

## **Predictors of Academic Engagement among Adolescents in Tehran**

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**ABSTRACT:** Lack of school engagement among adolescents in Iran remains a problem that can have serious consequences consists of raised risk for school dropout, substance use and criminal activity. Evidently, identification of psychological variables (parents and self-variables), that help adolescents that improve adolescents' academic performance. The present study examined predictors of academic engagement in Tehran. Participants were 600 high school students aged between 12 -18 years old. The results of Hierarchical regression indicated that strongest predictor of academic engagement is academic self-efficacy.

**KEYWORD:** Parenting Style, Parental School Involvement, Academic Self-Efficacy, Emotional Intelligence, Academic Engagement

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Decrease in motivation and performance during adolescence are concerns of parents, teachers, and policy makers [69]. Theories and research have emphasized the relationships between students' school engagement, adjustment, academic achievement, and behavior [8]. Adolescents who do well and are committed to school activities are likely to try tough and do well academically relative to their abilities [20] and fewer likely to drop out or engage in antisocial actions [9] than students who are disengaged from school. Thus, high school engagement can increase academic achievement and decrease behavioral problems. Unfortunately, school engagement appears to decline in early adolescence along with achievement [2]. It is important to identify factors associated with it [35]. Substantial research has documented the importance of classroom and school environment [28]. But few studies have examined the importance of social influences on school engagement among early adolescents, although both peers and parents are important influences on many aspects of adolescent behavior [68]. Ministry of Education of Iran (2010) estimates that about one fifth of the Iranian adolescents population is at risk of academic failure. There are a number of factors that maintain academic success for high Schools such as students' emotional intelligence and sense of self-efficacy. Research shows that parental factors such as parenting style and parental school involvement directly related to academic activities [39]. A review of the research literature reveals that the following factors are most directly related to, and supportive of, academic engagement:

### **II. ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT**

School engagement is an important predictor of academic outcomes and to prevent school drop-out [45]. A positive relationship between school engagement and academic outcomes is well established [35]. For instance, Finn and Rock (1997) reported that disengagement behaviors such as being inattentive and disruptive, predicted lower grades. There is a consensus that school engagement is a multifaceted construct, encompassing multiple components, for example, behavioral, emotional and cognitive characteristics [35, 36]. Behavioral engagement often refers to involvement in school-based activities or to the absence of disruptive behaviors [35]. Emotional engagement entails positive emotional reactions to the school, the teacher, and schoolmates [67]. These two concepts of school engagement are likely to be predictive of different outcomes and to be influenced by different variables. For instance, researchers have found that intensively disliking school is the primary reason for a student to leave school [33]. In turn, participation in school activities leads to positive academic outcomes (Marks, 2000). Emotional bonds with school prevent negative developmental outcomes among adolescents, such as delinquency [17]. Also, Cognitive engagement involves internal indicators such as becoming a self-regulated learner [35]. In participation-identification model, Finn (1989) has postulated that active participation (behavior) leads to an increased sense of belongingness and to a commitment to learning in students. However, as suggested by [35], it is also possible that emotional engagement leads to increases in behavioral engagement, or in other words, when students feel more attached to school, they are more likely to be involved in school-based activities.

Although the direction of the relationships between behavioral and emotional engagement are yet to be determined, it is hypothesized that adolescents, as experienced students, need to experience positive feelings toward school to, at least, maintain effort. In other words, positive emotional engagement may lead to increased behavioral involvement. Based on literature of review there is a positive relationship between academic engagement and academic success [65, 66, 14, and 72].

