

Effects of Family Emotional Atmosphere on Academic Performance of Students with Mild Depression: Mediating Role of Motivation and Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

Background and Aim: The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of family emotional atmosphere on academic performance of students with mild depression with considering the mediating role of motivation and self-efficacy.

Methods: The study employed a correlation research design using structural equation modeling. Participants were selected through convenience sampling method from high schools in district 4 and 5 of Tehran in 2023. The students have first fulfilled Beck depression inventory. Then, those who received a score between 17-29 (indicating a mild depression) were asked to complete the research questionnaires. After discarding incomplete and distorted items, the data from 356 subjects (169 boys and 187 girls) were analyzed. Standard questionnaires were used to collect data. Pearson correlation test and the structural equation modeling were used for data analysis.

Results: Results revealed that family emotional atmosphere significantly affected academic performance. Moreover, family emotional atmosphere significantly affected motivation and self-efficacy. Furthermore, motivation and self-efficacy affected academic performance. Finally, motivation and self-efficacy have significantly mediated the relationship between family emotional atmosphere and academic performance (both $P < 0.001$). Results of model fit indicated that the research model has good fit.

Conclusion: To enhance students' academic performance, it is crucial to consider both the family environment and academic motivation and self-efficacy. The collaboration between school and family is essential in fostering students' motivation and self-efficacy.

Keywords: Family, School, Motivation, Self-Efficacy, Depression

INTRODUCTION

Academic achievement and advancement are influenced by a variety of intricate elements, each necessitating thorough research and analysis. Factors such as goal-setting, motivation, anxiety levels, study techniques, intelligence, physical health, behavioral patterns, and emotional and psychological well-being all significantly impact an individual's academic success or failure. Emotional and psychological states are particularly crucial in determining academic outcomes. Numerous studies have demonstrated the profound impact of emotions on cognitive processes and decision-making (Bannit, 2002; Daniels et al., 2008; Heydarei & Daneshi, 2015). Recognizing the interplay between cognition and emotions, the rational-emotive therapy approach posits those negative emotions like dissatisfaction, anxiety, and depression stem from irrational

thoughts. The World Health Organization has highlighted depression and anxiety disorders as leading mental health issues, affecting approximately 11% of individuals seeking medical assistance globally. Recent years have seen a heightened focus on health concerns, particularly the mental well-being of students (Chun & Dickson, 2011; Leong et al., 2004; Mashayekhi & Mohammadi, 2014). This increased attention is warranted by reports indicating a rise in the number of students grappling with mental health challenges, as well as the severity of these issues. Research findings have underscored a significant correlation between academic performance, anxiety levels, and depression. Consequently, identifying factors that can support students with depression in enhancing their academic performance is of paramount importance.

Numerous empirical findings provide evidence for the impact of the family's emotional atmosphere on adaptation, competence, and academic achievement. The family serves various functions that influence the behavior of children within their environment. The emotional atmosphere of the family encompasses communication styles and the interactions among family members (Farrell et al., 2018; Lease & Dahlbeck, 2009; Mohebi Nooradinvand et al., 2003; Yeha et al., 2007). The attitudes, feelings, and level of involvement of family members with each other, as well as their cooperation or competition, all contribute to their communication dynamics. Cultivating and maintaining active family relationships, fostering an emotional atmosphere, and engaging in collective interactions contribute to maintaining a person's dynamism and are considered a potential source of support for mental health and enhancing the sense of well-being. The family's emotional atmosphere plays a crucial role in academic adjustment (KarimZade & Mohseni, 2006; Lynch et al., 2015; Pearson, 2009). Conversely, maladjusted and troubled children (lacking a supportive emotional atmosphere within the family) and those from conflict-ridden families are more prone to maladaptive behaviors. Compared to students with intact families, they tend to achieve lower grades and have a higher likelihood of dropping out of school. There are additional factors at play.

Academic motivation is the driving force behind students' activities and efforts to achieve specific academic goals. It is a crucial factor that influences the success or failure of students in their academic pursuits. According to Desi and Ryan, who follow the self-determination theory, academic motivation consists of three key components: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and demotivation (Haghighi et al., 2002; Miller et al., 2013). Intrinsic motivation comes from within, prompting individuals to engage in tasks without the need for external rewards. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation involves performing tasks for external incentives. Demotivated individuals lack any drive to engage in activities. Students with academic motivation are able to find the necessary drive to complete tasks, achieve goals, and excel in their academic endeavors. Research indicates that the school environment, including its emotional and social aspects, plays a significant role in fostering academic motivation (Putwain et al., 2020; Tajali & Ardalani, 2010; Talsma et al., 2019). The classroom atmosphere can either be supportive and cooperative, disciplined and focused on tasks, conflict-ridden, or competitive.

