

Designing a Qualitative Model of Factors Influencing Academic Competence among Female Secondary School Students: A Thematic Analysis Study Based on Triangulation

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The paragraph describing expert recruitment through snowball sampling should provide greater detail about the initial seed participant and the structure of the referral process. The manuscript should report how many referral chains were initiated, whether the experts came from all three named universities, and what measures were taken to prevent network homogeneity. Beginning with only one prominent scholar may generate a highly interconnected sample with similar theoretical orientations. The authors should explain how disciplinary variation across educational psychology, curriculum studies, educational administration, and school counseling was ensured.

The paragraph describing data analysis through Braun and Clarke's six-phase procedure should provide a more transparent account of the coding team and decision-making process. It is unclear whether one researcher performed all coding or whether multiple researchers participated. If coding was conducted by one researcher, the manuscript should describe peer debriefing, audit procedures, or external review used to challenge interpretations. If multiple coders were involved, the authors should explain how disagreements were managed without inappropriately reducing thematic analysis to inter-rater reliability. The role of MAXQDA 2022 should also be described accurately as data-management support rather than as an analytical agent.

The findings paragraph reports “487 initial codes, 87 preliminary themes, 4 overarching dimensions, 18 main themes, and 39 subthemes,” but Table 1 appears inconsistent with these totals. The table contains 6 individual main themes, 6 educational main themes, 5 family main themes, and 4 social main themes, yielding 21 main themes rather than 18. Likewise, the displayed subthemes appear to total substantially more than 39. The authors must conduct a complete audit of the thematic hierarchy, reconcile all numerical inconsistencies, and ensure that the abstract, methods, findings, tables, model, and discussion report identical counts.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The paragraph describing the experienced teachers should define the criterion of “successful educational and developmental performance” more objectively. Indicators such as high evaluation scores, university entrance examination success, or anecdotal reports of improved student motivation are conceptually different and may privilege teachers working in selective or resource-rich schools. Please report who assessed teacher eligibility, whether standardized thresholds were used, and whether school principals’ recommendations could have introduced selection bias. It would also be useful to explain whether teachers taught the same students or schools relevant to the phenomenon under investigation.

The participant characteristics section should provide additional demographic and professional information necessary for assessing the transferability of the findings. For experts, the manuscript should report disciplinary specialization, institutional affiliation, gender, and years of research experience. For teachers, relevant information includes age range, highest academic degree, subjects taught, school district, employment status, and experience in educational counseling or administrative roles. Because the model specifically concerns female students, the authors should also explain whether participants had sustained experience with adolescent girls across different socioeconomic and cultural contexts.

The paragraph stating that theoretical saturation occurred after the twelfth expert interview and seventeenth teacher interview requires methodological clarification. Within reflexive thematic analysis, “theoretical saturation” is not always considered an appropriate endpoint because the method does not assume that themes are objectively exhausted. The authors should either justify their use of theoretical saturation or adopt a more suitable concept such as information power, meaning saturation, or sufficient conceptual depth. They should also describe how saturation was assessed, who made the decision, and what evidence showed that the final interviews did not generate substantively new insights.

The paragraph identifying “three high-level educational policy documents and 42 credible Iranian and international scholarly sources” needs a reproducible document-selection procedure. Please specify the databases searched, search terms, publication period, languages, inclusion and exclusion criteria, screening process, and quality-appraisal method. Without these details, the documentary component resembles an unsystematic literature review and cannot be evaluated as an independent data source. The authors should also distinguish policy documents from scientific articles during analysis because these sources differ substantially in purpose, authority, evidentiary status, and discourse.

The paragraph describing the researcher-developed content analysis form indicates that it was organized around predetermined concepts such as motivation, self-regulated learning, teaching practices, and family support. This procedure may have constrained the inductive character of the analysis and increased confirmation bias. Please explain how the checklist was developed, reviewed, and revised, whether it was pilot-tested, and how the researchers ensured that unexpected concepts could be coded. The manuscript should also clarify whether the same coding framework was applied to interviews and documents or whether source-specific coding was first conducted before integration.

The paragraph presenting the semi-structured interview guide should explain how the questions were validated. Please report whether the guide was reviewed by qualitative-methodology specialists, piloted with individuals resembling the target participants, or modified after initial interviews. Some questions explicitly prompt participants to discuss “individual, educational, family, and social domains,” which may have predetermined the four-dimensional structure later reported as an

emergent finding. The authors should acknowledge this potential framing effect and clarify which themes emerged independently of the interview prompts.

The paragraph reporting that interviews lasted “approximately 60 to 90 minutes” should include procedural details concerning interview setting, interviewer characteristics, and reflexivity. Please state who conducted the interviews, the interviewer’s academic position, prior relationships with participants, training in qualitative interviewing, and assumptions regarding academic competence. The authors should also describe whether field notes or reflexive journals were maintained. These details are required because the interviewer’s professional status and expectations may have influenced participants’ responses and the subsequent interpretation of the data.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.