### **III. PARENTING STYLE**

Developmental psychologists have been interested to study how parents convey their values, goals attitudes, and skills in their children's socialization process since the 1920s [69] and one of the most robust approaches to this transmission process is the study of parenting style. According to [25] the way parents behave creates an emotional setting. A parent-child relationship develops according to how parents behave in their relationship with their child and this includes verbal as well as non-verbal communication. Early study on parenting typology was examined by Diana Baumrind. She was the first to study the relationship between parenting style and child outcomes. [11] Classified parenting behavior into three typologies: authoritative (of mature children), authoritarian (of dysphonic or disaffiliated children) and permissive (of immature children) based on two orthogonal factors: responsiveness and demandingness. Responsiveness implies the level to which parents encourage individuality and self-assertiveness by the way they are attentive to and supports the wishes and needs of their children. There should be a feeling of closeness and unconditional support and rational interaction. Demandingness implies a certain strict requirement by the parents of their children's adherence to regulated social behavior, even confrontation and demands for maturity by controlling their children's behavior by way of monitoring [11]. Authoritative parents are both responsive and demanding while providing useful guidance, support and motivation for their children. Such a parenting style involves an inductive approach, whereby parents take the trouble to explain to reason with their children. It has been proven that an authoritative parenting style produces children who are able to adapt well socially, have the respect of their peers, perform well academically and have a good mental health [11]. Authoritarian parents generally express high demand and fail to respond to their children's wishes or requests, employ harsh behavior, and use physical punishment in extreme cases. The potential long-term consequences of such an approach when the children are young include depression, alcoholism suicidal tendencies, and even physical assault when they are adults. An authoritarian parenting style can achieve immediate results that children bend to the will of their parents; but such parenting is often unsuccessful and can result in long-term harm [11]. Parents, who use a permissive style, when responding to their children's needs and wishes, do not make demands. Such a style therefore is inconsistent and lacks the firm direction of a structure. [12]. posited that permissive parents fail to control their children and in the process send mixed messages. Such permissive parenting encourages violence, anti-social behaviors, weak academic performances, and other inevitable childhood behavioral problems. Parenting style typologies were originally developed for research on parent socialization practices during childhood, they have also been used to study the effect of parent interaction pattern on adolescent adjustment [12]. The authoritative parenting style produces children who are independent, assertive, competent, more achievement and success oriented, and have good self-control than other children [11, 45].

Children who experience the authoritative parenting style invariably show better psychosocial development and academic competence, thus the authoritative parenting style appears to be the best style to develop competent and well-adjusted children. In such a parenting style, parents reason with their children, providing a rationale for doing the things they like, understanding the importance and need for education in order to be successful adults [69]. Such parents give due recognition when a child succeeds in the performance of a task or acquires new knowledge through sheer hard work. They do not show anger when the child makes a mistake but instead make it know to the child that making mistakes is an integral part of the learning and growing up process [15]. Authoritarian parents whose use strict and inflexible rules that command will obedience without question about behavior pertaining to school and their studies. This approach stifles creativity and curiosity, which can have negative consequences on the performance of the child [59, 62]. Within such an environment, a child will experience fear in making mistakes because of the knowledge that an over-critical parent awaits. Such apparently difficult to please parents who never seem to be satisfied with child's behavior and performance will only create worry in the child who would fear being seen as a failure in the eyes of the parents due to mistakes, poor performance, and unfavorably compared to other students [11]. In the case of academic achievement, a home with permissive parents is at a disadvantage, because the children are unaware what their parents expect of them, prompting the development of a level of aggression as they seek the norm [18]. According to Casanova et al. the permissiveness of such parents creates an environment of apparent indifference to various aspects of the children's academic life and activities: there appears to be ignorance or inattention to the behavioral aspects of the child in the academic context, no apparent interest in the children's activities in school, or in class, and no contact with the educators of their children.

With such apparent lack of encouragement, there is no motivation but instead there is a feeling of anxiety and stress and the children develop a sense of being neglected and abandoned. Casanova highlighted that there can also be stress and anxiety among children from authoritarian homes just because of parental involvement in their school activities.