Bandura's theory emphasizes the importance of self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to perform tasks and fulfill responsibilities. Those with strong self-efficacy beliefs demonstrate greater effort and persistence in completing assignments compared to those who doubt their abilities, leading to higher performance (Bandura, 1982, 1983, 1995; Eccles et al., 1993; Jung et al., 2017). Self-efficacy has wide-ranging effects across various aspects of life, including the educational environment, where it influences students' beliefs about their ability to complete assigned homework. Individuals with high self-efficacy are able to set realistic goals, have reasonable expectations of themselves, and understand the benefits of problem-focused coping (Ames, 1992; Bråten & Olaussen, 2005; Hovestadt et al., 1985). They also tend to be more assertive, sociable, and have higher self-esteem, as well as a greater sense of control over their lives. Additionally, self-efficacy impacts the learning process by influencing decision-making, effort, diligence, and persistence in assignments. The types of goals set also play a role in shaping beliefs about competence in learning and ultimately driving higher levels of academic motivation. The aim of this study was to further investigate this issue and examine the effects of family emotional atmosphere on academic performance of students with mild depression with considering the mediating role of motivation and self-efficacy.

METHODS

The study employed a correlation research design to investigate the relationships between the variables using structural equation modeling. The statistical population consisted of all first-year high school students in Tehran during the 2023-2024 academic year. Participants were selected through convenience sampling method from high schools in district 4 and 5 of Tehran in 2023. twenty schools (10 boys' and 10 girls' schools) were chosen, and from each school, one class from each grade (10th, 11th, and 12th) was selected. All students of these classes have first fulfilled Beck depression inventory. Then, those who received a score between 17-29 (indicating a mild depression) were asked to complete the research questionnaires. The sample size was determined based on Malek Kalin's (2016) recommendation of 10 to 20 times the number of model parameters. Inclusion criteria were student and teacher satisfaction, as well as complete questionnaires, with anonymity and

confidentiality assured. After discarding incomplete and distorted items, the data from 356 subjects (169 boys and 187 girls) were analyzed, revealing a mean age of 16.36 and a standard deviation of 1.24 for the research participants.

Measures

The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) (Lester et al., 2013): It is a widely used tool for measuring depression, known for its strong psychometric properties compared to other assessments. This questionnaire, which focuses on two behavioral-cognitive dimensions, consists of 11 self-report questions. It is utilized to gauge the severity of depression and identify symptoms in both psychiatric patients and the general population. Scores on the BDI range from 0 to 63, with four options (0-3) indicating the absence or presence of specific symptoms. A study conducted at the University of Pennsylvania established four ranges for interpreting BDI scores: minimal depression (0-16), mild depression (17-29), moderate depression (30-43), and severe depression (44-63). The alpha coefficients for outpatients and students were found to be 0.92 in this study.

The Family of Origin Scale (FOS) (Jiang et al., 2012): FOS is a 40-question survey to assess an individual's perception and evaluation of the "health" of their original family. The scale emphasizes independence and intimacy as crucial components of a healthy family life. This independence is characterized by frank expression, responsibility, respect for others, openness, and acceptance of separation and loss. This study found a reliability of 0.90 for this questionnaire, indicating its high accuracy in measuring family functioning.

Grade Point Average (GPA): In this research, students' GPA last year was used as academic performance.

Academic Motivation Questionnaire (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994): The questionnaire was developed in 1992 by Wallerand et al. to determine students' academic motivation. It covers intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. There are 7 subscales, with 3 focusing on internal motivation (knowledge, progress, and experience), 3 on external motivation (assimilation, introjection, and external regulation), and 1 on amotivation. The questionnaire consists of 28 statements, with 4 statements per subscale, each scored from 1 to 7. The questionnaire has two forms, one for students and one for teachers. This study found a reliability of 0.87 for this questionnaire.

Self-efficacy Questionnaire (Morgan & Jinks, 1999): It has 30 items scored as a four-choice Likert scale including: I completely disagree, I somewhat disagree, I somewhat agree, I completely agree, respectively. The grades are 1, 2, 3 and 4. This study found a reliability of 0.96 for this questionnaire.

Statistical Analysis

We employed SPSS-26 and Lisrel software for data analysis. To describe the variables, we used descriptive statistics like means and standard deviations. Furthermore, we conducted a Pearson correlation test to evaluate the connections between the variables. The structural equation method was utilized to explore how family emotional atmosphere on academic performance of students with mild depression with considering the mediating role of motivation and self-efficacy. The significance level was established at $P < 0.05$.

