring the school experience will help us identify weaknesses and strengths in schools' education and teaching systems. (Meehan et al., 2017). This information helped us understand what schools and teachers could do to improve the quality of education (Tian et al., 2016). Applying the school experience scale and clarifying problems can also support students' self-expression. This will help students to participate in the lesson more enthusiastically and to create thoughts that are important. Therefore, a special assessment tool is needed to measure the school experience of students, which affects both school and general life sphere issues. The School Experience Scale is a tool used worldwide. It has been adapted to different languages and its validity and reliability have been previously investigated (Anderson-Butcher et al, 2012). In this study, the psychometric characteristics of students in Azerbaijani schools were evaluated. For this purpose, the study was conducted, and certain results were obtained. The aim of the study is to adapt the school experience scale to the Azerbaijani language, to evaluate its validity and reliability.

The psychometric results of the version of the scale adapted to the Azerbaijani language supported the original version of the method, as well as the versions adapted to different countries and languages, and were similar to them. Similar results were obtained during the adaptation of the school experience scale to other languages. Also, the conducted analysis revealed that the structure of the school experience scale consisting of 14 items showed satisfactory results in terms of internal consistency and reliability.

The school experience scale (14 items) was psychometrically tested with different methods and samples. Various analyzes were conducted to reveal the internal consistency of the school satisfaction scale. During the analysis of the results of the study, the level of reliability was found to be above 0.70 when the items of the school experience scale were analyzed. Nunnally and Bernstein noted that Cronbach's alpha above .70 is satisfactory (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). When checking the internal consistency of the items of the scale, McDonald's omega and Gutmann's Lambda analyzes were also performed. Cronbach's alpha .934, McDonald's omega .940, Gutmann's lambda .942 were determined in this study.



Child and Adolescent Psychological Distress Scale, and High School Satisfaction Scale were used as supporting scales to ensure the conformity and criterion-related validity of the school experience scale. Reliability analysis of the school experience scale indicated that school experience was a significant indicator of school satisfaction and distress during adolescence (Loukas et al., 2006). It was found that students who rate their school experience more highly have higher levels of life satisfaction and high school satisfaction, as well as lower levels of distress symptoms and other negative results (Wilson, 2004). Furthermore, the relationship between life satisfaction, high school satisfaction, and school experience suggests that these constructs are all important indicators of a person's overall subjective well-being.

### **Limitation**

Although this study provides valuable insights, there are several limitations that should be considered. The present study focused only on high school students, limiting the generalizability of the results to other educational levels. Developmental and cognitive differences between high school students and those in elementary or higher education may affect the applicability of the adapted PSES to other age groups. Although the adaptation of PSES for Azerbaijan makes a significant contribution to the field of education research, these limitations emphasize the need to interpret the results with caution. Future research should aim to address these limitations and further validate the adapted scale in different educational contexts within Azerbaijan.

### **Conclusions**

Study results show that in addition to students' classroom experiences, the general atmosphere of the school has a great influence on student success and satisfaction. For this reason, it is important that schools implement different ways that better meet the individual needs of students and encourage student participation. Study shows that the role of teachers is also very important. In conclusion, this study highlights that the educational experience is at the center of the educational system and that collaborative activities aimed at providing a better educational experience are critical to students' success and overall well-being. Developing schools to meet the needs of students and providing educators with more resources and support to support student development will lay the foundations for a better future.

### **Ethics**

Ethical concerns held significant importance throughout the course of this research project. The study followed the ethical guidelines outlined in the Helsinki Declaration. Before commencing the study, ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Psychology Scientific Research Institute, Baku, Azerbaijan (ID = T-355).

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### **Declaration of Interest**

The authors declare no competing interest.

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