#### **IV. PARENTAL SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT**

The role of parental school involvement in children's education has received considerable attention in recent years [27]. The involvement of parents in their children's education has been viewed from various perspectives. While some scholars have studied the involvement of parents in the academic activities of their children from the point of their expectations and ambitions for their children's education, others have concentrated on the activities of the parents by way of their involvement in parent-teacher meetings and workshops, family days and such similar activities [3]. Parental involvement means the allocation of time, effort and care by the parent in relation to his/her children's academic affairs [24]. Parental school involvement includes participation in activities conducted at the school and those that are outside of the four school walls such as finishing homework, volunteering, and tutoring at school. Parental involvement has also been defined as the various ways in which parents are involved in the academic career of their children as well as the participation in their school activities (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). The participation of parents and family has been seen to benefit parents, teachers, students, and the community. Much summarized research that has been done to learn more about (a) the reasons why parents participate in the academic life of their children; (b) strategies that teachers and schools can utilize to promote the participation of parents; (c) impact of parents' participation on academic achievement. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) proposed various reasons for parental involvement in the academic career of their children. Among the reasons are: parents feel they should be involved, parents perceive their involvement will have a positive impact on the academic performance of their children, and they perceive that their involvement is desired, needed, expected, invited, and valued by the school. The various ways of being involved include being volunteers at the school, attends school functions, assisting with their children's homework, responding positively to school requests for conferences or help, making sure the child has proper studying space, tutoring, working in the classroom, motivating their children to do well, showing examples of desired behaviors (e.g., reading for pleasure), paying attention to what the children do, monitoring their children's behavior, and being the school's advocates in the community. When there is parental involvement, the children gain in several ways: better school attendance, less incidence of suspensions, lower rate of high school dropouts, better academic performance, less behavioral problems, better attitude toward school and improved perception of self [19]. Parental involvement uses a greater sense of responsibility for their own actions among the children who are more willing to perform more challenging tasks [38]. Children of involved parents also showed better speaking ability and better problem-solving skills [14]. Seeing their parents being involved in their education makes the children realize that they value education and in turn the children learn to appreciate the value of education as well. This motivates the children to want to do well and so they score good grades. Such a situation leads to a feeling of confidence as the children know they have the support of their parents who want them to do well and realize their dreams [38]. A child living in a family environment where there is constant encouragement to do well, recognition and praise for achievements, education is valued, and expectations for a child are high, has many reasons to do well academically [30]. It has been shown that middle and high school student's exhibit enhanced average levels of achievement when their parents are actively engaged in various aspects of their education compared to others whose parents are less involved or not involved [31].

#### **V. ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY**

Self-efficacy, one of the integral parts of Social Cognitive Theory, was the brainchild of Bandura (1986), who first talked about it more than two decades ago. Bandura defines self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 392). Bandura's key point regarding the role of self-efficacy beliefs in human functioning is that "people's level of motivation, affective states, and actions are based more on what they believe than on what is objectively true". Bandura saw self-efficacy as a form of self-reflection that influences how one behaves. This is because according to Bandura, people have personal expectations of what they want, what they can do and this determines the level of effort they will put into attaining their goals. Bandura suggests the existence of internal processes that significantly impact on an individual's perception and interpretation of personal behavior related to expected consequences. This means that how people behave depends on their intentions, the circumstances and the anticipated results of their actions [24]. Baron (2004) purposed three types of self-efficacy: self-regulatory self-efficacy (ability to resist peer pressure, avoid high-risk activities); social self-efficacy (ability to establish and maintain relationships, having assertiveness, involved in leisure time activities); and academic self-efficacy (being able to perform course work, disciplined in study activities, achieve goals).