RESULTS

Descriptive data are presented in Table 1. Descriptive results show that in general the level of family emotional atmosphere is higher than the average. However, academic performance, motivation and self-efficacy were at medium level. The results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests revealed that all variables were normally distributed (all $P > 0.05$). Results of Independent t tests showed that there were no significant differences between male and female students in all variables of the study.

Table 1. Descriptive Data

	Family Emotional Atmosphere	Academic Performance	Motivation	Self-Efficacy
Mean	28.49	16.89	112.09	58.44
SD	2.07	0.58	13.57	5.38

Bivariate relationships between family emotional atmosphere with academic performance, motivation and self-efficacy are demonstrated in Table 2. Results revealed significant direct relationship between family emotional atmosphere and academic performance ($P < 0.001$). Moreover, family emotional atmosphere was directly and significantly associated with motivation and self-efficacy (both $P < 0.001$). Finally, motivation and self-efficacy were directly and significantly associated with academic performance (both $P < 0.001$).

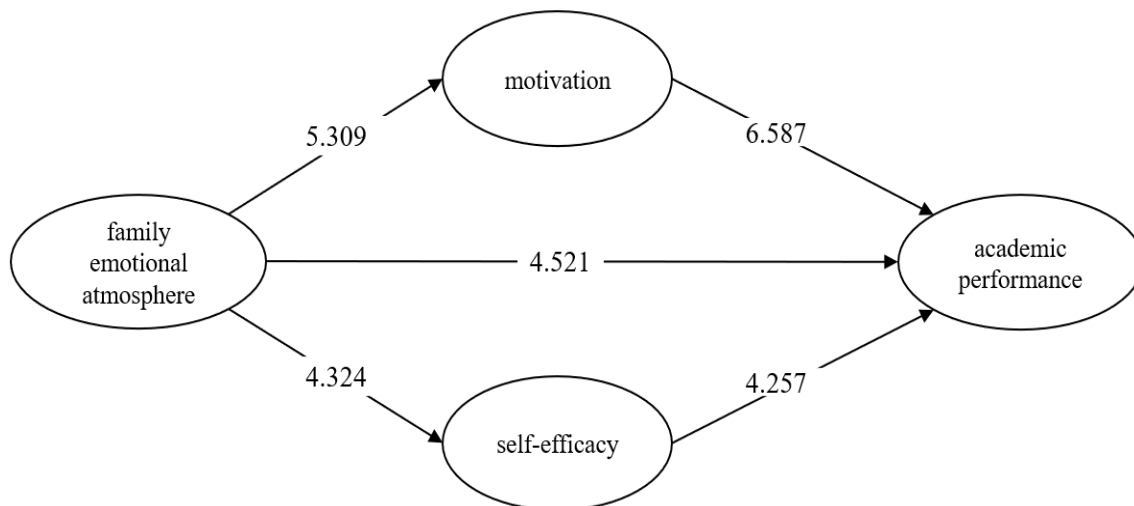
Table 2. Results of Bivariate Relationships between Variables

	1	2	3	4
1. family emotional atmosphere	-			
2. motivation	r=0.520 P<0.001	-		
3. self-efficacy	r=0.419 P<0.001	r=0.749 P<0.001	-	
4. academic performance	r=0.446 P<0.001	r=0.635 P<0.001	r=0.428 P<0.001	-

Table 3 and Figure 1 show the results of structural equation modelling. Results revealed that family emotional atmosphere significantly affected academic performance (T=4.521). Moreover, family emotional atmosphere significantly affected motivation and self-efficacy (T=5.309 and T=4.324, respectively). Furthermore, motivation and self-efficacy affected academic performance (T=6.587 and T=4.257, respectively). Finally, motivation and self-efficacy have significantly mediated the relationship between family emotional atmosphere and academic performance (both P<0.001). Results of model fit are presented in Table 4 and indicated that the research model has good fit.

