



The Relationship between Loneliness and Social Acceptance and the Academic Performance of Students

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this study is to determine the relationship between loneliness and social acceptance and the academic performance of the students. The research is descriptive-correlative and the statistical population is Lar's high school students of the school year of 2011-2012. Using multistage random sampling method, 342 students (180 girls and 162 boys) were selected as the statistical sample. Loneliness Questionnaire by Asher, Hymel and Renshaw and also the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale were used to collect the data. Pearson correlation coefficient showed that loneliness has a significant relationship with the academic progress of the students ($p < 0.001$). Nevertheless, there is no significant relationship between social acceptance and academic progress. The analysis of multivariate regression showed that loneliness is the most powerful variable in the prediction of academic achievement. The results also showed that there is no significant relationship between boy and girl students regarding social acceptance. Nonetheless, the academic progress ($p < 0.05$) and loneliness ($p < 0.01$) are higher in girls compared to boys.

Keywords: Loneliness, Social Acceptance, Academic Progress.

INTRODUCTION

The academic progress of school and university students is one of the important indicators for the evaluation of education. All the efforts of the educational system are for the fulfillment of this issue. Since academic progress and regression are two yardsticks for the efficiency of the educational system, the discovery and study of the variables affecting academic performance leads to a better understanding and the prediction of the effective variables at school. Therefore the study of the variables with a relationship with the academic progress in various courses is one of the main topics of research in the educational system [1].

Since as a social creature, interaction with other people is one of the essential requirements of the human being, loneliness is a universal issue that all human beings have experienced more or less. Berguno et al. believe that the people from all cultures, races, social classes, ages and times experience loneliness [mentioned in 2]. Loneliness is different in terms of quality from arbitrary social loneliness or isolation which is free of tension [3]. Thus after sudden changes, loneliness is normal and common and is not interpreted as being inconsistent. Nevertheless, when they impede normal tasks and functions of life, they can result in adverse emotional, social and even physical consequences [4]. In this case, loneliness is considered to be a threat for the mental health and psychosocial function of the individual [5]. Heinrich et al. believe that loneliness is a common issue during adolescence which can unbalance the individual's social relationships and involve them with psychosocial and emotional issues [5].

Gottman considers loneliness as the equivalent for social isolation. Perlman and Peplau, mentioned by Vahedi et al. considering the quantitative and qualitative aspects, have defined loneliness in terms of the differences and gaps between the individual's desired level and current level of social relations [6]. Crane has differentiated the loneliness caused by social isolation and the loneliness caused by emotional isolation. In emotional loneliness the lack of emotional attachment to other people is highlighted while in social loneliness, there is a lack of participation in social relationships and networks [7]. Elhageen gives the following definition of loneliness: loneliness is an unpleasant experience like a person's notion that he is different from others which is associated with visible behavioral problems such as sadness, anger and depression and demonstrates discrepancy

between expectations and aspirations of the individual and the accessibility of these aspirations in social relationships and is displayed by behaviors such as avoiding contact with others [8].

Another factor is social acceptance the effect of which was studied in this research. In fact, social acceptance is the consequence of several social phenomena such as social influence, conformity, social judgment and the attitude of individuals. Therefore, according to the provided context it can be said that social acceptance means that in order to be consistent with others, most people should look at issues from their point of view and act like them. This matter often deters people from honestly expressing their true selves [9]. Also Lang refers to the responses and reactions of the people who want to be favored in the society and gain social acceptance [10].

Adams defines social acceptance as the status and credibility of a behavior in groups [11]. In fact, social acceptance is a kind of behavior in the form of action and reaction to a specific goal and also the level of acceptance of a confirmatory attitude towards a particular attitude [12]. At school and in classes, there are students who get picked by their peers more than others for activities such as playing games, studying, speaking and other collaborative activities. On the other hand there are students who are isolated and their peers have no interest in picking them for doing collaborative activities. Being rejected by peers can result in low academic performance, avoidance of school and even abandoning it [13].

