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Investigating the Impact of the Getting Things Done Model on Psychological Well-being and Achievement in Iranian EFL University Students

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Abstract

Despite growing recognition of learner well-being in second language acquisition, limited research has examined how structured productivity interventions address affective and cognitive demands in EFL contexts. This explanatory sequential mixed-methods study investigated the impact of the Getting Things Done (GTD) productivity model on psychological well-being (PWB) and academic achievement among Iranian EFL university students. Forty students (20 male and 20 female) from two intact lower-intermediate classes at a Payam-e Noor University branch participated in a 16-session quasi-experimental intervention. The experimental group received GTD instruction integrated into coursework, whereas the control group followed standard instruction. Quantitative data were collected using Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale and a researcher-made achievement test and analyzed using ANCOVA; qualitative data from 13 experimental-group participants were gathered through semistructured interviews and analyzed thematically. The results showed statistically significant differences favoring the experimental group in psychological well-being and academic achievement. The qualitative analysis identified four themes for each outcome: for well-being, reduced mental overload, clearer purpose, enhanced control, and positive feelings resulting from goal completion; for achievement, organized study materials, consistent task management, increased motivation through clear goals, and greater responsibility for learning. The converging findings suggest that structured task-management interventions may benefit both the affective and performance domains of EFL learners in academic contexts.

Keywords: Achievement, getting things done (GTD) model, Iranian EFL university students, productivity intervention, psychological well-being (PWB)

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1. Introduction

Learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is a complex process that requires not only linguistic knowledge but also robust cognitive and affective resources, with productivity practices often serving as essential facilitators of sustained engagement (Allen, 2015; Segaran & Hasim, 2021). For Iranian university students, this process is particularly challenging because of contextual limitations on authentic exposure and the high-stakes nature of academic environments, both of which can impede long-term achievement (Al-Hashimy, 2023). Within this context, structured productivity interventions merit rigorous empirical examination, as they offer a potential framework for simultaneously supporting students' PWB and enhancing their quantifiable language attainment.

Previous pedagogical approaches have often struggled to address the substantial self-regulatory burden placed on learners in restricted-input environments (Al-Hashimy, 2023; Seli, 2023). Although the existing literature suggests that effective self-regulation is necessary for navigating these constraints (Lackey et al., 2014), the practical mechanisms for achieving consistent regulation remain underdeveloped in the EFL context (Segaran & Hasim, 2021). The GTD model (Allen, 2015) provides a structured productivity framework that emphasizes externalizing tasks and organizing commitments to reduce cognitive load. By clarifying actionable steps and providing a methodology for transforming diffuse academic demands into manageable goals, the GTD components, including the Five Steps and the Planning Map, position learning as a deliberate, goal-driven process (Al-Hashimy, 2023).

Despite the practical popularity of productivity frameworks, a significant research gap remains concerning the empirical efficacy of the GTD model in EFL educational contexts. Most existing studies focus on general self-regulatory strategies without examining a comprehensive, prescriptive productivity system. Furthermore, although the interdependence of cognition and emotion in language learning is well recognized (Gkonou et al., 2020), the field lacks conclusive evidence demonstrating whether such a system can actively serve as an intervention to cultivate affective stability while simultaneously improving academic outcomes. Failing to examine the impact of structured productivity on both dimensions represents a critical oversight in current EFL research.

This study directly addresses this gap by employing a mixed-methods design to investigate the impact of the GTD model on Iranian EFL university students. The primary objective of this research was to quantitatively assess the effect of a GTD-based intervention on students' PWB and English achievement while qualitatively capturing their nuanced perceptions of this transformation. By integrating these two dimensions, this study seeks to determine whether a structured productivity framework can provide a holistic solution to the cognitive and affective challenges inherent in the Iranian EFL context.

2. Literature Review

The literature review synthesizes the theoretical and empirical foundations concerning the GTD model's influence on Iranian EFL students' PWB and academic achievement. It first examines the cognitive, economic, and psychological frameworks underlying the model and then evaluates empirical studies to highlight the current research gap.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

The GTD productivity framework, conceptualized by Allen (2015), is examined here as a systematic approach to cognitive self-regulation. Its core focus, namely, the externalization of cognitive load through the five steps of Capture, Clarify, Organize, Reflect, and Engage, is supported by research in cognitive psychology. Masicampo and Baumeister (2011) note that uncompleted tasks or unclear goals consume executive resources and may lead to cognitive interference. By encouraging systematic capture and clarification processes, GTD appears to reduce this cognitive demand. However, as Segaran and Hasim (2021) observe, the use of such structured task-management systems in EFL contexts remains an area that would benefit from further examination, particularly in relation to student well-being. In addition, the GTD Levels of Focus model offers a hierarchical structure linking daily actions to longer-term aims. This approach may serve as a practical alternative to dispositional self-regulation models, such as the one discussed by Seli (2023), which emphasize identity-level goals but often provide less immediate procedural support for managing heavy academic demands in EFL settings. Likewise, the GTD Planning Map, by requiring explicit next actions, may help reduce academic procrastination, a factor discussed by Kim and Seo (2015). Even so, the connection between micro-level organizational efficiency and broader language achievement still requires empirical support.

This focus on process efficiency also aligns with Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1962; Schultz, 1961), which views education and skills as investments that may yield future returns. Within this framework, structured productivity training can be understood as a form of investment in transferable human capital, with the potential to enhance learners' ability to develop language proficiency. Although early scholars such as Robinson (1919) expressed concern about reducing individuals to economic value, Schultz's later work emphasized human capital as a means of personal empowerment. This perspective appears relevant to the Iranian EFL context, where limited authentic English exposure and resource constraints may require learners to use their study time more efficiently (Al-Hashimy, 2023). Mincer's (1958) model similarly suggests that improving the learning process through self-management and productivity may generate meaningful educational returns. However, much of the human capital literature in education has focused more on structural inputs, such as instructional time and curriculum design, than on the role of self-managed, process-oriented strategies such as GTD.