There has been much attention paid to self-efficacy in research on education and it has been proven to be a predictor of students' educational performance [55, 67]. Since academic self-efficacy has been proven to be an important predictor of educational performance [8], it has therefore been closely related to success in class and homework, assessments, and scores (Stevens, Olivarez, Lan, & Tallent-Runnels, 2004). Previous research [70] has demonstrated that students who are confident in their academic capabilities monitor their work time more effectively, are more efficient problem solvers, and show more persistence than do equally able peers with low self-efficacy. High self-efficacy students work harder, evaluate their progress more frequently, and engage in more self-regulatory strategies that promote success in school [62]. The concept of self-efficacy in motivational research refers to the self-belief of students in their personal academic abilities [48]. As such, a lack of self-belief in one's personal academic ability will result in feelings of low self-efficacy. In a study by Lodewyk and Winne (2005), it was found that such experiences put stress on students and is a constraint in the face of unaccustomed challenges. Researchers maintain that self-efficacy can be improved by personal success in achieving the desired outcomes, seeing others achieve successful outcomes, being encouraged, reassured and motivated by inspirational speeches, and by decreasing the anxiety level [43]. Thus, when students involve themselves in academic tasks, internal and external opinions lead to either an increase or decrease in self-efficacy.

## **VI. EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a new concept in multiple Intelligences [1]. Emotional assimilation refers to the ability to recognize different emotions that one is feeling and to identify feeling that is influencing their thought processes. Emotional understanding means the ability to understand complex emotions (such as feeling two emotions at same time) and the ability to distinguish transitions from one emotion to another emotion. Emotional management is the ability to connect or disconnect an emotion depending on its usefulness in a certain situation. Bar-On (2002) introduced five components about emotional intelligence: Intrapersonal ability, interpersonal ability, adaptability, stress management, and general mood. According to Bar-On emotional intelligence can develop every time and it can improve through training, programming, and therapy [7]. Bar-On future found out that individuals with high EQ are more successful in environmental pressures. He also asserted that a deficit in emotional quotient intelligence can create lack of success and emotional problems. Goleman (1990) model in Matthews et al., (2002) proposed consisting four main components. The first component is self-awareness that relates to persons' ability to read one's emotions and recognize their impact. Second, Self-management that means ability to control one's emotions and to adapt with changing situation. Social awareness is third component that includes the ability to sense, understand, and react to other's emotions while comprehending social network. Finally, relationship management is fourth component that consist of ability to inspire, influence, and develop others while managing conflict. Emotional intelligence is a new concept. It is a recent area of research, especially with regard to testing emotional intelligence and the role of emotional intelligence during adolescence. It is important to know the benefits of recognizing emotional intelligence among adolescents and understand that how EI may impact on adolescents' growth and development [44]. Liau et al. (2003) argued that emotional intelligence is vital for the healthy psycho-social development in adolescents. Literature shows that the lack of EI can be associated with problem behavior. Liau et al. (2003) indicated that EI is a potential risk factor in behavior problem in adolescent. Emotional intelligence in adolescents plays an important role in successful transition from adolescence to adulthood [57]. There has been an increasing interest in the construct of emotional intelligence within a school context. Some studies in the field of education have been focused on the emotional intelligence of students and the role of emotional intelligence on academic achievement. Students with higher emotional intelligence are more success at school [57]. Intrapersonal skills such as communication, negotiation and relating with other are necessary skills for the success in the life and academic achievement. Adolescents experience changes in their ability to perceive, understand and utilize emotional information and these abilities may have significant contribute in intellectual growth [51]. Lam and Kirby (2002) found that adolescents with high EI are able to recognize and manage emotions, and make decisions that can contribute to academic performance.

### **4.1.Theoretical framework**

#### **Educational Productivity Theory**

Educational Productivity Theory posits that nine factors are powerful and consistent in influencing learning [71]. The nine factors are grouped into three categories which are student aptitude (ability, development or age, and motivation), instruction (the amount of time for which students engage in learning or academic engagement and the quality of the instructional experience including method, psychological and curricular aspect), and psychological environment (home environment, classroom social group, and exposure to mass media outside of school). These factors are asserted for learning in school. Without the contribution of each factor, there can be little learning. Student characteristic has a significant influence on learning outcomes.

