



Research Paper

Investigating the mediating role of academic retention in the relationship between school attachment and academic engagement

Haideh Ashouri¹ Mobina Abbasi²

1. Department of Educational Sciences, Tonekabon Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon, Iran.
2. Department of Educational Sciences, Yadegar Imam Khomeini Branch, Shahr-e Ray, Islamic Azad University, Shahr-e Ray, Iran.

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Abstract

The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the mediating role of academic retention in the relationship between school attachment and academic engagement. This study is in the field of applied research in terms of its purpose and is descriptive-correlational in terms of its research method. The statistical population of the study consisted of 411 students studying in first secondary girls' schools in Shahr-e Ray city, of which 177 were selected as the research sample using cluster random sampling. The data collection tools included the school attachment questionnaires of Rezaei Sharif et al. (2014) with reliability (0.78), academic retention of Martin and Marsh (2008) with reliability (0.84), and academic engagement of Zarang (2012) with reliability (0.85). Face and content validity were used to measure the research tools, and the validity of the questionnaires was assessed as good. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to determine reliability, which was approved. In order to analyze the data, the structural equation technique was used using Lisrel statistical software and Spss statistical software. The research findings showed that there is a direct and significant relationship between school attachment and academic retention with students' academic engagement, and academic retention plays a mediating role in the relationship between school attachment and students' academic engagement.

Keywords:

Academic retention,
School attachment,
Academic engagement.

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Corresponding Author: Haideh Ashouri	https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2923-2345	
Email: h.Ashouri@iau.ac.ir	Creative Commons: CC BY 4.0	



Extended Abstract

Introduction

School is the first social institution that influences adolescents' lives and determines the opportunities, quality of life, and behaviors of children and adolescents. School has a unique and profound impact on students' lives and plays an important role in defining an individual's overall sense of community during adolescence (Hirvonen et al, 2020). Studies have considered school, within the framework of concepts such as belonging, membership, satisfaction, commitment, commitment, and connection, as a predictor of students' educational, cognitive, behavioral, and social achievements. These studies have emphasized educational outcomes such as attention to education, school misconduct such as cheating and disobedience, academic success and progress, student motivation, and dropout (Salimi et al, 2015). One of the important motivational factors in academic success is academic engagement. Academic engagement is defined as a positive state of power, dedication, and absorption in learning. Students with high academic engagement learn with intrinsic motivation, attend classes regularly, are curious about school activities, are eager to learn, and have more challenges and energy for studying (Robayo-Tamayo & et al, 2020). Research has shown that if learners can be involved in academic issues and assignments as much as possible, their academic success can be expected to increase. Academic engagement is a construct that was first proposed to understand and explain academic decline and failure and was considered as the basis for reform efforts in the field of education (Forouzan Mehr, 2018). Student engagement in academic affairs is an important and vital factor for progress and success. In fact, the desire to progress and improve students' learning increases their interest in academic engagement (Zhen & et al, 2020). Academic engagement provides a clear picture of students' academic progress and failure and is considered as the primary model for academic progress and failure. Given the importance of academic engagement, researchers and educators are eager to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence academic engagement. Students' academic engagement is influenced by various intrapersonal and extrinsic factors (Ramezani, 2016). School engagement can be defined as the extent to which students feel satisfied with being at school; school connection is defined as students' perception of the support of a school that has a favorable climate and a supportive culture (Rezaei Sharif & Hajloo, 2016). School attachment has been defined as school participation, commitment to values and beliefs about the school, and the subjective feeling of being accepted, encouraged by others in the classroom, and feeling that one is an important part of the classroom activity (Korpershoek et al, 2020).

Given that not much research has been conducted in our country on the relationship between the above variables and their impact on students' academic engagement, the researcher decided to investigate the relationship between these variables in girls' junior high schools in Shahr-e-Ray city. In this regard, the main question of the present study is whether there is a relationship between school attachment and academic engagement, with the mediating role of academic retention in girls' junior high schools in Shahr-e-Ray city?



Theoretical framework

School Attachment

School attachment refers to the connections that an individual has with school and other aspects of school life. Maddox and Prince (1993) defined school attachment as school involvement, commitment to values, and beliefs about school (sheikholeslami et al, 2018). Anderman and Anderman (1999) also defined school attachment as students' feelings of being respected and comfortable at school. School attachment represents a broad term used to describe students' relationships with school (Neely & Faici, 2016).

Academic Resilience

Academic resilience was developed from academic resilience to distinguish between the small but significant population of academically resilient students who receive the most attention and the majority of students who often experience small but less varied problems and issues on the same continuum (Hoferichter et al, 2021). Academically resilient students remained largely unknown in the research literature until Martin et al. (2010) examined this phenomenon. They separated academic resilience and academic resilience and presented the difference between them on a continuum, in fact, in their recent review they pointed out the differences between academic resilience and academic resilience in terms of differences in type and degree (Khandan, 2016).