The relationship between productivity frameworks and psychological well-being represents a noticeable gap in the literature. Ryff's (1995) multidimensional model of PWB, which includes environmental mastery, autonomy, and purpose in life, offers a useful lens for examining whether structured workflows can support affective stability. Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) found that systematic goal attainment is associated with subjective well-being, and Aeon et al. (2021) reported a relationship between time management and reduced distress. Still, studies connecting multistep productivity interventions to PWB remain limited (Moore, 2018). This issue becomes even more relevant when cultural context is considered. The collectivist orientation of Iranian society (Kwan et al., 1997) suggests that individual well-being may be shaped by relational harmony as well as personal autonomy. As a result, a productivity intervention in this context would ideally help students manage cognitive demands while remaining aligned with broader academic and social purposes. Similarly, although the reflective dimension of GTD appears conceptually related to mindfulness-based practices (Brown & Ryan, 2003), there is still limited empirical evidence showing that structured task externalization can consistently cultivate the reflective states needed to reduce academic stress among Iranian EFL learners (Al-Hashimy, 2023).

2.2. Empirical Studies and Research Gap

Empirical research in educational settings suggests a relationship between structured self-management and academic outcomes. For example, Ghorbanzadeh et al. (2023) reported a correlation between EFL instructors' self-efficacy and personal productivity, suggesting that structured workflows may operate through perceived control and efficacy. The measurement of such productivity-related constructs has also been supported by instruments such as the Personal Productivity Questionnaire (PPQ), developed by Al-Hashimy (2023). In addition, Segaran and Hasim (2021) observed that structured organizational frameworks may help students manage academic commitments, a capacity often necessary for sustained academic performance.

With regard to the affective dimension, research suggests that effective goal management may support emotional regulation and well-being. Brown and Ryan (2003) noted that dispositional mindfulness, which shares some cognitive features with the focused task execution emphasized in GTD, predicts higher PWB. More recently, Davis and Hadwin (2021) reported that goal management is associated with higher student well-being, suggesting that structured planning may contribute to emotional resilience during academic challenges. This interpretation is supported by Trudel-Fitzgerald et al. (2019), who found that systematic goal-setting behaviors contribute to well-being across different age groups, implying that the benefits of structured self-regulation may extend across developmental stages.

There is also evidence of a relationship between cognitive development and emotional management in learning environments. Griffiths et al. (2021) provided evidence indicating that early language proficiency may predict later performance on emotional regulation tasks ($\beta = .23$),

suggesting that cognitive resources may support affective control. In the EFL context, Akbari et al. (2017) mapped teacher and student self-regulation behaviors onto Gross's Process Model of Emotion Regulation, showing that emotion management can be meaningfully examined in language classrooms. Likewise, Zhang et al. (2021) found that foreign language learners use self-regulation strategies to maintain engagement and enjoyment.

At the same time, the applicability of these models should be considered in relation to their cultural and developmental contexts. Research by Diener and Diener (2009) and Kwan et al. (1997) indicates that cultural values influence the factors contributing to life satisfaction and well-being. Thus, the perceived usefulness of a productivity model such as GTD among Iranian EFL students is likely to be shaped by local academic expectations and support structures. This point is important because student well-being is sensitive to environmental conditions. For instance, Cihinlioğlu (2006) associated poorer psychological outcomes with insufficient social support, while Cenkseven (2004) identified locus of control and personality traits as predictors of student well-being. By contrast, Garcia (2017), in an intervention study on language-learning strategies, found that metacognitive strategy instruction, which shares procedural similarities with the reflection phase of GTD, enhanced motivation and self-efficacy.

In summary, while structured productivity, self-regulation, and well-being have each received attention in the literature, fewer studies have examined them together in an integrated manner. Existing research suggests a possible pathway through which structured productivity practices may strengthen self-efficacy and goal management (Davis & Hadwin, 2021; Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2023), which may, in turn, support the forms of self-regulation associated with well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Trudel-Fitzgerald et al., 2019). However, this possible pathway has not been sufficiently examined through a comprehensive productivity model such as GTD in an EFL setting. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the impact of the GTD model on the psychological well-being and academic achievement of Iranian EFL students while also exploring their experiences during the intervention.

2.3. Research Questions

The main objective of this study was to examine the impact of the GTD productivity model on Iranian EFL university students' psychological well-being and academic achievement while also exploring their perceptions of its implementation. To guide this investigation, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What effect does the GTD model have on Iranian EFL university students' psychological well-being?
2. What effect does the GTD model have on Iranian EFL university students' academic achievement?

3. How do Iranian EFL university students perceive the impact of the GTD model on their psychological well-being and academic achievement?

This study addresses a gap at the intersection of productivity, well-being, and academic achievement in EFL education. By examining the outcomes of the GTD model, the study may offer useful insights into EFL course design, teaching practices, and student self-management strategies (Al-Hashimy, 2023). The findings may also help educational administrators consider approaches that support both academic development and student well-being.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was adopted to capture both the measurable impacts of the GTD model and students' subjective experiences. According to Creswell and Clark (2017), this design enables quantitative data collection and analysis in the initial phase, followed by qualitative data collection to further explain and contextualize the quantitative findings. This approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the intervention by integrating statistical outcomes with participants' lived experiences.

3.2. Participants

The participant pool comprised 40 university-level EFL students (20 male and 20 female) from two intact lower-intermediate classes at a Payam-e Noor University branch in Iran. Convenience sampling was used to select the two existing classes, resulting in balanced gender representation. Because the participants were drawn from intact classes, random assignment to experimental conditions was not feasible. Consequently, one class was designated as the experimental group and the other as the control group.

Both groups were taught by the same instructor using the same instructional materials, class schedule, and learning objectives to minimize instructional variability. Participants ranged in age from 22 to 30 years and were all native speakers of Farsi. Before participation, informed consent was obtained from all students, and ethical assurances regarding the anonymity and confidentiality of personal data were clearly communicated.

Baseline equivalence between the two groups was examined through screening using the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) and the administration of pretests measuring psychological well-being and academic achievement before the intervention. These pretest scores were subsequently controlled for in the ANCOVA analyses.