However, Walberg asserted that some of the characteristic is only partly alterable. Other characteristic such as motivation is influenced by external factors and students themselves. Walberg considers psychological environment in learning because it provides both direct and indirect influence on the essential classroom factors. One of the important psychological environments is the home environment. The curriculum of home refers to such activity as informed parent-child conversation and communication about everyday observations and events. These may include discussion or critical analyses of school-related discoveries, interest in children's academic and personal growth, leisure reading, television programs, and friends. Parents that contribute in their children's homework and in the process can better understand the challenges their children face in their studies. The curriculum of the home enhances student's academic efficacy. By developing certain habits and attitudes in the child, the family makes the child ready for the school's instruction. Also, the amount of time that students devote in school activities and parental involvement programs promote success. According Carbonaro (2005) children who receive support of teachers and parents in their school activities, they improve a special sense of belonging and attachment to school and school-related activities. Thus, such children achieve higher grades and generally show better academic achievements. Also, students who value their education and have clear ideas about goals they wish to achieve will exhibit a desire for status attainment and be higher performing students. Walberg suggested nine important factors in facilitating learning. The present study however utilized only personal characteristics and home environment to examine academic achievement among adolescents.

### **Objective**

1. To determine the unique predictors of academic engagement among respondents.

## **VII. METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

The population of in this research was 3500 high school students. The participants in present study included 382 adolescents who were attending high schools in Tehran city. The participants were selected by stratified sampling method.

### **Measures**

#### **Parenting Style**

Parenting style was measured by Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ: Buri, 1991). PAQ is valid and reliable instruments. PAQ consists of 30 items with three subscales which are permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parental authority types. There are 10 items for each subscale. Parental Authority Questionnaire is rated on five point Likert scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree and 5= strongly agree. For each subscale, the score was obtained by summing the score for individual items. Score on each subscale ranged from 10 to 50. High score means high parenting in specific subscale of PAQ. Buri (1991) reported high reliability for PAQ with Cronbach coefficient alpha values with a range from 0.78 to 0.86 for the mother's parenting style and 0.74 to 0.87 for the father's parenting style.

#### **Parental School Involvement**

Parental school involvement was assessed using the 22-item of Paulson's Parental Academic Involvement (1994). This scale was designed to identify support and participation of parents at home and at the school site that directly and positively affect the educational performance of all children. This scale has three dimensions such as achievement values (8 items), interest in schoolwork (9 items) and involvement in school functions (5 items). The response format consisted of a five- point Likert scale on which respondents indicated whether they 1= very unlike, 2= more unlike than like, 3= neither like nor unlike, 4= more like than unlike nor and 5= very like with parental school involvement. The score for parental school involvement was calculated by summing the scores for the 22 items after reversing the scores for 5 items (items 5, 6, 11, 16, and 21). The total scale score ranged from 22 to 110, with high scores indicating higher parental school involvement. Paulson (1994) reported reliability results from the parental school involvement questionnaire with Cronbach coefficient alpha values of .85 for the mother's school involvement and .81 for the father's school involvement

#### **Academic Self-efficacy**

The Morgan-Jinks Student Efficacy Scale (1999) was designed to gain information about student efficacy beliefs that is related to school success. The Academic Self-efficacy Scale consists of 30-items with three subscales such as: talent (15 items), context (9 items), and effort (6 items). It is rated on a five point Likert scale ranging based on 1=never, 2= occasionally, 3= sometimes, 4= usually and 5= always. The score for academic self-efficacy was calculated by summing up the scores for the 30 items, after reversing the scores for 9items (4, 6, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, and 28).

The total scale score ranged from 30 to 150, with high score indicating high academic self-efficacy among respondents. Morgan-Jinks (1999) reported reliability results from the academic self- efficacy with Cronbach coefficient alpha values of .80.

