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The Relationship Between Positive Attitude Towards School and Students' Academic Well-Being with the Mediating Role of Cognitive Flexibility

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Extended Abstract

Aim

The educational system and the factors influencing student success and academic quality have long been a focus of researchers. Numerous studies have examined these factors based on their importance and impact on students' academic success. One critical factor that affects academic outcomes is academic well-being (Ghadampour et al., 2018). Academic well-being plays a significant role in shaping students' positive orientation toward school. A positive school orientation can be understood as individuals' thoughts, plans, motivations, hopes, and feelings regarding their future (Alm et al., 2019).

Cognitive flexibility is one factor that may mediate the relationship between positive school orientation and academic well-being. The constant changes and developments in society necessitate cognitive flexibility, allowing individuals to reassess decisions and adapt to new situations (Shadman Sadat Mahaleh, 2014). In the classroom, cognitive flexibility influences academic well-being by enabling students to adjust their approach when confronted with new information, obstacles, or errors (Saifi et al., 2017).

This research examines all three variables—academic well-being, positive school orientation, and cognitive flexibility as an integrated set. A review of previous studies highlights the importance of conducting this research. The aim of this study is to test the mediating role of cognitive flexibility in predicting academic well-being based on positive school orientation among first secondary school students in Minodasht city.

Methodology

The current research employs a structural equation modeling approach, with correlational method. The statistical population consists of all first-period secondary school students in Minodasht city during the 2022-2023 academic year, totaling 360 individuals. From this population, 186 students were selected through cluster random sampling and participated in the study.

Data was collected using three questionnaires:

1. The *Positive Orientation towards School (POTS)* questionnaire by Abul Maali (2017), which consists of 43 questions across four dimensions: satisfaction with school, sense of belonging to school, academic effort, and attitude towards classmates.
2. The *Academic Well-Being Questionnaire (AWBQ)* developed by Tomminen-Sweeney et al. (2012), a self-assessment scale comprising 31 items and covering dimensions such as the value of school, school burnout, academic satisfaction, and involvement in school assignments.

3. The *Cognitive Flexibility Inventory (CFI)*, created by Dennis & Vanderwaal (2010), includes 20 questions and assesses three cognitive components: controllability, perception of behavior justification, and perception of alternative options.

Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS3 software, employing structural equation modeling.

Findings

The results indicated a positive and significant relationship between positive orientation towards school and cognitive flexibility. Additionally, the findings revealed a positive and significant effect of cognitive flexibility on academic well-being. Structural equation modeling further demonstrated that positive orientation towards school has both direct and indirect effects on academic well-being. The direct effect value is 0.803, while the indirect effect, mediated by cognitive flexibility, is 0.597. The model's fit was assessed using reliability criteria, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR), with both exceeding 0.7 for all variables. Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) values for all constructs were greater than 0.5, indicating the model's reliability and validity.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the relationship between positive orientation towards school and students' academic well-being, with cognitive flexibility as a mediator, among secondary school students in Minodasht city during the 2022-2023 academic year. The results confirmed a positive and significant relationship between positive orientation towards school and cognitive flexibility, as well as between cognitive flexibility and academic well-being. Structural equation modeling showed both direct (0.803) and indirect (0.597) effects of positive orientation towards school on academic well-being, mediated by cognitive flexibility. These findings are consistent with previous studies by Rastegar et al. (2018), Moinikia et al. (2017), Wong et al. (2019), Alm et al. (2019), Kim et al. (2019), Wang et al. (2021), and Salem al-Qaraibeh (2020).

A positive orientation towards school can significantly influence students' growth, development, well-being, and adaptability to changing conditions. It plays a crucial role in shaping students' learning, thoughts, plans, motivations, hopes, and emotions regarding their future. Factors such as attitude towards classmates affect students' sense of belonging, satisfaction with school, and academic effort. When students have a positive outlook on their school environment and class, they tend to perform better, hold more positive attitudes toward learning and peers, and exhibit greater satisfaction and enthusiasm for school. As student interactions mainly occur in the classroom and school environment, a sense of belonging can directly influence their learning outcomes. Students' perceptions and attitudes towards their school, classroom, and peers—whether positive or negative—determine their sense of belonging. A positive orientation and friendly relationships foster a sense of connection, reducing the risk of depression, negative moods, and even school dropout.

Keywords: Cognitive Flexibility, Academic Well-Being, Positive Orientation Towards School, Students, Secondary School.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were observed in this study. Participants were informed of the research's purpose and procedures. Their information was kept confidential, and they were given the option to withdraw from the study at any stage. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. The research results will be made available to them.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest or financial support.

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