3.3. Instruments

Data collection relied on four distinct instruments. The OPT, a standardized proficiency assessment, served as the prescreening tool for establishing homogeneity among participants based on their listening, reading, and writing skills. Only those scoring between 30 and 39, corresponding to the lower-intermediate proficiency band, were included in the study, thereby controlling for initial proficiency differences.

Academic achievement was measured using a standardized 30-item multiple-choice pretest/posttest derived from the Payam-e Noor General English curriculum. The test items were directly aligned with the course learning objectives and syllabus content, thereby supporting the content validity of the instrument as a measure of students' academic achievement within the instructional context. The internal consistency reliability of the dichotomously scored achievement test was examined using the Kuder–Richardson Formula 21 (KR-21).

Psychological well-being was measured using the Persian short-form Psychological Well-Being Questionnaire (PWBQ), developed by Ryff and Keyes (1995). The instrument consists of 18 items rated on a six-point Likert scale assessing multiple dimensions of psychological well-being. The Persian version of the questionnaire was previously validated in the Iranian context by Al-Hashimy (2023), who reported a strong reliability coefficient of .90. In the present study, internal consistency reliability was also examined using Cronbach's alpha to confirm the reliability of the instrument for the current sample.

Finally, qualitative data were collected through a six-item semistructured interview guide designed to explore students' perceptions of the GTD intervention and its perceived impact on their well-being and academic performance. The interview questions were initially derived from the literature on productivity and self-management strategies (Allen, 2015). To ensure content and face validity for the target population, the interview guide was reviewed and refined through expert consultation involving two EFL specialists and one productivity expert before being translated into Persian. The qualitative data obtained from these interviews were intended to provide deeper insight into the quantitative findings and explain students' experiences with the GTD intervention.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection followed the sequential structure of the mixed-methods design. After sampling and obtaining informed consent, all participants completed the OPT for proficiency screening to confirm their lower-intermediate proficiency level. Subsequently, participants in both groups completed the PWBQ and the Payam-e Noor General English achievement test as pretests to establish baseline measures.

The instructional intervention was implemented over 16 sessions. During this period, the first author served as the instructor for both groups, delivering the standard General English textbook content. The experimental group additionally received instruction in GTD strategies, including task

capture, daily to-do list planning, and goal-setting practices, as conceptualized by Allen (2015). In contrast, the control group continued with the standard instructional approach without explicit productivity strategy training.

To minimize potential threats to internal validity, both groups received identical instructional materials, instructional time, and classroom conditions, with the only systematic difference being the incorporation of GTD strategies in the experimental group.

Immediately following the intervention, both groups completed the PWBQ and the Payam-e Noor General English achievement test as posttests. Subsequently, 65% of the participants in the experimental group (n = 13) were purposively selected to participate in individual semistructured interviews to explore their perceptions of the GTD intervention's impact on their psychological well-being and academic achievement. These interviews were audio-recorded and conducted in Persian to ensure participant comfort and clarity of expression. The interview phase provided qualitative depth and helped explain the quantitative outcomes observed in the earlier stage of the study.

3.5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 27). Before hypothesis testing, parametric assumptions were assessed. Normality was evaluated using skewness and kurtosis indices. Because no serious violations of normality were observed, parametric analyses were retained. Preliminary analyses also confirmed the assumptions of linearity, homogeneity of variance, and homogeneity of regression slopes. Following confirmation of these assumptions, the primary statistical procedure used to address Research Questions 1 and 2 was one-way ANCOVA, which compared the posttest scores of the experimental and control groups for both psychological well-being and academic achievement while controlling for the corresponding pretest scores as covariates.

Qualitative data addressing Research Question 3 were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, and an initial open-coding process was conducted to identify meaningful segments related to students' experiences with the GTD intervention. These initial codes were then grouped into broader conceptual categories through iterative comparisons across transcripts. Subsequently, related categories were refined into overarching themes that captured recurring patterns in participants' responses. The final themes were reviewed and clearly defined before being presented alongside illustrative participant quotations.

Qualitative rigor was ensured through several established strategies. Credibility was enhanced through the use of thick description and verbatim participant quotations to preserve authenticity and allow readers to assess the resonance of the findings. Dependability was supported through a second round of transcript coding conducted by the researcher after a two-month interval

to check coding consistency. Transferability was addressed by providing a detailed description of the research context, participants, and procedures, allowing readers to evaluate the applicability of the findings to other contexts. Confirmability was supported through the maintenance of a transparent audit trail documenting key decisions made during data collection and analysis.

3.6. Validity and Reliability

Instrument validity and reliability were addressed through several procedures. The OPT relied on standardized scoring norms to ensure validity in assessing participants' language proficiency for screening purposes.

The Payam-e Noor General English achievement test demonstrated content validity through its direct alignment with the course syllabus and learning objectives used within the university's instructional system. Internal consistency was examined using KR-21, which is appropriate for dichotomously scored items.

The Persian short-form PWBQ demonstrated strong internal consistency. Previous validation research conducted in the Iranian context reported a reliability coefficient of .90 (Al-Hashimy, 2023). Cronbach's alpha was also calculated for the present dataset to verify the internal consistency of the instrument within the current sample.

The semistructured interview protocol underwent both content and face validity checks through expert evaluation by two EFL specialists and one productivity expert. Qualitative rigor was further reinforced through the integration of qualitative themes with the quantitative findings. In addition, an audit trail documenting the research process supported confirmability, while periodic coding consistency checks supported the dependability of the coding process.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols were strictly followed throughout the study. All participants provided written informed consent before participation. Anonymity was maintained through the use of coded identifiers in the quantitative datasets and pseudonyms in the qualitative transcripts. Participation was entirely voluntary, and students were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All collected data were securely stored on password-protected devices accessible only to the research team, in accordance with established research ethics guidelines.

4. Results and Findings

This section presents the findings of the study, which investigated the impact of the GTD model on Iranian EFL university students' PWB and academic achievement, as well as their perceptions of its effectiveness. The analysis addresses three research questions: (1) What effect does the GTD model have on Iranian EFL university students' PWB? (2) What effect does the

GTD model have on Iranian EFL university students' academic achievement? and (3) How do Iranian EFL university students perceive the impact of the GTD model on their PWB and academic achievement? The quantitative results, derived from one-way ANCOVA analyses, are reported first, followed by the qualitative findings from the thematic analysis of semistructured interviews.

