

Designing and Validating a Model for Emotional Agility

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to design and validate an indigenous, valid, and reliable instrument for assessing emotional agility in the Iranian population. This study was conducted within an exploratory mixed-methods instrument-development design in two qualitative and quantitative phases. In the qualitative phase, using a three-round Delphi method with the participation of 18 psychology experts, 39 items were extracted across seven main dimensions, including Emotional Awareness and Clarity, Emotional Acceptance and Mindfulness, Emotional Flexibility and Adaptability, Emotional Inhibition and Pausing, Value-Driven Action and Emotional Meaning-Making, Self-Compassion and Emotional Integration, and Emotional Differentiation and Interaction. In the quantitative phase, the researcher-developed questionnaire was administered to a sample of 208 participants, and the data were analyzed using factor analysis and AMOS software. The findings indicated that the measurement model demonstrated satisfactory fit, and all items had significant factor loadings greater than 0.50. The seven dimensions were subsumed under the higher-order construct of emotional agility, and all path coefficients were statistically significant. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the overall instrument and all dimensions were above 0.80, indicating satisfactory reliability. The dimension of Value-Driven Action and Emotional Meaning-Making, with the highest path coefficient, constituted the central core of emotional agility. The findings emphasize that emotional agility in the Iranian population is a multidimensional and culturally adaptable construct that places particular emphasis on interpersonal and self-compassionate aspects. The developed instrument can be used in organizations and counseling centers for the assessment and enhancement of emotional agility; however, further studies are recommended to examine its criterion-related and convergent validity.

Keywords: emotional agility, instrument development, validation, Delphi method, factor analysis

1. Introduction

Emotions are fundamental components of human functioning and influence cognition, motivation, interpersonal behavior, decision-making, adaptation, and psychological well-being. Rather than being merely internal subjective states, emotions provide information about the significance of events, organize behavioral responses, influence attention and memory, and shape individuals' interactions with their social and physical environments. From this perspective, adaptive functioning does not require the elimination of unpleasant emotions or the uninterrupted maintenance of positive emotional states; instead, it depends substantially on the capacity to recognize, interpret, tolerate, regulate, and use emotional experiences in ways that are responsive to situational demands. Contemporary theories of emotion therefore emphasize the functional and context-dependent nature of emotional responses and consider the ability to interact effectively with changing emotional experiences to be a central component of psychological adaptation (Gross, 2015; Keltner & Lerner, 2010). This conceptual shift has contributed to increasing attention to constructs such as emotion regulation, psychological flexibility, regulatory flexibility, resilience, and, more recently, emotional agility.

Emotion regulation represents one of the principal theoretical foundations for understanding adaptive emotional functioning. It broadly refers to the processes through which individuals influence which emotions they experience, when those emotions occur, and how they are experienced or expressed. Emotion regulation may involve changes in attention, appraisal, behavioral responses, physiological activation, or the expression of emotion, and these processes may occur deliberately or automatically. Importantly, contemporary perspectives no longer assume that particular emotion-regulation strategies are universally adaptive or maladaptive. Instead, their effectiveness depends on contextual demands, personal goals, timing, available resources, and the characteristics of the emotional situation. Consequently, successful emotional functioning requires more than frequent use of supposedly adaptive strategies; it requires the capacity to select and modify regulatory responses according to changing circumstances (Aldao et al., 2015; Gross, 2015). This context-sensitive approach provides an important basis for conceptualizing emotional agility as the ability to respond flexibly and purposefully to internal emotional experiences.

The importance of flexible rather than rigid emotion regulation is further supported by research on psychopathology. A broad meta-analytic literature has demonstrated that maladaptive patterns of emotion regulation are associated with numerous forms of psychological difficulty. Strategies such as persistent avoidance, suppression, and rumination have been linked to a wide range of symptoms, indicating that difficulties in responding adaptively to emotional experiences represent a transdiagnostic feature of psychopathology (Aldao et al., 2010). However, the distinction between adaptive and maladaptive strategies cannot be reduced to a simple classification of individual techniques. A strategy that may be beneficial in one situation may be ineffective or even harmful in another. Accordingly, a central determinant of psychological adjustment is the ability to evaluate contextual demands, access a sufficiently broad repertoire of regulatory strategies, and modify one's responses when existing strategies are ineffective (Aldao et al., 2015). Emotional agility extends this logic by focusing not only on emotional regulation but also on awareness, acceptance, flexibility, value-consistent behavior, and effective engagement with emotional experiences.

A closely related construct is psychological flexibility, which has been identified as a fundamental dimension of psychological health. Psychological flexibility reflects the capacity to remain in contact with present-moment experience while adjusting behavior in accordance with situational demands and personally meaningful goals. Individuals with greater psychological flexibility are better able to experience difficult thoughts and emotions without allowing those experiences to rigidly determine their actions. Conversely, psychological inflexibility is characterized by experiential avoidance, excessive attachment to internal experiences, and restricted behavioral repertoires. Research and theoretical work have suggested that psychological flexibility is associated with greater mental health, resilience, and adaptive functioning across diverse circumstances (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). From this perspective, emotional agility can be understood as a more specifically emotion-focused manifestation of flexible psychological functioning in which individuals remain open to emotional experience while retaining the capacity to choose behavior based on broader goals and values.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy provides another major theoretical foundation for emotional agility. Within this framework, psychological well-being depends not on eliminating undesirable thoughts and emotions but on

changing one's relationship with them. Acceptance, cognitive defusion, present-moment awareness, self-as-context, values clarification, and committed action are proposed as interrelated processes through which individuals develop greater psychological flexibility. Particularly relevant to emotional agility is the principle that internal discomfort does not need to be controlled before meaningful action can occur. An individual may acknowledge anxiety, sadness, anger, or uncertainty while simultaneously engaging in behavior consistent with personally important values (Hayes et al., 2012). Thus, the capacity to accept emotional experience without excessive avoidance, maintain mindful awareness of internal states, and engage in value-guided behavior constitutes an essential theoretical bridge between psychological flexibility and emotional agility.

The concept of emotional agility was explicitly advanced as a framework for understanding how individuals can navigate difficult thoughts and emotions while maintaining adaptive and value-consistent behavior. Emotional agility involves approaching inner experiences with curiosity, openness, and acceptance rather than becoming entangled in them or attempting to suppress them. David and Congleton described emotional agility as a process through which individuals recognize emotional patterns, distance themselves sufficiently from automatic reactions, and respond in ways that are consistent with their values and situational demands (David & Congleton, 2013). The concept was subsequently elaborated as a broader model for adaptive functioning in both personal and occupational contexts. From this perspective, emotional agility involves the ability to face emotions honestly, avoid treating temporary emotional states as absolute determinants of action, clarify personally meaningful values, and make flexible behavioral adjustments as circumstances change (David, 2016). Emotional agility therefore differs from the simplistic pursuit of positive emotions; its central emphasis is on developing a more flexible, accepting, and intentional relationship with the full range of emotional experience.