Bonney et al. found in their research that students who were classified higher in stoichiometric status and social activity were academically more successful than those classified lower [14]. Also Buswell show that the average academic progress of popular students in standardized tests are significantly higher than the average academic progress of outcast students [15]. Estell et al. concluded that there is a significant correlation between social relationships and academic success [16]. Also Wentzel showed in his research that stoichiometric status is related to classroom grades [17]. In the research by Cauce, correlation was observed between the average of class grades and the judgment of peers about popularity [18]. The results of a research by Salehi et al. showed that girls experience loneliness more than boys [2]. The results of a research by Hosein Chari et al. showed that there is no significant correlation between academic progress and loneliness [19]. Soleymanian et al. showed that students with little academic success had lower social acceptance compared to normal students [20]. The results of a research by Salimi showed that popular students have significantly higher academic progress compared to isolated students [13]. Rezakhani showed in his research that girls are less motivated for academic progress compared to boys [21]. Hoseini Tabatabaee et al. concluded in their research that, compared to boys, academic progress, academic motivation and positive attitude towards education are higher in girls [22]. Mokhtari concluded in his research that academic progress is higher in girls compared to boys [23]. The results of a research by Ahmadi suggested that girls have a higher academic progress compared to boys [24]. Johnson concluded in an international evaluation that in elementary schools, girls have a higher academic progress compared to boys [25]. Henry also concluded in his research that girls have a higher academic progress compared to boys. [26]. Lloyd concluded in a research in guidance school that girls have a better academic progress compared to boys [27].

Thus the present research seeks to find the answer to the general question of whether loneliness and social acceptance can predict academic progress. What are the differences between boy and girl students regarding academic progress, loneliness and social acceptance?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is descriptive-correlative research and the statistical population is Lar's high school students of the school year of 2011-2012. Using multistage random sampling method, 342 students from four high schools (two for girls and two for boys) were selected as the statistical sample. It is worth to mentioning that the ratio of social classes (grade, field of study and gender) are observed in the sample.

The following indicators were used to collect information:

1. Loneliness Scale for Children: made by Asher et al. in 1984, this scale evaluates children's feelings about loneliness and their social dissatisfaction. It includes 24 articles which are scored based on Likert rating scale. Each statement is scored from 1 to 5. The reliability coefficient of this test was 0.83, 0.91 and 0.91 using Split, Spearman – Brown et al. Split-half methods, respectively [28].

2. Social acceptance questionnaire: the questionnaire is made by Crown and Marlow. By answering this questionnaire it is determined if a person has social acceptance. This questionnaire consists of 33 true/false articles. Its validity coefficient has been calculated above 80% using replication method. In terms of validity this test has shown high and acceptable correlation with other psychological tests designed for social acceptance [29]. The validity coefficient of the above test has been calculated 74% in the research by Samari et al. [30].

Implementation method: questionnaire was used to collect the required information. Academic information of the students was extracted from their academic records. Ultimately, the collected data was analyzed with Pearson correlation coefficient, multivariate regression and independent t-test.

RESULTS

The results of table 1 shows that the average (and standard deviation) of loneliness, social acceptance and academic performance are 44.77 (and 7.69), 19.27 (3.67) and 18.85 (1.20) in girl students, respectively. Also the

average (and standard deviation) of loneliness, social acceptance and academic performance are 42.35 (7.14), 19.77 (2.98) and 18.21 (1.52) in boy students, respectively.

Table 1. The average and standard deviation of the grades of students for the research variables

Variable	Girl students		Boy students		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Academic progress	18.70	1.17	18.41	1.44	18.57	1.31
Loneliness	44.05	7.60	41.88	6.90	43.02	7.35
Social acceptance	19.50	4.00	19.55	2.88	19.52	3.51

Table 2. The correlation coefficient matrix for the research variables

Variable	Academic progress	Loneliness	Social acceptance
Academic progress	1		
Loneliness	***-0.305	1	
Social acceptance	-0.034	***-0.416	1

*** P<0.001

The results listed in table 2 showed that loneliness ($r=0.30$) has a positive and significant relationship with academic progress. Nevertheless, there is a negative relationship between social acceptance ($r=0.03$) and academic performance which is not significant. There is also a negative significant relationship between loneliness ($r=0.41$) and social acceptance.