4.1. Quantitative Data Analysis and Results

Quantitative data were analyzed using one-way ANCOVA. Before conducting the main analyses, the relevant statistical assumptions were examined, including the approximate normality of score distributions, the linearity of the relationship between pretest and posttest scores, the homogeneity of regression slopes, and the equality of variances across groups. Instrument reliability was also evaluated. In addition, it was confirmed that the pretests were administered before the posttests, that observations were independent across participants, and that each posttest was analyzed using a single covariate corresponding to its pretest.

4.1.1. Assumption Testing: Normality and Reliability

Prior to conducting the main analyses, the normality of score distributions was assessed for all variables in both groups using skewness and kurtosis indices. According to commonly used guidelines, skewness and kurtosis values within ±2 suggest no serious departure from normality for parametric analyses.

Table 1

Skewness and kurtosis Indices for Normality Assessment

Group	Variable	N	Skewness	Std. Error	Kurtosis	Std. Error
GTD	Pre-PWB	20	-0.211	0.548	-1.104	1.095
	Post-PWB	20	0.022	0.548	-0.193	1.095
	Pre-achiev.	20	0.255	0.548	-0.310	1.095
	Post-achiev.	20	-0.211	0.548	-0.599	1.095
Control	Pre-PWB	20	-0.044	0.548	0.437	1.095
	Post-PWB	20	0.449	0.548	1.075	1.095
	Pre-achiev.	20	-0.010	0.548	-0.963	1.095
	Post-achiev.	20	-0.174	0.548	-1.044	1.095

Note. Achiev.=achievement; Post=posttest; Pre=pretest; PWB=psychological well-being; Std. Error= standard error.

The normality indices presented in Table 1 show that all skewness values ranged from -.211 to .449 and all kurtosis values ranged from -1.104 to 1.075, well within the acceptable limits of ±2. These results indicate that the score distributions did not show problematic departures from normality and that the normality assumption required for ANCOVA was satisfied across all measures.

In addition to normality, the reliability of the instruments employed in this study was examined through internal consistency estimates. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for the PWB pretest and posttest, while the KR-21 was used for the dichotomously scored achievement test.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Internal Consistency Reliability Indices

	N	M	SD	Variance	Reliability (α / KR-21)
Pre-PWB	40	59.97	9.978	99.563	0.74
Post-PWB	40	80.72	13.105	171.743	0.89
Pre-achiev.	40	12.30	4.874	23.754	0.72
Post-achiev.	40	15.75	6.254	39.113	0.84

Note. PWB reliability was estimated using Cronbach's alpha; achievement reliability was estimated using KR-21. N = 40.

As shown in Table 2, the descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients for all instruments are summarized. The mean pretest PWB score was 59.97 (SD=9.978), which increased to 80.72 (SD=13.105) at posttest. For academic achievement, the pretest mean was 12.30 (SD=4.874), rising to 15.75 (SD=6.254) at posttest. All reliability coefficients exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of .70, with values ranging from .72 for the pretest of achievement to .89 for the posttest of PWB. These findings indicate that the instruments used in the study possessed satisfactory internal consistency.

4.1.2. Effect of the GTD Model on EFL University Students' PWB

Research Question 1 examined whether the GTD model had a significant effect on Iranian EFL university students' PWB. To address this question, a one-way ANCOVA was performed, with posttest PWB scores serving as the dependent variable, group membership (experimental or control) as the independent variable, and pretest PWB scores as the covariate. Before presenting the main findings, the ANCOVA assumptions relevant to this analysis are detailed below.

The PWB pretest was administered before the posttest, the observations were independent across participants, and the PWB posttest was analyzed using a single covariate (pretest PWB). The normality and reliability of the PWB data were verified in Section 4.1.1. The remaining testable assumptions, namely, linearity, homogeneity of regression slopes, and homogeneity of variance, are addressed in the following sections.

The linearity assumption requires a linear relationship between the covariate (pretest PWB) and the dependent variable (posttest PWB). This assumption was tested by examining whether the linear component of the relationship between the pretest and posttest scores was statistically significant.

Table 3

Testing Linearity of Relationship Between Pretest and Posttest of PWB

			SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Post-PWB * Pre-PWB	Between Groups	(Combined)	4701.892	25	188.076	1.319	.299
		Linearity	2100.236	1	2100.236	14.731	.002
		Deviation from Linearity	2601.655	24	108.402	.760	.731
	Within Groups		1996.083	14	142.577		
	Total		6697.975	39			

Note. df=degrees of freedom; F=F-statistic; MS=mean square; Post=posttest; Pre=pretest; PWB=psychological well-being; Sig.=significance level; SS=sum of squares.

The results of the linearity test, displayed in Table 3, indicate that the linear relationship between pretest and posttest PWB scores was statistically significant, $F(1, 14)=14.73$, $p=.002$. In addition, the deviation from linearity was non-significant, indicating that the relationship between pretest and posttest PWB scores was adequately linear. These findings confirm that the linearity assumption was met, allowing the ANCOVA to proceed.

Another critical assumption for ANCOVA is homogeneity of regression slopes, which requires that the relationship between the covariate and the dependent variable be consistent across both groups. This assumption was tested by examining the interaction between the covariate (pretest PWB) and the grouping variable (experimental vs. control).

Table 4

Tests of Homogeneity of Regression Slopes For Pretest and Posttest of PWB

Source	Type III SS	df	MS	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Group	32.797	1	32.797	.479	.493	.013
Pre-PWB	3360.908	1	3360.908	49.117	.000	.577
Group * Pre-PWB	3.119	1	3.119	.046	.832	.001
Error	2463.349	36	68.426			
Total	7992.020	40				

Note. df=degrees of freedom; F=F-statistic; MS=mean square; Partial η^2=partial eta squared; Post=posttest; Pre=pretest; PWB= psychological well-being; Sig.=significance level; SS=sum of squares.