An important feature of emotional agility is emotional awareness and clarity. Adaptive emotional functioning requires individuals to identify what they are experiencing and distinguish among related but psychologically different emotional states. When emotional experiences are poorly differentiated or vaguely understood, individuals may have difficulty identifying the source of their discomfort or selecting an appropriate response. Emotional awareness allows individuals to observe changes in affective

experience, whereas emotional clarity enables them to interpret these experiences accurately and understand their implications. Emotions themselves serve important informational and motivational functions and contribute to social coordination, judgment, and action tendencies (Keltner & Lerner, 2010). Consequently, emotional agility should include not only the regulation of emotions after they arise but also the capacity to perceive and understand them with sufficient precision to guide adaptive responses.

Emotional acceptance and mindful awareness are similarly essential to the construct. Attempts to avoid or eliminate unwanted emotional experiences may paradoxically increase their psychological influence and narrow the range of available responses. In contrast, mindful awareness enables individuals to observe emotional experiences as temporary internal events rather than as commands that must automatically be obeyed. Acceptance allows individuals to remain psychologically engaged with experience without unnecessary defensive efforts to suppress, deny, or escape emotional discomfort (Hayes et al., 2012). The emotional agility perspective similarly emphasizes "showing up" to emotions rather than attempting to force them away and encourages individuals to create psychological distance between what they feel and what they choose to do (David, 2016). Accordingly, emotional acceptance and mindfulness can be regarded as core mechanisms through which individuals maintain behavioral choice in emotionally challenging situations.

Flexibility and adaptability are also central to emotional agility because emotional demands vary substantially across situations. Regulatory flexibility theories propose that successful coping involves sensitivity to contextual demands, access to multiple behavioral and regulatory responses, and the ability to monitor and modify those responses over time. Bonanno and Burton emphasized that regulatory flexibility is an individual-difference capacity that enables people to adjust coping and emotion-regulation strategies according to situational requirements rather than relying rigidly on a single response style (Bonanno & Burton, 2013). Similarly, emotion regulation flexibility involves variation in the implementation of strategies depending on context and the ability to shift strategies when circumstances change (Aldao et al., 2015). These ideas closely correspond to emotional agility, which requires individuals to adapt their emotional and behavioral responses without losing continuity in their broader values and goals.

The relevance of emotional agility is also evident in resilience research. Resilience is commonly understood as the capacity to maintain or regain adaptive functioning in the context of adversity, stress, or significant challenge. Contemporary perspectives emphasize that resilience is not a fixed trait but a dynamic process involving interactions among individual, interpersonal, and contextual resources (Southwick et al., 2014). Emotional agility may support resilience by allowing individuals to acknowledge difficult emotional experiences without becoming immobilized by them, reinterpret challenging situations, shift strategies when circumstances change, and continue pursuing meaningful goals. This theoretical overlap is supported by empirical findings indicating important relationships between emotional agility and resilience. For example, research among university students has demonstrated significant associations among emotional agility, resilience, and emotional intelligence, suggesting that emotionally agile individuals may possess broader adaptive resources for navigating academic, interpersonal, and developmental pressures (Shoeib, 2022).

The significance of emotional agility also extends beyond clinical and educational settings into organizational psychology. Modern workplaces are characterized by technological transformation, uncertain role demands, rapid decision cycles, interpersonal complexity, and continuous adaptation. Under these conditions, employees need not only technical expertise but also the ability to respond adaptively to emotional strain and changing environmental requirements. Research on workforce agility has shown meaningful relationships between agility, emotional intelligence, and performance, highlighting the importance of emotional competencies for flexible work behavior (Varshney & Varshney, 2020). Similarly, emerging work examining digital culture and organizational behavior suggests that emotional capabilities may function alongside organizational agility in shaping adaptive responses within contemporary public organizations (Pourgholi, 2025). These findings reinforce the practical relevance of developing valid measures of emotional agility for organizational assessment, employee development, leadership training, and workplace counseling.

The increasing emphasis on agility in management and organizational research also demonstrates that adaptability is often shaped by culturally and contextually embedded systems. Studies concerned with model development in Iranian settings have highlighted the importance of identifying locally meaningful components rather than

relying exclusively on models developed in different institutional and cultural environments. For example, research focused on designing empowerment models for Iranian brands has demonstrated the value of context-sensitive model development in capturing relationships among innovation, organizational characteristics, and locally relevant processes (Sahafzadeh & Haghighi, 2023). Although such work addresses an organizational rather than psychological construct, the methodological implication is relevant to emotional agility: constructs involving adaptation, flexibility, and interaction with environmental demands may be expressed differently across cultural and social settings. Therefore, culturally grounded conceptualization and validation are particularly important when developing an instrument intended for use in the Iranian population.

Despite growing theoretical interest in emotional agility, its measurement remains less established than that of related constructs such as emotion regulation, emotional intelligence, psychological flexibility, or resilience. The development of dedicated emotional agility measures represents an important step toward distinguishing the construct empirically from adjacent concepts. Kamilah and Hanifah developed and validated an Emotional Agility Scale, providing evidence that emotional agility can be operationalized psychometrically and assessed as a measurable psychological construct (Kamilah & Hanifah, 2021). Nevertheless, the existence of a measure in one linguistic or cultural setting does not automatically establish its appropriateness for another. Differences in language, emotional norms, interpersonal expectations, patterns of self-expression, and culturally shaped meanings attached to emotional control and disclosure can affect item interpretation and the factorial organization of psychological instruments. Consequently, merely translating an existing measure may fail to capture culturally salient aspects of emotional agility.

A further issue concerns the multidimensional nature of the construct. Emotional agility cannot be adequately represented by a narrow focus on emotional control. Excessive control may itself become maladaptive when it reflects rigid suppression or avoidance. Instead, emotional agility appears to involve a coordinated set of capacities, including awareness and clarity, acceptance and mindfulness, flexibility and adaptability, the capacity to pause before acting automatically, value-guided action, self-compassion, emotional integration, differentiation, and effective interpersonal engagement. This multidimensional

understanding is consistent with evidence showing that psychological health depends on both the quality and contextual appropriateness of emotional responses rather than on any single regulatory strategy (Aldao et al., 2015; Gross, 2015). It is also consistent with the emotional agility framework, which places emphasis on openness to experience, psychological distancing from automatic narratives, values, and adaptive behavioral change (David, 2016; David & Congleton, 2013).

