




Research Paper

Structural Relationships between Alexithymia and Academic Engagement Mediated by Dependence on Social Networks and Mental Health

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Abstract

Aim: The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between alexithymia and academic engagement mediated by dependence on social networks and mental health. The statistical population of this correlational descriptive study comprise 483 students at vocational schools in Miandorood, 217 of whom were recruited using a stratified random sampling method. Cochran's formula was used to estimate the sample size. Research data were collected through standard questionnaires, and analyzed using structural equation modeling in LISREL and SPSS statistical software. Alexithymia, mental health, and dependence on social networks had negative and significant effects on academic engagement. The mediating role of mental health and dependence on social networks was negative and significant for the relationship between alexithymia and academic engagement. In conclusion, it is necessary to address alexithymia, dependence on social networks, and mental health to increase students' academic engagement.

Keywords: *Alexithymia, Academic Engagement, Dependence on Social Networks, Mental Health.*

Introduction

Students' academic engagement is among the academic achievement drivers that can be affected by various factors (Pomerantz, 2006). The Education Department can become a center for developing life skills by providing conditions that help students develop all the talents and abilities that practically lead them to success or help them do their tasks. Students, as the young and future working forces of Iran, play an effective role in this field. (Abbaszadeh, 2014). Also, considering the role of the Education Department in helping students with their problems and issues, creating academic engagement in students and identifying mediating factors appear to be essential for establishing academic success on the one hand, and effective communication between the school and the community on the other hand. An effective step in this regard is to identify the factors affecting academic engagement by emphasizing the role of alexithymia, (Juhani, 2010), dependence on social networks (Zhang, Qin, & Ren, 2018), and mental health (Sheehan, Herring, & Campbell, 2018). In general, addressing the psychological variables in schools is a key strategy in creating a favorable atmosphere for teaching and learning. The root of many academic problems, including academic failure, lies in psychological issues. On the other hand, one of the current problems of the Education Department and schools is the expansion of social networks and the numerous signs of students' dependence on them. If the atmosphere and context that these networks provide for the development of learning on the one hand and the prevalence of behavioral problems, on the other hand, are not properly identified and managed, they will have adverse effects on students and ultimately their desire to study (academic engagement). Considering that necessity, the present study aimed to investigate the relationship between alexithymia and academic engagement with the mediation of dependence on social networks and mental health.

Methodology

The statistical population of this correlational descriptive study comprised 483 students at vocational schools in Miandorood, 217 of whom were selected as the statistical sample using a stratified random sampling method. Cochran's formula was used to estimate the sample size. The Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) by Begby et al. (1994), the Academic Engagement Scale by Fredricks et al. (2004), the Dependence on Social Networks questionnaire by Wayne et al. (2009), and the General Health Questionnaire by Goldberg & Hillier (1979) were used to collect data.

Research data were analyzed using structural equation modeling in LISREL and SPSS statistical software.

Results

The direct effect of alexithymia on academic engagement was -0.23, which is negative at a significance level of 0.05. The direct effect of dependence on social networks on academic engagement was -0.32, which is negative at a significance level of 0.01. The direct effect of mental health on academic engagement was -0.37, which is negative at a significance level of 0.01. The indirect effect of alexithymia on academic engagement with the mediating role of dependence on social networks was -0.23 which is negative at a significance level of 0.05. The indirect effect of alexithymia on academic engagement with the mediating role of mental health was -0.22, which is negative at a significance level of 0.05.

Discussion and conclusion

Educational system is the foundation of the social, economic, political, and cultural development of a society. A study of the factors affecting the progress and development of advanced societies reveals an efficient educational system in all of them. Furthermore, any educational system is comprised of many factors that work together to achieve learning, engagement, and academic achievements. Each part of the system must be prepared such that the desired efficiency and objectives can be achieved because if one component stops working, it will negatively affect the efficiency of other components. The present study investigated the relationship between alexithymia and academic engagement with the mediating role of mental health and social network dependence. As a result, it is necessary to address alexithymia, dependence on social networks, and mental health to increase students' academic engagement. This research is different from previous studies for two reasons. First, this study clarified the determinants of academic engagement by evaluating their relationship with alexithymia. Second, this study explored the role of dependence on social networks and mental health as mediators in the formation of the relationship between alexithymia and academic engagement. It should be noted that review of the literature revealed no study that has simultaneously addressed the relationship between alexithymia and academic engagement with the mediating role of dependence on social networks and mental health. Therefore, further similar studies are recommended in other populations to increase the generalizability of the findings. It is also suggested that the

factors that increase academic engagement be identified. Finally, as school culture may affect the examined variables, it is suggested to investigate the relationship between school culture and research variables.

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