Table 4 presents the results of the test for homogeneity of regression slopes. The interaction term between pretest PWB and group was non-significant ($F(1, 36)=.046$, $p=.832$, Partial $\eta^2 = .001$), indicating that the regression slopes did not differ significantly between the experimental and control groups. The negligible effect size (Partial $\eta^2=.001$) further supports the conclusion that this assumption was satisfied.

The homogeneity of variance assumption, also known as the assumption of equal variances, was assessed using Levene's test. This test examines whether the variance in posttest PWB scores was approximately equal across the two groups.

Table 5

Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances for Posttest of PWB By Group With Pretest

F	df1	df2	Sig.
.172	1	38	.681

Note. df = degrees of freedom; F = F-statistic; PWB = psychological well-being; Sig. = significance level.

As displayed in Table 5, Levene's test yielded a non-significant result ($F(1, 38) = .172$, $p = .681$), indicating that the variances in posttest PWB scores did not differ significantly between the experimental and control groups. This finding confirms that the homogeneity of variance assumption was met. With all ANCOVA assumptions satisfied, the main analysis proceeded.

After confirming that all assumptions were met, the ANCOVA was conducted to compare the adjusted posttest PWB means of the experimental and control groups while controlling for pretest PWB scores. The adjusted means represent the estimated posttest scores if both groups had started with identical pretest means.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Posttest of PWB By Group With Pretest

Group	Mean	SE	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
GTD	88.44[a]	1.82	84.631	92.241
Control	73.01[a]	1.82	69.209	76.819

a. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following value: Pre-PWB = 59.97.

Note. CI=confidence interval; GTD=Getting Things Done; PWB = psychological well-being; SE = standard error of the adjusted mean.

The adjusted means and standard errors are presented in Table 6. After controlling for pretest PWB scores, the GTD group obtained an adjusted mean of 88.44 (SE=1.82, 95% CI [84.63, 92.24]), while the control group had an adjusted mean of 73.01 (SE=1.82, 95% CI [69.21, 76.82]). Both adjusted means were evaluated at the grand mean of the covariate (Pre-PWB=59.97). These adjusted values indicate a substantial difference between the two groups, consistent with the statistically significant ANCOVA result.

The primary results of the one-way ANCOVA for posttest PWB scores are summarized below, indicating whether group membership had a statistically significant effect after controlling for pretest scores.

Table 7

Tests of between-subjects Effects For Posttest of PWB by Group With Pretest

Source	Type III SS	df	MS	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Pre-PWB	3394.281	1	3394.281	50.918	.000	.579
Group	2131.270	1	2131.270	31.972	.000	.463
Error	2466.469	37	66.661			
Total	267359.000	40				

Note. df=degrees of freedom; F=F-statistic; MS = mean square; Partial η^2=partial eta squared; PWB=psychological well-being; Sig.=significance level; SS=sum of squares; Type III SS=Type III sum of squares.

As shown in Table 7, the ANCOVA revealed a statistically significant difference between groups in posttest PWB scores after controlling for pretest scores ($F(1, 37) = 31.97$, $p < .001$, Partial $\eta^2 = .463$). The pretest covariate was also a significant predictor of posttest performance ($F(1, 37) = 50.92$, $p < .001$, Partial $\eta^2 = .579$). The partial eta-squared value of .463 for group membership indicates that approximately 46.3% of the variance in adjusted posttest PWB scores was attributable to group differences, representing a large effect size. These results demonstrate that the GTD group attained significantly higher adjusted posttest PWB scores than the control group after accounting for initial PWB levels.

4.1.3. Effect of the GTD Model on EFL University Students' Achievement

Research Question 2 investigated whether the GTD model had a significant effect on Iranian EFL university students' academic achievement. A one-way ANCOVA was performed to compare posttest achievement scores between the experimental and control groups while controlling for pretest achievement scores. As with the PWB analysis, the relevant assumptions were tested before the main results were interpreted.

The achievement pretest was administered before the posttest, the observations were independent across participants, and the posttest was analyzed using a single covariate (pretest achievement). The normality and reliability of the achievement data were verified in Section 4.1.1. The testable assumptions, namely, linearity, homogeneity of regression slopes, and homogeneity of variance, are examined below.

The linearity assumption was tested to determine whether a linear relationship existed between pretest and posttest achievement scores. This test evaluates whether the linear component of the relationship between the covariate and the dependent variable is statistically significant.

Table 8

Testing Linearity of Relationship Between Pretest and Posttest of Achievement

			SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Post-achiev. * Pre-achiev.	Between Groups	(Combined)	1009.750	18	56.097	2.284	.036
		Linearity	512.436	1	512.436	20.864	.000
		Deviation from Linearity	497.314	17	29.254	1.191	.348
	Within Groups		515.750	21	24.560		
	Total		1525.500	39			

Note. df = degrees of freedom; F = F-statistic; MS = mean square; Post = posttest; Pre = pretest; Sig. = significance level; SS = sum of squares.

The linearity test results presented in Table 8 showed a statistically significant linear relationship between pretest and posttest achievement scores, $F(1, 21)=20.86$, $p< .001$. In addition, the deviation from linearity was nonsignificant, indicating that the relationship between pretest and posttest achievement scores was adequately linear. Therefore, the linearity assumption for ANCOVA was satisfied.

The homogeneity of regression slopes assumption was examined by testing whether the relationship between the covariate (pretest achievement) and the dependent variable (posttest achievement) was consistent across the two groups. This was assessed through the interaction between the covariate and the grouping variable.

Table 9

Tests of Homogeneity of Regression Slopes for Pretest and Posttest of Achievement

Source	Type III SS	df	MS	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Group	7.806	1	7.806	.344	.561	.009
Pre-achiev.	465.851	1	465.851	20.526	.000	.363
Group * Pre-achiev.	5.745	1	5.745	.253	.618	.007
Error	817.027	36	22.695			
Total	1296.429	39				

Note. df=degrees of freedom; F=F-statistic; MS=mean square; Partial η^2=partial eta squared; Sig.=significance level; SS=sum of squares; Type III SS=Type III sum of squares.