Academic engagement

Students' engagement in academic affairs is an important and vital factor for progress and success. In fact, the desire to progress and improve students' learning increases their interest in academic engagement. Academic engagement provides a clear picture of students' academic progress and failure and has been considered as a primary model for academic progress and failure (Zhen & et al. , 2020). Given the importance of academic engagement, researchers and educators are eager to gain a deeper understanding of the factors affecting academic engagement. Students' academic engagement is influenced by various intrapersonal and extrinsic factors (Ramezani, 2016). Some researchers have considered engagement as a process, while others have conceptualized it as an outcome. However, all these diverse definitions share several commonalities: 1- Engagement is an important mediator of learning. 2- Engagement is a multidimensional construct. 3- Students show a decrease in engagement in learning activities when transitioning from elementary to middle school (Nouri, 2019).

The results of a study (Ravavi Motlagh et al, 2022) conducted on 12th grade female students in Shiraz city indicated that family flexibility, academic engagement, and perception of the classroom environment have a significant and positive effect on academic retention, and academic flourishing plays a mediating role in the model. (Bayramnejad et al, 2021) also concluded in a study conducted on female and male second-year high school students in Naqadeh city that the perception of teacher support and the perception of the classroom environment have a significant effect on school satisfaction through academic retention and academic engagement.



Research Methodology

The present research method is a correlational type in which the relationships between research variables are expressed by structural equation modeling. The statistical population of the research consisted of 411 students studying in girls' high schools in Shahr-e Ray in the academic year 1401-1402. 177 people were selected as a statistical sample by cluster random sampling method. LISREL statistical software was used to test the research hypotheses. The data collection tool was standard questionnaires. To determine the validity of the research tool, face and content validity were used and approved. To confirm the reliability of the questionnaire, the questionnaires were distributed among 30 respondents and after collecting and analyzing the questionnaires, their Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated.

Research Findings

Descriptive statistics related to the demographic characteristics of the students indicated that the largest sample size was made up of seventh grade students and the smallest sample size was made up of eighth grade students. The academic retention index had a mean of (16. 43) and a standard deviation of (3. 56). Among the components of the school attachment variable, the highest mean was obtained by the school attachment component with a mean of (11. 26) and a standard deviation of (28. 6), and the lowest mean was obtained by the school commitment component with a mean of (11. 6) and a standard deviation of (2. 56). Among the components of the academic engagement variable, the highest mean was obtained by the behavioral engagement component with a mean of (19. 74) and a standard deviation of (46. 5), and the lowest mean was obtained by the cognitive engagement component with a mean of (16. 07) and a standard deviation of (18. 4). The strength of the relationship between school attachment and academic retention was (0. 66), which indicates that the correlation of the variables is favorable. The significance statistic was also (21. 7) which was greater than the critical value of t at the 5% error level, i. e. (1. 96), indicating that the observed correlation was significant. The strength of the relationship between school attachment and academic retention was calculated to be (0. 86), indicating that the correlation was favorable. The t-test statistic was also (59. 8) which was greater than the critical value of t at the 5% error level, i. e. (1. 96), indicating that the observed correlation was significant. The strength of the relationship between school attachment and academic engagement was calculated to be (0. 49), indicating that the correlation was favorable. The t-test statistic was also (5. 93), which was greater than the critical value of t at the 5% error level, i. e. (1. 96), indicating that the observed correlation was significant. The strength of the direct relationship between school attachment and academic engagement was (0. 49). The indirect effect of school attachment on academic engagement in the presence of the mediating variable of academic retention is (0. 56). Given that the effect of the direct path is less than the indirect paths, the presence of the mediating variable of academic retention increases the strength of the relationship and the mediating role of academic retention is confirmed in the present hypothesis.

Conclusion

The overall aim of the present study is to investigate the mediating role of academic retention in the relationship between school attachment and academic engagement. Students come to



class with a happy face, which can play a significant role in improving their academic hope and ultimately their academic performance. Such students joke with their classmates in the classroom, and teachers also participate in improving the students' mental conditions in learning lessons to provide a calm and cheerful atmosphere for their education in the classroom and school. Having a sense of competence and making students aware that they deserve the best academic conditions helps them to make better academic decisions, and when these decisions are successful, it will increase their sense of empowerment. The level of empowerment achieved in students causes them to show increasing efforts to earn academic degrees, and academic hope will have a significant impact on improving their academic performance. Students put in all their efforts in completing their daily assignments even if no one is supervising their work. On the other hand, no matter how much they have done, they will still blame themselves for not doing enough. In such a situation, they do not feel afraid or tired, and their daily morals and behaviors will not anger other friends and family. These students also increase their efforts when they fail and try to turn it into success. In fact, these students are eager to learn, curious, and very hardworking, and this provides them with a strong bond with school. The most common behaviors that show academic motivation include insisting on completing difficult assignments, working hard or trying to learn to the point of mastery, and choosing assignments that require effort. In this regard, the following practical suggestions can be made: Teachers are advised to have a friendly relationship with students so that they can better understand their problems and issues. Creating a strong bond between teacher and student can help resolve curricular and extracurricular problems that affect their academic progress and success. Finally, using strategies such as verbally encouraging students when solving relatively difficult problems, providing conditions for participation and teamwork, and fostering the belief that learning requires continuous and high effort can create conditions for increasing academic engagement and using effective learning strategies for academic engagement.