Self-compassion may be particularly important within this broader framework because flexible engagement with difficult emotions requires individuals to respond to their own distress without excessive self-criticism. Although self-compassion is not always treated as a primary component in conventional models of emotion regulation, it is theoretically compatible with acceptance-based and flexibility-oriented approaches. A compassionate response to one's own emotional difficulties may reduce defensive avoidance and facilitate more integrated processing of emotional experiences. Similarly, emotional differentiation and interpersonal interaction may have particular importance in collectivistic or relationship-oriented cultural contexts, where emotional functioning is often embedded in social expectations and close interpersonal relationships. These considerations support the need for instrument-development procedures that allow culturally meaningful dimensions to emerge from expert judgment and empirical analysis rather than imposing a predetermined structure.

The psychometric validation of an emotional agility instrument therefore requires more than establishing internal consistency. A robust instrument-development process should systematically establish content relevance, factorial validity, and the coherence of the proposed multidimensional structure. Qualitative expert-based procedures such as the Delphi method can help identify dimensions and items that are conceptually appropriate for the target culture, while quantitative techniques such as confirmatory factor analysis can determine whether the observed indicators adequately represent their intended latent dimensions. Higher-order confirmatory factor analysis is particularly relevant when several correlated dimensions are hypothesized to represent a broader overarching construct. Such an approach allows researchers to determine whether emotional awareness, acceptance, flexibility, inhibition or pausing, value-guided action, self-compassion, and differentiation can legitimately be interpreted as distinguishable but integrated dimensions of emotional agility.

Developing a culturally appropriate emotional agility measure may have substantial theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, it can clarify the boundaries between emotional agility and related constructs such as emotion regulation flexibility, psychological flexibility, resilience, and emotional intelligence. Practically, a valid instrument could assist psychologists, counselors, organizational practitioners, and researchers in identifying strengths and limitations in individuals' emotional functioning, evaluating intervention outcomes, and developing programs designed to enhance flexible and value-consistent responses to emotional challenges. Given the links between adaptive emotional functioning and mental health, resilience, interpersonal adaptation, and occupational performance, such an instrument could also facilitate research across clinical, educational, and organizational populations (Aldao et al., 2010; Shoeib, 2022; Southwick et al., 2014; Varshney & Varshney, 2020). At the same time, the conceptual complexity and cultural sensitivity of emotional agility make rigorous indigenous instrument development especially important.

Accordingly, the present study aimed to design and validate an indigenous, psychometrically sound model and instrument for assessing emotional agility in the Iranian population.

2. Methods and Materials

The present study, which aimed to design and validate an indigenous and valid instrument for assessing emotional agility in the Iranian population, is classified as applied research in terms of its purpose, because it seeks to use existing theoretical findings to advance applied knowledge in the field of emotional assessment and evaluation, and its final product—namely, the developed instrument—has the potential for practical application in psychological and organizational settings. With regard to the type of data collection, this study employed a mixed-methods sequential exploratory design (qualitative–quantitative). Accordingly, in the first step, a qualitative approach and the Delphi technique were used to identify, extract, and formulate the dimensions and components of the emotional agility construct. In the second step, a quantitative approach using a descriptive-correlational method was adopted to describe the status of the developed instrument and to examine the relationships among the items and dimensions of the construct through factor-analytic techniques. Given the two-phase nature of the study, two distinct yet interrelated

statistical populations were defined. The statistical population in the first phase consisted of specialists, scholars, and experts in psychology, particularly in the fields of emotion psychology, psychometrics, and counseling, who were expected to possess a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical or research experience concerning concepts such as emotional agility, emotion regulation, and psychological flexibility. The statistical population in the second phase comprised all Iranian adults. The selection of a general population for the preliminary norming process of the instrument was based on the rationale that emotional agility, as a broad construct independent of specific occupational or clinical groups, requires a diverse and relatively heterogeneous sample from the target population for validation. In the first phase, participants were selected using purposive criterion-based sampling. Based on criteria such as having at least 5 years of professional experience in the fields of emotion and psychotherapy or having authored credible scholarly articles in this area, 18 experts were invited to participate in the Delphi panel, and the Delphi process continued until theoretical saturation was achieved at the end of the third round. In the second phase, because data analysis was based on structural equation modeling and confirmatory factor analysis, the minimum sample size was estimated according to the general rule of 5 to 10 participants per questionnaire item. Accordingly, the questionnaire was distributed among 210 members of the population, of whom 208 returned complete and usable questionnaires that were included in the analyses. To enhance the generalizability of the findings and ensure proportional representation of population subgroups, stratified random sampling was employed based on demographic variables such as gender and age group. Information concerning the theoretical foundations and research literature was collected from library resources, peer-reviewed scientific articles, specialized books, and reputable online databases. For field data collection in the first phase of the study, a semi-structured Delphi questionnaire was administered over three rounds. Specifically, in the first round, a questionnaire containing open-ended questions was developed based on a comprehensive review of the literature and sent to the experts. In the second round, following content analysis of the responses obtained in the first round, a closed-ended questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale was developed and

redistributed to the experts. In the third round, statistical feedback, including the mean score of each item and the anonymously presented opinions of other experts, was provided, thereby completing the process of achieving final consensus. In the second phase, the data collection instrument was the researcher-developed Emotional Agility Questionnaire derived from the Delphi process. It consisted of two sections: a general section containing questions regarding age, gender, educational level, and employment status, and a specialized section using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from completely relevant to completely irrelevant. The content validity of the developed questionnaire was confirmed based on the opinions of relevant faculty members and specialists. To evaluate the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for the study variables, with values exceeding 0.80 for all variables. These values indicate acceptable and satisfactory reliability for the research variables (Table 1).