Table 9 displays the test results for homogeneity of regression slopes. The interaction term between pretest achievement and group was non-significant ($F(1, 36)=.253$, $p=.618$, Partial $\eta^2 = .007$), indicating that the regression slopes did not differ significantly between the experimental and control groups. The minimal effect size (Partial $\eta^2 = .007$) further supports the conclusion that this assumption was upheld.

Levene's test was employed to assess whether the variances in posttest achievement scores were approximately equal across the two groups, thereby testing the homogeneity of variance assumption.

Table 10

Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances for Posttest of Achievement by Group with Pretest

F	df1	df2	Sig.
1.224	1	38	.276

Note. df=degrees of freedom; F=F-statistic; Sig.=significance level.

As indicated in Table 10, Levene's test produced a non-significant result ($F(1, 38)=1.22$, $p = .276$), suggesting that the variances in posttest achievement scores did not differ significantly between the experimental and control groups. This finding confirms that the homogeneity of variance assumption was met. With all assumptions satisfied, the ANCOVA was conducted.

Following confirmation of all assumptions, the ANCOVA was performed to compare the adjusted posttest achievement means of the two groups while controlling for pretest achievement scores. The adjusted means provide an estimate of posttest performance assuming both groups had equivalent pretest scores.

Table 11

Descriptive statistics for posttest of achievement by group with pretest

Group	Mean	SE	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
GTD	17.935[a]	1.056	15.797	20.074
Control	13.565[a]	1.057	11.426	15.703

a. The covariate appearing in the model was evaluated at the following value: Pre-achievement = 12.30.

Note. SE = standard error of the adjusted mean.

The adjusted means and their corresponding standard errors are presented in Table 11. After accounting for pretest achievement scores, the GTD group obtained an adjusted mean of 17.94 (SE=1.06, 95% CI [15.80, 20.07]), whereas the control group had an adjusted mean of 13.57 (SE=1.06, 95% CI [11.43, 15.70]). Both means were evaluated at the grand mean of the covariate (Pre-achievement=12.30). The adjusted means indicate a notable difference between the two groups, which is consistent with the statistically significant ANCOVA result reported below.

The final analysis examines whether group membership had a statistically significant effect on posttest achievement scores after controlling for initial achievement levels.

Table 12

Tests of between-subjects Effects for Posttest of Achievement by Group with Pretest

Source	Type III SS	df	MS	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Pre-achiev.	472.328	1	472.328	21.241	.000	.365
Group	190.291	1	190.291	8.557	.006	.188
Error	822.772	37	22.237			
Total	11448.000	40				

Note. df = degrees of freedom; F = F-statistic; MS = mean square; Partial η^2 = partial eta squared; Post = posttest; Pre = pretest; Sig. = significance level; SS = sum of squares; Type III SS = Type III sum of squares.

Table 12 summarizes the one-way ANCOVA results for posttest achievement. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between groups after controlling for pretest achievement ($F(1, 37)=8.56$, $p = .006$, Partial $\eta^2=.188$). The pretest covariate was also a significant predictor of posttest scores ($F(1, 37)=21.24$, $p < .001$, Partial $\eta^2 = .365$). The partial eta-squared value of .188 for group membership indicates that approximately 18.8% of the variance in adjusted posttest achievement scores was attributable to group differences, reflecting a large effect size according to conventional benchmarks. These findings demonstrate that the GTD group achieved significantly higher adjusted posttest achievement scores than the control group after accounting for initial achievement levels.

4.2. Qualitative Data Analysis and Findings

To address Research Question 3, "How do Iranian EFL university students perceive the impact of the GTD model on their psychological well-being and academic achievement?" interview

data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. The analysis generated eight themes: four related to participants' perceptions of the impact of GTD on psychological well-being and four related to its perceived impact on academic achievement.

4.2.1. Perceived Impact on Psychological Well-Being

Participants described several ways in which the GTD model was perceived to influence their psychological well-being. Their accounts pointed to reduced mental pressure, clearer direction, greater control over responsibilities, and positive feelings associated with completing planned tasks.

Theme 1: Reducing Mental Overload and Anxiety

Participants frequently reported that writing down tasks and commitments helped reduce stress and mental pressure. Interviewee 1 explained, "Before using GTD, my mind often felt crowded with things I had to remember, and this sometimes reduced my enjoyment of daily life." The same participant added, "When I quickly write something down in the system, I immediately feel calmer because I know I will not forget it." Interviewee 2 similarly said, "I make a checklist before important events so I don't forget anything. When I check everything on the list, I feel more relaxed." Interviewee 12 also noted that organizing tasks into clear categories created "a feeling of being prepared and comfortable." These responses suggest that participants perceived capturing and organizing tasks outside the mind as helpful in reducing cognitive pressure and anxiety.

Theme 2: Value-Guided Planning and Sense of Purpose

Some participants reported that using GTD encouraged them to think more clearly about their goals and priorities, which supported a greater sense of purpose. Interviewee 5 stated, "When I started planning my goals more clearly, I realized that many things I do are connected to my long-term plans. This made me feel more satisfied with my progress." Interviewee 7 likewise noted, "I feel calmer and more confident because GTD helped me plan my activities better." Interviewee 11 said, "It helped me decide faster and be clearer about what I want to achieve," while Interviewee 10 explained that organizing tasks and plans made daily life feel "more structured and easier to manage." Taken together, these accounts indicate that participants associated GTD with clearer direction and more purposeful daily action.

Theme 3: Organization and Sense of Control

Another theme concerned the role of organization in increasing participants' sense of control over their responsibilities. Interviewee 12 explained, "When everything is organized step by step, I feel more in control of what I need to do." Interviewee 11 similarly reported, "It became easier to decide what to do next," and Interviewee 7 noted, "I became better at planning my activities and managing my time." Unlike the previous theme, which centered more on goals and direction, this theme focused on the practical sense of control that came from breaking

responsibilities into manageable steps. Overall, participants suggested that GTD helped them deal with tasks in a more orderly and manageable way.