**Emotional Intelligence**

Schutte et al, 1998) Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) is used in the present study. The EIS by Schutte et al. was based on Salovey and Mayer’s (1990) original model of emotional intelligence. This scale is consisting of four subscales. The four factors were described as follows: perception of emotions (10 items), managing emotions in the self (9 items), social skills or managing others’ emotions (8 items), and utilizing emotions (6 items). So, the total item for EIS is 33 items. Each item in the scale was rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1= strongly disagree, 2= somewhat disagree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= somewhat agree and 5= strongly agree. The score for emotional intelligence was calculated by summing the scores for the 33 items after reversing the scores for 3 items (items 5, 28, and 33). The total scale score ranged from 33 to 165, with high score indicating high emotional intelligence in respondents. Schutte et al. (1998) reported high reliability results for the EIS with Cronbach coefficient alpha values of EIS has been used .87.

**Academic Engagement**

Academic engagement was measured using Academic Engagement Scale (AES) by Short, Fleming, Guiling, and Roper (2002). The AES was developed by Short, Vowels, and Robinson (2002). The AES has 40 items with three subscales. The subscales are cognitive engagement (10 items), behavioral engagement (15 items), and affective engagement (15 items). A five-point Likert scale from 1= never, 2= seldom, 3= sometimes, 4= often and 5= always was used to rate the items. The score for AES was obtained by summing up the scores for the 40 items after reversing 11 items (items 7, 8, 12, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 26, 29 and 34). The total scale score ranged from 40 to 200, with high score indicating high academic engagement among respondents. The AES has demonstrated respectable psychometric properties (alpha =.94).

**VIII. RESULTS**

Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to test the main effects of the background variables (age, gender, parent ‘age, parent’s education, family income), parental factors (authoritative and permissive parenting style, parental school involvement) and personal factors (academic self-efficacy and emotional intelligence) in predicting academic engagement among adolescents. Table 1 displays the results of hierarchical regression analyses for academic engagement. At step 1, family factors were entered to the regression model. The family factors entered were (authoritative, permissive style, and parental school involvement). At step 1,  $F(10, 590) = 31.2313, P<.05$ , indicating the regression model is significant. The  $R^2=.461$  revealed that about a 46.1% of variance in academic engagement by family factors. At step 2, academic self-efficacy, emotional intelligence was added to the regression mode l. The  $F(13, 587) = 56.603, p<.05$ . At step 2,  $R^2 = .734$  indicating that family factors (authoritative, permissive style, and parental school involvement), and personal variables (academic self-efficacy, emotional intelligence) explained about 73.4% of the variance in academic engagement. At step 2, three variables were statistically significant. Academic self-efficacy (Beta = .771,  $p <.05$ ) appeared as the strongest predictor, follows by emotional intelligence (Beta = .572,  $p <.05$ ), authoritative parenting style (Beta = .453,  $p<.05$ ).

**Table 1 Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis for Academic Engagement**

Variables	Step 1			Step 2		
	B	SE.B	Beta	B	SE.B	Beta
<b><i>Family factors</i></b>						
Authoritative Style	1.108	.124	.223	.235	.135	.453
Permissive Style	-.750	.158	-.198	-.120	.125	-.023
Parental School Involvement	.493	.078	.227	-.056	.066	-.020
<b><i>Personal factors</i></b>						
Academic Self-efficacy				1.120	.064	.771
Emotional Intelligence				.172	.050	.572

Note : \*\* $p<.05$

**Step 1:  $F(10,590) = 31.2313, R^2= .46$ -----Step 2:  $F(13, 587) =56.603, R^2= .734$**

## IX. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The main purpose of the present study was examining of predictors of academic engagement. The result of Hierarchical regression analysis showed that academic self-efficacy was the strong predictor of academic achievement in Tehranian adolescents. According to Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003), students with self confidence in their abilities tend to persist and make the extra effort even when faced with difficult challenges. On the other hand, those with low or no self-belief tend to give up more easily even if they have the required skills or knowledge because they lack that belief in their own ability to succeed. When students have a poor level of academic self-belief, the result could be poor involvement in the academically-related tasks they have to perform like reading assignments, homework, and studying (Attaway & Bry, 2004). It is the opinion of Attaway and Bry that when there is poor engagement in academic-related tasks, there tends to be poor academic performance.

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