A total of 58 female students participated in the study and were assigned to the motivational interviewing group ($n = 19$), growth mindset group ($n = 19$), or control group ($n = 20$). The mean age of participants was 15.21 years ($SD = 0.69$) in the motivational interviewing group, 14.96 years ($SD = 0.87$) in the growth mindset group, and 15.10 years ($SD = 0.85$) in the control group. Regarding paternal education in the motivational interviewing group, 4 fathers had less than a high school diploma, 6 had a high school diploma, 6 held a bachelor's degree, and 3 had postgraduate education. In the growth mindset group, 6 fathers had a high school diploma, 2 held an associate degree, 5 held a bachelor's degree, and 6 had postgraduate education. In the control group, 6 fathers had a high school diploma, 3 held an associate degree, 6 held a bachelor's degree, and 5 had postgraduate education. Regarding maternal education, in the motivational interviewing group, 2 mothers had less than a high school diploma, 9 had a high school diploma, 6 held a bachelor's degree, and 2 had postgraduate education. In the growth mindset group, 1 mother had less than a high school diploma, 8 had a high school diploma, 2 held an associate degree, 4 held a bachelor's degree, and 4 had postgraduate education. In the control group, 1 mother had less than a high school diploma, 9 had a high school diploma, 2 held an associate degree, 6 held a bachelor's degree, and 2 had postgraduate education.

Table 1*Questionnaire Information*

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Emotional Awareness and Clarity	5	0.768
Emotional Acceptance and Mindfulness	9	0.887
Emotional Flexibility and Adaptability	6	0.854
Emotional Inhibition and Pausing	4	0.879
Value-Driven Action and Emotional Meaning-Making	8	0.910
Self-Compassion and Emotional Integration	4	0.777
Emotional Differentiation and Interaction	3	0.913

To assess emotional agility, a researcher-developed questionnaire designed and formulated through a systematic three-round Delphi process was used. The questionnaire consisted of 39 items and seven components: Emotional Awareness and Clarity (5 items), Emotional Acceptance and Mindfulness (9 items), Emotional Flexibility and Adaptability (6 items), Emotional Inhibition and Pausing (4 items), Value-Driven Action and Emotional Meaning-Making (8 items), Self-Compassion and Emotional Integration (4 items), and Emotional Differentiation and Interaction (3 items). In the present study, the reliability of the questionnaire, assessed using Cronbach's alpha, was 0.913 for the total instrument and ranged from 0.768 to 0.913 for the seven dimensions, indicating highly satisfactory reliability. The questionnaire items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from completely relevant (1) to completely irrelevant (5). The questionnaire was developed in Persian, and its content validity was confirmed through consultation with specialists and experts familiar with the subject. Construct validity was also examined using confirmatory factor analysis. All factor loadings of the items in the developed questionnaire, ranging from 0.586 to 0.904, were greater than 0.40 in the standardized solution, and the corresponding t statistics were greater than 1.96. Therefore, it can be concluded that the relationships between the items and the latent variable were statistically significant and that the questionnaire items were appropriately selected to measure emotional agility.

3. Findings and Results

Of the total sample of 208 participants, 172 were men and 36 were women. This composition indicates the relative predominance of men in the study sample. In addition, 80 participants had postgraduate education (master's or doctoral degrees), while 128 had bachelor's degrees. This distribution indicates that the sample possessed an

appropriate level of education and cognitive ability to understand the specialized questionnaire items. Moreover, 52 participants were single and 156 were married. The predominance of married individuals in the sample may potentially have influenced responses to items related to interpersonal emotional interactions.

Table 2 presents descriptive statistical indices, including the mean and standard deviation, for each of the seven dimensions of emotional agility. These indices provide an initial overview of the general status of the data and the distribution of responses among the 208 participants. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that relying solely on the simple mean of each dimension does not allow for a comprehensive and accurate interpretation of the level of emotional agility, because the different dimensions contain unequal numbers of items, ranging from 3 to 9 items, and this inequality may complicate direct comparisons among dimensions. Therefore, the researcher calculated and reported a "weighted mean" for each dimension to provide a more equitable and precise basis for comparison. The weighted mean results indicated that all dimensions of emotional agility were above the theoretical midpoint of 3 on the 5-point Likert scale. This finding suggests that, overall, respondents had a positive and relatively favorable perception of their emotional capabilities and evaluated themselves as having an acceptable level of emotional agility across its various dimensions. In other words, the overall profile of the data indicates that the participants estimated their level of emotional agility to be above the theoretical average, which may itself reflect the presence of relatively healthy emotional capacities within this group. However, it should be noted that these findings provide only a descriptive and preliminary representation of the data, and final conclusions regarding the factorial structure and validity of the dimensions require more advanced inferential analyses, such as exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, which are described subsequently.

Table 2*Descriptive Statistics of the Research Variables*

Variable	SD	Mean	Weighted Mean
Emotional Awareness and Clarity	3.18	19.30	3.86
Emotional Acceptance and Mindfulness	6.08	34.19	3.80
Emotional Flexibility and Adaptability	4.73	21.87	3.64
Emotional Inhibition and Pausing	3.84	13.56	3.39
Value-Driven Action and Emotional Meaning-Making	6.87	28.17	3.52
Self-Compassion and Emotional Integration	3.02	14.88	3.72
Emotional Differentiation and Interaction	3.12	11.67	3.89