Theme 4: Positive Feelings from Completing Planned Goals

Participants also described positive emotions that came from completing planned tasks within the GTD system. Interviewee 9 stated, "When I know the next steps clearly and complete them one by one, I feel satisfied." Interviewee 10 explained, "When I look at my lists and see what I have completed, I feel motivated and positive about my progress." Similarly, Interviewee 5 said, " When I plan my activities clearly, I feel more involved in the process and more satisfied when I complete them," and Interviewee 1 noted, "Even doing a small step like organizing something gives me a good feeling." In contrast to Theme 3, which focused on control during task management, this theme reflects the positive emotional effect of visible progress and task completion.

Overall, the psychological well-being findings suggest that participants perceived GTD as helpful in reducing mental overload, giving clearer direction, increasing day-to-day control over responsibilities, and creating positive feelings through steady progress.

4.2.2. Perceived Impact on Academic Achievement

Participants also described several ways in which GTD was perceived to support their academic achievement. Their responses focused on better organization of study materials, more consistent handling of academic tasks, clearer study goals, and greater responsibility for managing learning.

Theme 1: Organized Study Materials and Learning Efficiency

Participants reported that organizing academic materials made studying more efficient and helped them focus better. Interviewee 1 explained, "I started putting vocabulary notes, grammar points, and study materials into organized folders. Because everything was easier to find, I could review faster and focus better." The same participant also noted that having materials arranged neatly supported concentration. Interviewee 10 similarly stated, "Learning depends on many things, but organizing my study materials helped me study more effectively." These responses suggest that the organization of materials reduced wasted time and made academic work more manageable.

Theme 2: Managing Academic Tasks More Consistently

Participants also emphasized the role of GTD in helping them carry out academic tasks more regularly and systematically. Interviewee 9 said, "I used it for reading textbook chapters, preparing presentations, doing practice exercises, and working on small projects." Interviewee 12 explained, "When tasks are clear and organized, it becomes easier to focus on studying," and Interviewee 11 indicated that planning tasks helped clarify priorities and improved efficiency in completing

academic work. This theme is distinct from Theme 1 in that it relates less to organizing materials and more to managing academic actions and assignments in a consistent way.

Theme 3: Increased Motivation Through Clear Academic Goals

Several participants suggested that clearer planning strengthened their motivation for learning English. Interviewee 5 explained, "When I started planning my study tasks, I became more involved in the learning process," and added, "Now I understand better why I chose to study English, and this motivates me to continue improving." Interviewee 11 described a similar experience, explaining that clearer planning made academic goals easier to understand and follow. These accounts indicate that GTD was perceived not only as a practical system for organizing work, but also as something that could strengthen students' motivation by making goals more visible.

Theme 4: Greater Responsibility for Learning

The final theme concerned participants' increased sense of responsibility for directing and managing their own learning. Interviewee 5 explained, "By planning my tasks carefully, I could avoid unnecessary activities and spend more time studying English." Interviewee 7 similarly said, " When I treat a problem as a small project, it becomes easier to handle." Interviewee 9 noted, "When I see the next actions clearly, it is easier to continue working," and Interviewee 12 observed that organizing tasks increased independence in managing study responsibilities. Compared with Theme 2, which focuses on consistent execution of academic tasks, this theme centers more on ownership, prioritization, and self-management in learning.

Overall, the academic achievement findings suggest that participants perceived GTD as helping them organize study materials, manage academic tasks more consistently, clarify their academic goals, and take greater responsibility for their learning.

5. Discussion

This study investigated the impact of the GTD productivity model on Iranian EFL university students' PWB and academic achievement, while exploring their subjective perceptions of the intervention. The following sections interpret the findings in relation to the research questions, theoretical frameworks, and prior empirical literature.

5.1. Overall Pattern of Findings

Participation in the GTD intervention was associated with meaningfully higher adjusted posttest scores for both PWB and academic achievement after controlling for pretest differences. The effect size for PWB (partial $\eta^2 = .463$) was notably larger than that for academic achievement (partial $\eta^2 = .188$), although both values represented large effects. This pattern suggests that the intervention had a more pronounced influence on students' affective states than on measurable

language performance. Together, the quantitative and qualitative data indicate that structured task management may have reduced cognitive and emotional burdens while providing a framework for more organized and goal-directed academic engagement. Given the scope and scale of the study, these interpretations should be regarded as preliminary.

5.2. Effect of the GTD Model on Psychological Well-Being

The finding that the GTD group demonstrated significantly higher adjusted posttest PWB scores provides empirical support for a connection between structured productivity practices and student well-being in the Iranian EFL context. This result aligns with Lyubomirsky et al. (2005), who reported associations between systematic goal attainment and subjective well-being, extending this relationship to language learning. Similarly, Aeon et al. (2021) reported relationships between time management and reduced distress; the current data suggest that a specific multistep framework can produce comparable effects when implemented as a structured intervention.

The qualitative data illuminate these mechanisms. Participants described externalizing tasks as producing immediate relief and mental space, closely reflecting Masicampo and Baumeister's (2011) finding that uncompleted goals create cognitive interference. GTD may have functioned as a form of cognitive offloading, reducing mental burden and freeing attentional resources for emotional regulation, consistent with Allen's (2015) theoretical framework. Participant responses, particularly those concerning control over responsibilities, a clearer sense of purpose, and positive feelings resulting from visible progress, correspond to Ryff's (1995) PWB dimensions of environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Davis and Hadwin (2021) similarly reported associations between goal management and student well-being, although they did not examine a prescriptive multicomponent system. Trudel-Fitzgerald et al. (2019) found that systematic goal setting contributes to well-being across age groups; the present findings suggest that this pattern also holds for young adult EFL learners in Iranian university contexts.

The cultural context warrants consideration. Diener and Diener (2009) and Kwan et al. (1997) noted that cultural values shape the factors contributing to well-being, and within Iran's collectivist culture, individual well-being may be influenced by relational dimensions that GTD does not directly address. The positive outcomes observed may reflect the system's organizational benefits converging with the broader academic and social goals that participants already held.

Theme 2 of the qualitative findings, concerning value-guided planning and purpose, merits attention. Participants reported that GTD helped them recognize connections between daily activities and longer-term aspirations. This finding relates to the GTD Levels of Focus model and is broadly consistent with Brown and Ryan's (2003) discussion of dispositional mindfulness and PWB, although Al-Hashimy (2023) noted that empirical evidence linking structured task externalization to mindful states remains limited.