Table 3. The summary of the results of multivariate regression to predict academic performance

Predictive variables	RS	F	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	R ²
			B	SE	Beta		
Constant	-	-	15.043	0.718	-	***20.37	0.10
Loneliness	54.91	***34.87	0.063	0.010	0.352	***6.12	
Social acceptance	1.17	0.64	0.042	0.021	0.112	*1.17	

*P<0.05; ***P<0.001

Multivariable regression analysis with Enter Method was used to determine the effect of each variable. As it can be seen in table 3, the results show that about 10% of the variance of academic progress is determined by loneliness and social acceptance variables. According to the beta values, loneliness (beta= 0.385) is the most powerful variable for the prediction of academic progress. The beta value for social acceptance is 0.112.

Table 4. The results of t-test of the research variables in boy and girls students

Variable	Gender	M	SD	t	p
Academic progress	Girl	18.70	1.17	2.01	*0.045
	Boy	18.41	1.44		
Loneliness	Girl	44.05	7.60	2.73	**0.006
	Boy	41.88	6.90		
Social acceptance	Girl	19.50	4.00	-0.146	0.884
	Boy	19.55	2.88		

*P<0.05; ***P<0.001

As it can be seen in table 4, the academic performance of girls are significantly higher than that of boys ($P<0.05$, $t=2.01$). Also the average loneliness variable is significantly higher in girls compared to boys ($P<0.01$, $t=2.73$). Nevertheless, there is no significant difference in the social acceptance variable in girls and boys.

DISCUSSION

The results of the present research showed that there is a positive correlation between loneliness and academic progress. This means that the students, who experience loneliness more, have a higher academic progress. To justify this point it can be noted that the students who experience loneliness more, spend less time with their relatives and friends and are lonely most of the time. They spend their time studying which results in their higher academic progress. The results of this research also showed that social acceptance has no significant

correlation with academic progress. The results are inconsistent with the results of the researches by Bonney et al. [14], Buswell [15], Estell et al. [16], Wentzel [17], Cauce [18], Soleymanian et al. [20] and Salimi [13].

According to the results of this research gender has a significant relationship with academic progress. Girls have a higher academic progress compared to boys. This result is consistent with the result of the studies by Rezakhani [22], Hoseini Tabatabaee et al. [21], Mokhtari [23], and researches by Ahmadi [24], Johnson [25], Lloyd [27], and Henry [26]. Brennan suggested that girls have a higher academic performance compared to boys and mentioned their intimate relationship with their teachers as an important factor for their higher performance [31]. Holden sees the academic progress of girls and the weakness of boys in the different expectations of teachers from them. He also evaluates the girls' ability to concentrate, their self-confidence and their social skills higher than boys [32]. Warren in his research carried out in England found out that girls have a better performance in exams compared to boys. According to him, the reasons for the weak performance of boys are their apprehension about class activities and academic performance, lack of interest and social consequences [33].

According to the findings of this research, no significant difference was observed between girls and boys in terms of social acceptance. The findings of this study regarding loneliness also showed a stronger feeling of loneliness in girls compared to boys. This result is consistent with the results of the research by Salehi and Seif [2]. To interpret this finding it is worth to mention that due to social characteristics and the difference in the disciplinary methods and standards in Iranian culture, girls possibly have more limited social relationships compared to boys and rely mostly on their peers in the school environment, while boys have a wider communication network. Thus, any kind of disruption in social relationships with the peers at school leads to a more obvious increased loneliness in girls. In other words, the sensitivity of girls about social relationship with their peers in the school environment is higher than boys. On the other hand, it should be noted that girls possibly express their feeling of loneliness more freely than boys. Due to social and cultural factors such as gender roles and stereotyped beliefs, boys may tend to hide their feelings including their feeling of loneliness. The reason is that as a male, they consider it as a sign of weakness and inferiority [2].

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