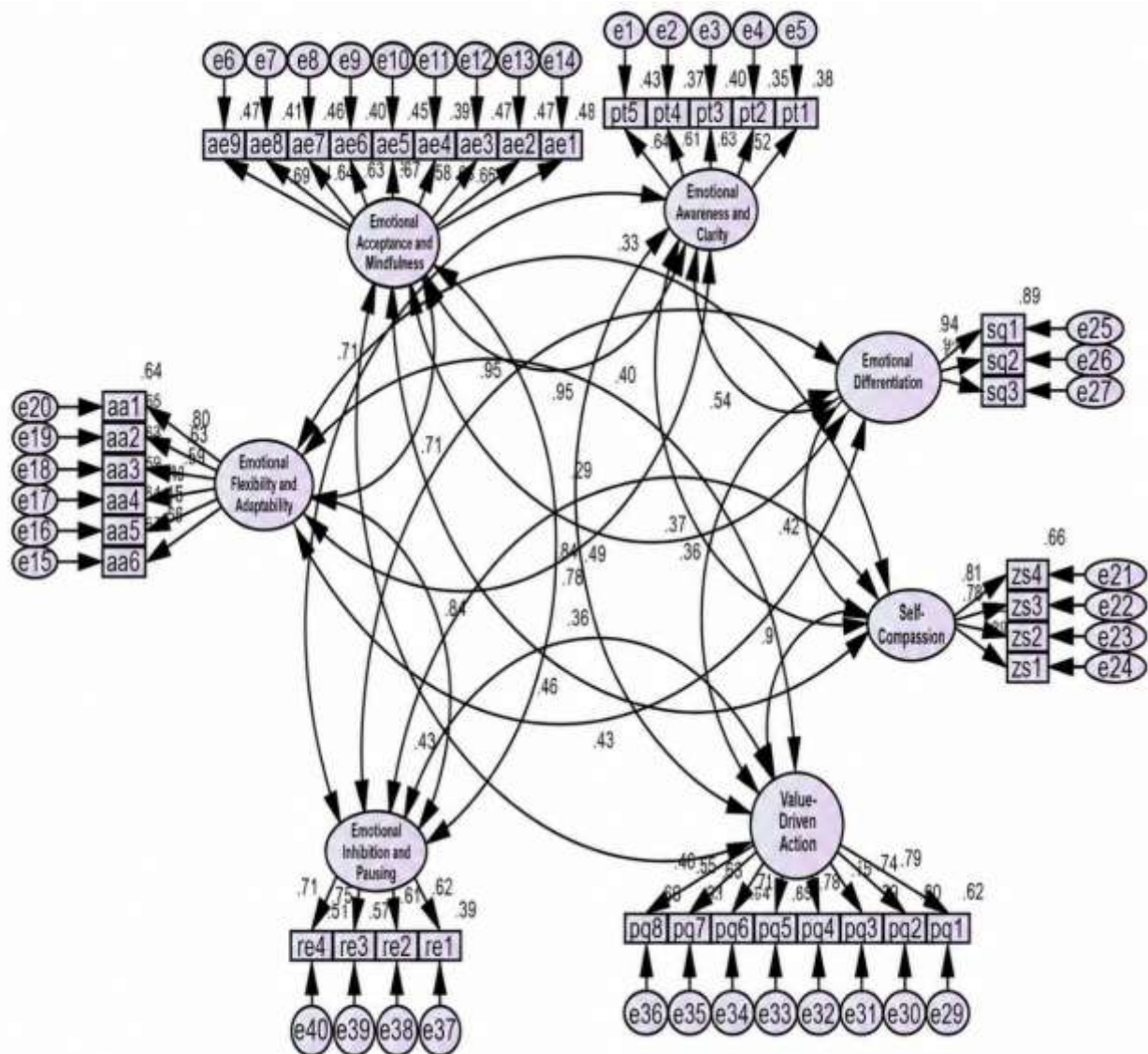
Before testing the primary structural model, it was necessary to examine whether each of the seven dimensions of emotional agility could be adequately measured by the questionnaire items. For this purpose, first-order confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. This analysis determines whether the items designed for each dimension significantly and sufficiently measure the corresponding latent construct. Figure 1 and Table 3 present the results of this analysis using AMOS software and data collected through the researcher-developed questionnaire derived

from the Delphi phase. The outputs report the standardized factor loadings of each item on its corresponding dimension, together with their significance levels. It should be noted that, in all analyses, an asterisk (*) next to a value indicates that the significance level (p -value) was less than .001 and that the relationship between the item and the latent factor was therefore statistically significant. The results of this analysis provide a basis for evaluating the adequacy of the items and their suitability for inclusion in higher-order analyses, such as second-order confirmatory factor analysis.

Table 3*Descriptive Statistics of the Research Variables*

Variable	SE	Standardized Coefficient	CR	p	Result
Emotional Awareness and Clarity	0.105	0.622	7.880	< .001	Fit
Emotional Acceptance and Mindfulness	0.103	0.639	8.877	< .001	Fit
Emotional Flexibility and Adaptability	0.115	0.725	8.742	< .001	Fit
Emotional Inhibition and Pausing	0.724	0.867	13.461	< .001	Fit
Value-Driven Action and Emotional Meaning-Making	0.049	0.926	18.836	< .001	Fit
Self-Compassion and Emotional Integration	0.817	0.724	11.456	< .001	Fit
Emotional Differentiation and Interaction	0.135	0.654	8.212	< .001	Fit

Figure 1*Results of the first-order confirmatory factor analysis of the dimensions of emotional agility*