5.3. Effect of the GTD Model on Academic Achievement

The ANCOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in adjusted posttest achievement scores, $F(1, 37) = 8.56$, $p = .006$, partial $\eta^2 = .188$, indicating that GTD participation was associated with higher achievement after controlling for pretest differences. This addresses gaps identified by Segaran and Hasim (2021) regarding structured task-management systems in EFL contexts and by Al-Hashimy (2023) regarding comprehensive empirical studies applying GTD in EFL settings.

The result is consistent with Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1962; Mincer, 1958; Schultz, 1961), which frames investments in study skills as yielding educational returns. The present findings offer preliminary empirical support for this theory in an EFL context, where Al-Hashimy (2023) noted that limited authentic exposure and resource constraints require learners to use their study time more efficiently. However, Human Capital Theory was originally conceived at structural and societal levels (Schultz, 1961), and its application to individual productivity interventions involves theoretical extrapolation.

More directly comparable is Ghorbanzadeh et al.'s (2023) finding of a correlation between EFL instructors' self-efficacy and personal productivity. The present findings extend this logic to learners: Students who acquired structured task-management skills may have experienced heightened efficacy, which supported their performance. The qualitative data support this interpretation. Participants described organizing materials, managing assignments consistently, and clarifying goals as processes that made studying more efficient and focused, suggesting a transition from unstructured to systematically managed engagement.

Qualitative Theme 3 under academic achievement, concerning increased motivation through clearer goals, connects to Garcia's (2017) finding that metacognitive strategy instruction enhanced motivation and self-efficacy. GTD shares procedural similarities with metacognitive instruction, requiring learners to reflect on tasks, clarify purposes, and plan deliberately. Theme 4, describing increased responsibility for learning, aligns with the self-regulatory dimension emphasized by Seli (2023) and Lackey et al. (2014). GTD may have supported this capacity by making the structure of self-management explicit and learnable, consistent with Segaran and Hasim's (2021) observation that structured frameworks help students manage academic commitments.

The effect size for achievement (partial $\eta^2 = .188$), although large, was considerably smaller than that for PWB (partial $\eta^2 = .463$). This suggests that although GTD had a meaningful impact, the pathway from productivity practices to measurable language achievement is likely more complex and may involve additional mediating factors. Language achievement may be more resistant to change than affective states, which can shift more immediately in response to changes in workload management.

5.4. Convergence of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The degree of coherence between the quantitative results and qualitative themes is noteworthy. The statistically significant improvement in PWB is echoed in participants' accounts of reduced anxiety, clearer purpose, greater control, and positive emotional responses. The significant improvement in academic achievement is reflected in descriptions of more organized study habits, consistent task management, clearer goals, and greater ownership of learning. This convergence lends internal coherence to the findings and suggests that the quantitative outcomes were accompanied by substantive changes in how participants experienced their academic work and well-being.

5.5. Contextual Considerations

Several contextual factors are relevant. The study was conducted with Iranian university EFL students operating within a high-stakes academic environment with limited authentic exposure to English (Al-Hashimy, 2023). This combination may have meant that students who acquired structured task-management skills experienced relatively pronounced benefits. Cihinlioğlu (2006) associated poorer psychological outcomes with insufficient social support, and Cenkseven (2004) identified locus of control as a predictor of student well-being. By providing an externally structured but internally directed framework, GTD may have functioned partly as scaffolded support associated with better outcomes, although this interpretation remains tentative.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of the GTD productivity model on Iranian EFL university students' psychological well-being and academic achievement using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. The quantitative findings confirmed statistically significant group differences in both outcomes after controlling for baseline scores, with a larger effect on PWB (partial η^2 =.463) than on academic achievement (partial η^2=.188). The qualitative phase complemented these results by revealing that participants experienced reduced mental overload, a clearer sense of purpose, greater organizational control, and increased ownership of learning. The convergence of both strands strengthens confidence in the central claim that structured task management can yield measurable affective and performance benefits in EFL contexts.

The study's primary contribution is demonstrating that a general productivity framework, when adapted to the EFL classroom, can simultaneously influence both well-being and achievement. This extends prior work on time management and well-being (Aeon et al., 2021; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005), addresses gaps identified by Segaran and Hasim (2021) and Al-Hashimy (2023) regarding structured task management in language learning, and supports the view that cognitive offloading through task externalization (Masicampo & Baumeister, 2011) can reduce

interference from uncompleted goals. From a Human Capital Theory perspective (Becker, 1962; Schultz, 1961), productivity training functions as an educational investment with measurable returns, which is particularly relevant in high-stakes EFL environments with limited authentic exposure, such as Iran. Practically, GTD's procedural clarity and low resource demands make it a scalable tool for instructors working with cognitively and emotionally burdened learners, and the qualitative themes related to value-guided planning and increased responsibility suggest that it can function as metacognitive scaffolding (Garcia, 2017; Seli, 2023).

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The quasi-experimental design, which involved intact classes rather than random assignment, limits causal inference, and the small sample drawn from a single university branch restricts generalizability across proficiency levels, age groups, and cultural settings. The 16-session intervention does not permit claims about long-term retention, the achievement test captures only immediate postintervention performance, and self-reported responses on the PWBQ are susceptible to social desirability bias. The qualitative sample was restricted to the experimental group, precluding a direct comparison of subjective experiences across conditions, and the dual role of the first author as instructor and analyst introduces potential bias despite the use of reflexivity measures. The study also does not isolate specific GTD components or compare GTD with alternative frameworks, limiting the understanding of its underlying mechanisms.

Future research should pursue replication using randomized designs, larger and more diverse samples, and longer follow-up periods to establish whether the effects persist. Comparative studies testing GTD against other metacognitive or productivity interventions would help identify its active components, while mediation analyses could clarify whether improvements in well-being drive performance gains or whether both stem from reduced cognitive load. Incorporating objective behavioral measures alongside self-report data would provide a more complete account of how GTD shapes study practices across different instructional contexts.

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