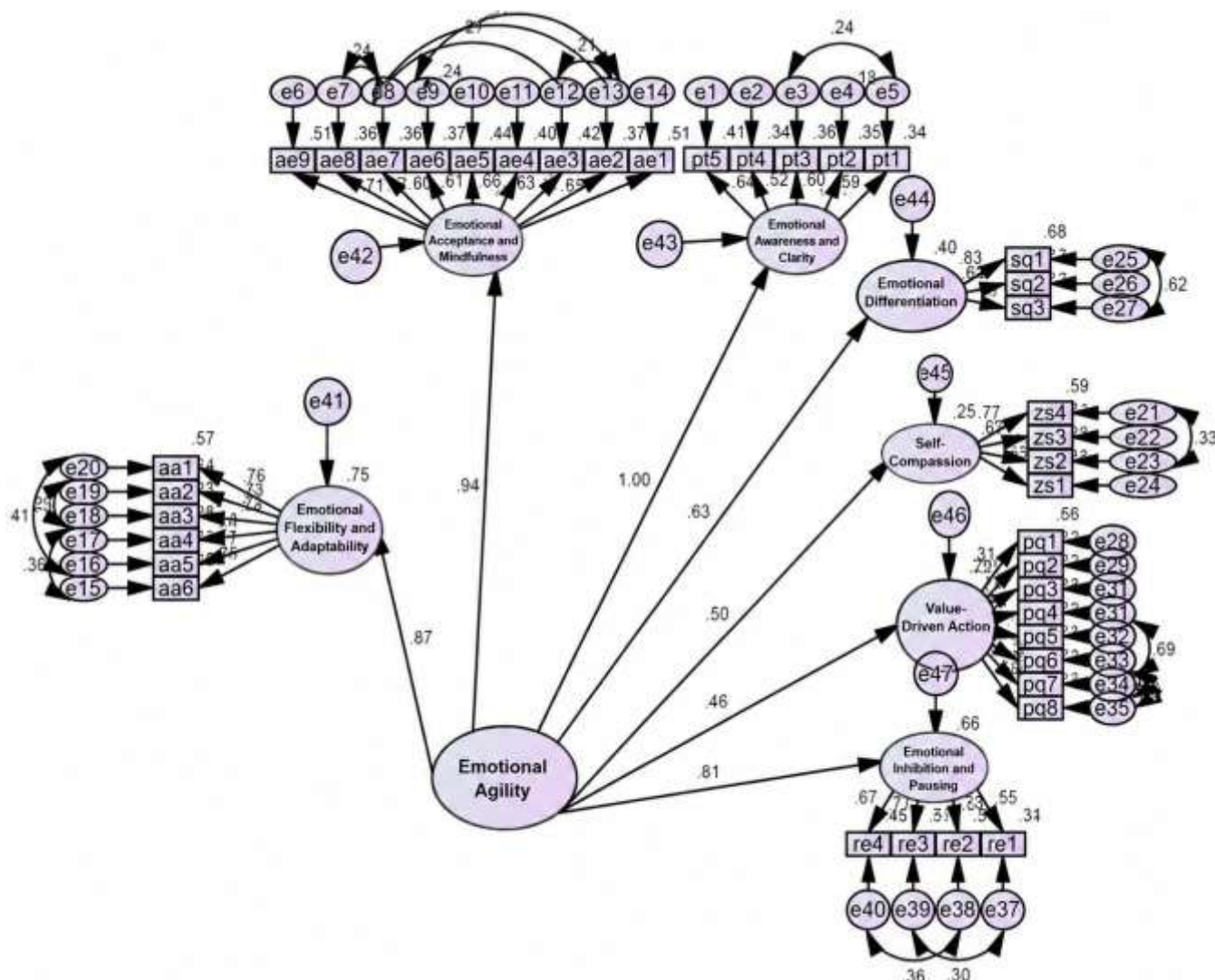


The results presented in Table 3, which concern the first-order confirmatory factor analysis of the seven dimensions of emotional agility, indicate that all questionnaire items demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties. This judgment was based on the standardized factor loadings reported for each item, such that all items had factor loadings greater than 0.50 on their corresponding dimensions. Given that these factor loadings were statistically significant at the 95% confidence level ($p < .05$), it can be inferred that the first-order measurement model demonstrates strong relationships between the observed items and the latent dimensions of emotional agility and provides favorable preliminary evidence supporting the construct validity of the instrument.

Following confirmation of the adequacy of the first-order measurement model, the next step in validating the conceptual structure of the instrument involved conducting a second-order confirmatory factor analysis. The purpose of this analysis was to address a more fundamental question: Do the seven identified dimensions—Emotional Differentiation, Acceptance and Mindfulness, Flexibility, Inhibition, Value-Driven Action, Self-Compassion, and Differentiation—converge under a broader, integrated construct termed “emotional agility”? In other words, second-order factor analysis determines whether these seven dimensions constitute components of a single coherent construct or whether each represents an independent entity. The results of this analysis are presented below.

Figure 2

Second-order factor analysis of the research model



The statistical significance of the relationships between the seven dimensions of emotional agility and the main

construct, as well as the path coefficients associated with each dimension, are reported in Table 4.

Table 4

Path Coefficients of Emotional Agility

Path	SC	CR	SE	<i>p</i>	Result
Emotional Agility → Emotional Acceptance and Mindfulness	0.941	10.647	0.063	< .001	✓
Emotional Agility → Self-Compassion	0.810	6.719	0.210	< .001	✓
Emotional Agility → Emotional Inhibition	0.505	6.342	0.138	< .001	✓
Emotional Agility → Emotional Differentiation	0.650	8.620	0.116	< .001	✓
Emotional Agility → Emotional Awareness and Clarity	1.000	—	—	< .001	✓
Emotional Agility → Emotional Flexibility	0.864	8.830	0.068	< .001	✓
Emotional Agility → Value-Driven Action	0.458	6.032	0.069	< .001	✓

The results presented in the table above indicate that all paths specified in the second-order model were statistically significant and that the seven dimensions were substantially influenced by the primary construct of emotional agility. According to the reported standardized path coefficients, a one-standard-deviation increase in the emotional agility construct would be associated, respectively, with increases of 0.941 standard deviations in Acceptance and Mindfulness, 0.810 standard deviations in Self-Compassion and Integration, 0.505 standard deviations in Inhibition and Pausing, 0.650 standard deviations in Differentiation and Interaction, 1.000 standard deviations in Awareness and Clarity, 0.864 standard deviations in Emotional Flexibility and Adaptability, and 0.458 standard deviations in Value-Driven Action and Meaning-Making. This differential pattern of factor loadings indicates that the strength of the relationship between each dimension and the primary construct is not identical. For example, the Awareness and Clarity dimension, with a coefficient of 1.000, demonstrates the strongest association with emotional agility and may therefore be regarded as the central core of this construct, whereas the Value-Driven Action and Meaning-Making dimension, with a coefficient of 0.458, demonstrates a relatively weaker relationship. Nevertheless, because all of these coefficients were statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, it can be concluded that all seven dimensions make significant contributions to the formation of the higher-order emotional agility construct and that the second-order measurement model demonstrates acceptable theoretical and empirical coherence.

4. Discussion

The present study was conducted to design and validate an indigenous instrument for assessing emotional agility in the Iranian population. The findings supported a multidimensional conceptualization of emotional agility consisting of seven dimensions: Emotional Awareness and Clarity, Emotional Acceptance and Mindfulness, Emotional Flexibility and Adaptability, Emotional Inhibition and Pausing, Value-Driven Action and Emotional Meaning-Making, Self-Compassion and Emotional Integration, and Emotional Differentiation and Interaction. The three-round Delphi process resulted in a 39-item instrument, and the subsequent quantitative analyses provided evidence supporting its psychometric adequacy. The first-order confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the items loaded significantly on their respective latent dimensions, with the

reported standardized loadings exceeding the acceptable threshold. Moreover, second-order confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated that the seven dimensions could be meaningfully subsumed under the broader higher-order construct of emotional agility. The reliability findings were also favorable: Cronbach's alpha was .913 for the total scale and ranged from .768 to .913 across the seven dimensions. Taken together, these findings suggest that emotional agility can be conceptualized and measured as an integrated but multidimensional psychological capacity within the Iranian cultural context.

One of the principal findings was the strong role of Emotional Awareness and Clarity in the higher-order emotional agility structure. This dimension displayed the strongest association with the overarching construct in the second-order model, indicating that recognizing, labeling, and clearly understanding one's emotional states may constitute a foundational aspect of emotional agility. This finding is consistent with contemporary theories of emotion, which conceptualize emotions as informational systems that shape cognition, motivation, decision-making, and interpersonal behavior (Keltner & Lerner, 2010). Emotional responses provide individuals with important information regarding their internal states and environmental conditions; however, their adaptive value depends substantially on the individual's ability to identify and interpret them accurately. The present results therefore suggest that emotional agility begins with the capacity to recognize what one is feeling before deciding how to respond. Without sufficient emotional awareness, adaptive regulation may become difficult because individuals cannot flexibly manage experiences that they cannot adequately identify or differentiate.

The importance of awareness and clarity is also compatible with Gross's contemporary model of emotion regulation, according to which successful regulation requires sensitivity to the unfolding emotional process and the ability to intervene at appropriate stages (Gross, 2015). Emotional regulation is not simply the suppression or reduction of emotional arousal; rather, it involves recognizing the emotional response, understanding its antecedents and consequences, and selecting a response that is suitable for current goals. From this perspective, the strong loading of Emotional Awareness and Clarity on the higher-order emotional agility construct is theoretically meaningful. Individuals who can accurately identify and interpret their emotional experiences are more likely to determine whether an emotion should be accepted, expressed, modified, or used

as information for subsequent behavior. The present finding thus reinforces the view that emotional agility is grounded in conscious and differentiated awareness rather than automatic emotional reactivity.

A second major finding was the strong contribution of Emotional Acceptance and Mindfulness to emotional agility. This dimension showed a high standardized relationship with the higher-order construct, indicating that the ability to remain open to emotional experiences without excessive judgment, avoidance, or fusion represents a central component of emotional agility. This result closely aligns with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, which identifies acceptance and present-moment awareness as major processes underlying psychological flexibility (Hayes et al., 2012). From this perspective, difficult emotions do not necessarily need to be eliminated before adaptive behavior can occur. Rather, individuals can acknowledge discomfort while maintaining the capacity to engage in meaningful action. The present finding therefore supports an acceptance-based interpretation of emotional agility in which healthy emotional functioning is reflected not by the absence of unpleasant emotions but by the ability to experience them without allowing them to dominate behavior.

This interpretation is also consistent with the conceptualization proposed by David and Congleton, who described emotional agility as the capacity to approach thoughts and emotions with openness and curiosity while preventing them from automatically directing one's behavior (David & Congleton, 2013). David later elaborated this position by emphasizing the importance of "showing up" to internal experiences, stepping back from rigid emotional narratives, and choosing behavior according to personal values rather than momentary affective states (David, 2016). The strong role of Emotional Acceptance and Mindfulness found in the present study therefore provides empirical support for one of the core theoretical propositions of emotional agility: that adaptive functioning depends on changing one's relationship with emotional experiences rather than merely attempting to control their content or intensity.

Emotional Flexibility and Adaptability also showed a strong association with the overall emotional agility construct. This result is particularly consistent with the literature on regulatory flexibility. Bonanno and Burton argued that psychological adaptation depends not on the habitual use of a particular coping strategy but on the ability to select and modify strategies according to changing contextual demands (Bonanno & Burton, 2013). Similarly,

Aldao and colleagues emphasized that emotion regulation should be evaluated in terms of flexibility rather than through a rigid division of strategies into universally adaptive and maladaptive categories (Aldao et al., 2015). A strategy such as distraction, cognitive reappraisal, suppression, acceptance, or problem solving may be useful in one context and ineffective in another. The present findings reinforce this framework by showing that emotional agility contains a substantial adaptability component, suggesting that emotionally agile individuals are able to shift their emotional and behavioral responses as environmental conditions change.

This finding can also be understood in relation to psychological flexibility. Kashdan and Rottenberg proposed psychological flexibility as a fundamental characteristic of mental health, describing it as the ability to adapt behavior to situational demands while remaining connected to meaningful values and goals (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). Emotional agility appears to represent a closely related capacity operating specifically within the emotional domain. Rather than reacting rigidly to internal experiences, individuals with greater emotional agility may maintain access to multiple regulatory responses and adjust their behavior according to what the situation requires. The present factor structure therefore supports the proposition that flexibility is not peripheral to emotional agility but one of its defining characteristics.

The results regarding Emotional Inhibition and Pausing further clarify the nature of emotional agility. This dimension contributed significantly to the higher-order construct, although its association was more moderate than those of awareness, acceptance, and flexibility. The construct should not be interpreted as emotional suppression in the conventional sense; rather, it appears to reflect the ability to suspend impulsive or automatic reactions sufficiently to create a space for deliberate responding. Such a capacity is consistent with flexible emotion regulation because adaptive emotional functioning often requires individuals to interrupt immediate behavioral tendencies before evaluating alternative responses. Gross's work emphasizes that regulatory processes can occur at multiple points during the generation and expression of emotion and that their adaptiveness depends on timing and context (Gross, 2015). Similarly, the emotional agility framework emphasizes creating psychological distance between an emotional experience and subsequent behavior (David, 2016). Thus, the significance of Emotional Inhibition and Pausing suggests that emotional agility requires neither

impulsive emotional expression nor rigid suppression, but rather the ability to delay automatic action long enough to respond more intentionally.

The significant contribution of Value-Driven Action and Emotional Meaning-Making is also theoretically important. Although this dimension displayed a comparatively lower coefficient in the second-order model, its relationship with emotional agility remained statistically significant, indicating that values and meaning represent an integral component of the construct. This finding is highly consistent with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, in which values clarification and committed action are considered central mechanisms through which individuals translate psychological flexibility into meaningful behavior (Hayes et al., 2012). Likewise, David's emotional agility model emphasizes that individuals should not allow temporary emotional states to determine their choices automatically; instead, behavior should be aligned with broader personal values and long-term objectives (David, 2016; David & Congleton, 2013). The present finding thus indicates that emotional agility involves more than managing affective states. It also includes the capacity to interpret emotional experiences in a meaningful framework and continue acting in accordance with personally significant directions.

The emergence of Self-Compassion and Emotional Integration as a distinct and significant dimension is another noteworthy finding. Although self-compassion is not always explicitly incorporated into conventional models of emotion regulation, it is theoretically compatible with acceptance-based approaches. Individuals who respond to their emotional difficulties with excessive self-criticism may intensify emotional distress and increase avoidance, whereas a more compassionate and integrative response may allow difficult emotions to be acknowledged and processed without defensive resistance. This finding therefore expands the emotional agility framework by suggesting that the manner in which individuals relate to themselves during emotional difficulty may be particularly important in the Iranian cultural context. It also corresponds conceptually with the broader literature on psychological flexibility, in which openness to difficult internal experiences is considered essential to adaptive functioning (Hayes et al., 2012; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010).

Emotional Differentiation and Interaction also significantly contributed to the higher-order construct. The importance of this dimension suggests that emotional agility encompasses not only intrapersonal regulation but also the capacity to distinguish emotional states and function

effectively in emotionally charged interpersonal situations. This interpretation is compatible with the social-functional view of emotions, according to which emotions communicate intentions, coordinate relationships, and shape interpersonal judgments and responses (Keltner & Lerner, 2010). The result may be especially relevant in a culturally embedded model of emotional agility because the expression, interpretation, and regulation of emotions are partly shaped by interpersonal expectations and social norms. Thus, the identification of Emotional Differentiation and Interaction as a separate dimension supports the value of developing an indigenous instrument rather than assuming that emotional agility will manifest identically across cultural contexts.

The favorable reliability coefficients provide additional evidence for the quality of the developed instrument. Cronbach's alpha for the total scale was .913, while the coefficients for the seven dimensions ranged from .768 to .913. These findings indicate satisfactory to excellent internal consistency and suggest that the items within each dimension measure coherent aspects of emotional agility. The results are generally aligned with the work of Kamilah and Hanifah, who demonstrated that emotional agility can be operationalized as a psychometrically measurable construct and developed a scale for its assessment (Kamilah & Hanifah, 2021). However, the present study extends this line of research by identifying a culturally grounded seven-dimensional structure through expert consensus and confirmatory analyses within an Iranian sample. The findings therefore provide evidence that emotional agility has sufficient conceptual coherence to be assessed systematically while also permitting culturally meaningful differentiation among its constituent dimensions.

The findings also correspond with research linking emotional agility to other adaptive psychological capacities. Shoeib reported meaningful relationships among emotional agility, resilience, and emotional intelligence among university students (Shoeib, 2022). Such relationships are theoretically plausible because emotional agility requires awareness, regulation, adaptability, and effective responses to emotional demands, all of which are relevant to resilient functioning. Southwick and colleagues emphasized that resilience should be conceptualized as a dynamic process of adaptation rather than a static personality trait (Southwick et al., 2014). Emotional agility may represent one mechanism through which this adaptation occurs, because emotionally agile individuals are better positioned to tolerate distress,

reinterpret emotional experiences, shift regulatory strategies, and continue functioning during adversity.

The multidimensional model is also consistent with evidence showing that emotion-regulation problems are implicated across different forms of psychopathology. Aldao and colleagues found that maladaptive emotion-regulation strategies are broadly associated with psychological symptoms, supporting the view that rigid or ineffective regulation may constitute a transdiagnostic vulnerability (Aldao et al., 2010). The current model offers a complementary positive framework by identifying capacities that may protect against rigid emotional responding. Awareness, acceptance, flexibility, pausing, self-compassion, differentiation, and value-driven behavior together constitute a potentially useful profile of adaptive emotional functioning. Thus, rather than focusing exclusively on reducing specific maladaptive strategies, interventions informed by emotional agility may aim to expand the individual's repertoire of adaptive responses and improve the contextual appropriateness of emotional behavior.

The findings have relevance beyond clinical psychology. Research on workforce agility has shown that adaptive workplace functioning is associated with emotional intelligence and employee performance (Varshney & Varshney, 2020). In rapidly changing organizational environments, employees are frequently required to manage uncertainty, interpersonal conflict, changing responsibilities, and emotionally demanding decisions. Emotional agility may facilitate this process by enabling individuals to recognize their internal responses while avoiding rigid or impulsive behavioral patterns. Similarly, research examining digital culture and organizational behavior has emphasized the relationships among emotional capabilities, agility, and adaptive organizational functioning (Pourgholi, 2025). These findings support the potential application of the developed instrument in organizational assessment, leadership development, employee counseling, and training programs aimed at strengthening adaptive responses to change.

5. Conclusion

Finally, the use of a culturally informed instrument-development process is an important contribution of the present study. Constructs involving adaptation and flexibility may be shaped by the social and institutional contexts in which they are expressed. Iranian model-

development research in other domains has likewise highlighted the importance of generating context-sensitive frameworks rather than applying externally developed models without empirical adaptation (Sahafzadeh & Haghighi, 2023). The Delphi-derived structure of the present instrument, followed by empirical validation, allowed culturally meaningful dimensions such as self-compassion, emotional integration, and interpersonal emotional differentiation to become explicitly represented. Overall, the results support emotional agility as a multidimensional higher-order construct whose components are distinct yet interrelated, and they provide preliminary evidence for the reliability and construct validity of the developed instrument.

The present study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, although the sample size was sufficient for the planned factor-analytic procedures, the quantitative sample was relatively limited in relation to the diversity of the broader Iranian adult population. The gender distribution was also unequal, with men constituting a substantial majority of participants, which may restrict the generalizability of the factorial structure and normative scores across genders. Second, the instrument relied entirely on self-report data and may therefore have been affected by social desirability, response styles, limited introspective accuracy, and participants' willingness to report emotional difficulties. Third, although content validity and construct validity were examined, other important forms of validity, including convergent, discriminant, predictive, and criterion-related validity, were not evaluated. Fourth, the cross-sectional design did not permit assessment of the temporal stability of the construct or its ability to predict subsequent psychological and behavioral outcomes. Finally, although the Delphi panel included specialists with relevant expertise, expert judgments may still reflect theoretical preferences and disciplinary perspectives that could have influenced item generation and dimension formation.

Future studies should replicate the seven-factor structure in larger and more heterogeneous samples drawn from different geographical regions, age groups, educational levels, occupational groups, and clinical populations. Particular attention should be given to achieving greater gender balance and examining measurement invariance across demographic subgroups. Researchers should assess convergent and discriminant validity by examining relationships between the developed scale and established measures of psychological flexibility, emotion regulation,

mindfulness, resilience, emotional intelligence, self-compassion, and psychological distress. Criterion and predictive validity should also be investigated by determining whether emotional agility scores predict mental health, interpersonal functioning, occupational adaptation, academic performance, or resilience under stress. Longitudinal research would be valuable for evaluating test-retest reliability and examining whether emotional agility changes over time or in response to significant life experiences. Further studies may also employ exploratory structural equation modeling, item response theory, and cross-cultural validation to refine the scale and determine whether shorter versions can retain adequate psychometric quality.

The developed Emotional Agility Questionnaire can be considered a potentially useful assessment instrument for psychological counseling, organizational development, educational settings, and employee support programs. Practitioners may use the total score together with the seven dimensional scores to identify specific emotional strengths and areas requiring development rather than relying only on a global estimate of emotional functioning. Intervention programs can be designed to strengthen emotional awareness and clarity, mindful acceptance, flexible responding, deliberate pausing before action, value-consistent behavior, self-compassion, and effective emotional interaction. In organizational settings, the instrument may assist with needs assessment, leadership development, change-management programs, and interventions designed to strengthen employees' adaptability under uncertainty. In counseling and psychoeducational contexts, repeated administration may also help practitioners monitor changes in emotional functioning over the course of interventions and tailor training to the individual's specific profile of strengths and weaknesses.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

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Declaration of Interest

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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