Table 3. Results of Structural Equation Modelling

Path	β	T-value
1 family emotional atmosphere => academic performance	0.459	4.521
2 family emotional atmosphere => academic buoyancy	0.561	5.309
3 family emotional atmosphere => academic resilience	0.446	4.324
4 motivation => academic performance	0.635	6.587
5 self-efficacy => academic performance	0.458	4.257
	Z	P-value
6 family emotional atmosphere => motivation => academic performance	6.257	P<0.001
7 family emotional atmosphere => self-efficacy => academic performance	5.479	P<0.001

**Figure 1. Structural Equation Modelling in the form of T-Values****Table 4. Results of model fit**

Index	Optimal Range	Obtained Value	Conclusion
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.07	Good fit
X ² / df	< 3	2.98	Good fit
RMR	Closer to 0	0.01	Good fit
NFI	> 0.9	0.97	Good fit
CFI	> 0.9	0.98	Good fit

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of family emotional atmosphere on academic performance of students with mild depression with considering the mediating role of motivation and self-efficacy. Results revealed that family emotional atmosphere significantly affected academic performance. Moreover, family emotional atmosphere significantly affected motivation and self-efficacy. Furthermore, motivation and self-efficacy affected academic performance. Finally, motivation and self-efficacy have significantly mediated the relationship between family emotional atmosphere and academic performance. Cultivating and sustaining strong family bonds, fostering an emotional environment, and engaging in communal interactions contribute to enhancing an individual's vitality. This vitality, in turn, boosts one's capacity to tackle obstacles. Conversely, students who struggle with numerous tasks or academic hurdles can develop the skills to address these challenges by drawing support from their family relationships. Consequently, academic achievement, which mirrors a student's ability to surmount academic obstacles, flourishes under the nurturing emotional climate of the family, enabling students to triumph over challenges (Amir, 2004; Carroll et al., 2009; Samavi et al., 2016). Hence, it is evident that the emotional ambiance within the family plays a pivotal role in enhancing academic performance.

Throughout the course of their education, individuals who are surrounded by a supportive family environment and recognize the importance of school are better equipped to effectively tackle developmental challenges, leading to improved academic performance. The impact of a nurturing family environment on academic success, as influenced by perceived self-efficacy, can be attributed to the fact that a supportive atmosphere and active engagement in communal interactions contribute to a person's dynamism, thereby enhancing their self-efficacy (Azmitia et al., 2009; Haghighi et al., 2002; Miller et al., 2013; Mohebi et al., 2011). Students with high perceived self-efficacy view academic challenges as opportunities for success and are motivated to acquire the necessary skills to overcome any obstacles they may encounter. Furthermore, the perception of the school's value serves as a source of motivation, inspiring students to actively engage in the management of their educational environment, thereby keeping them engaged and enthusiastic. In essence, perceived self-efficacy serves as a conduit for the effects of the family's emotional atmosphere and the school's value in fostering and enhancing academic performance, warranting further exploration of this topic (Arjmand et al., 2016).

Self-efficacy is a crucial element when it comes to assessing environmental claims. Individuals tend to view external demands as either a challenge or a threat based on their self-efficacy levels (Farrell et al., 2018; Lease & Dahlbeck, 2009; Mohebi Nooradinvand et al., 2003; Yeha et al., 2007). Essentially, self-efficacy is the primary determinant in the decisions we make and the actions we take. None of an individual's cognitive beliefs are as vital as self-efficacy in managing personal adaptive functions and coping with difficulties and stressful situations. A strong sense of self-efficacy encourages learners to tackle assignments, navigate through adverse conditions, and confront upcoming challenges (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Learners who possess high self-efficacy levels exhibit enthusiasm and confidence in their ability to overcome obstacles and face challenges. This confidence in one's capabilities to handle environmental stressors is linked to the adaptive functions of vitality. Individuals with high self-efficacy demonstrate increased vitality and academic performance by investing more effort and persisting in problem-solving. Students with high perceived self-efficacy view academic challenges as opportunities for success and are eager to develop the necessary skills to address any academic obstacle that comes their way (Chun & Dickson, 2011; Leong et al., 2004; Mashayekhi & mohammadi, 2014). Consequently, when students believe in their ability to succeed in their academic pursuits, they are more likely to strive towards achieving their goals and are poised to attain successful outcomes in the future, ultimately enhancing their academic vitality (Djigic & Stojiljkovic, 2011). The student's upbringing within the family environment significantly influences their relationships with family members and their performance at school. A positive emotional atmosphere at home fosters a constructive outlook and enhances the individual's ability to handle challenges, ultimately impacting their motivation and effort towards achieving their goals. Furthermore, a nurturing family environment encourages responsibility, diligence, and continuous improvement, consequently boosting students' motivation and academic progress (Roohi et al., 2013).

CONCLUSION

To enhance students' academic performance, it is crucial to consider both the family environment and academic motivation and self-efficacy. The collaboration between school and family is essential in fostering students' self-efficacy. Teachers and school administrators must work together to create a supportive environment that boosts students' belief in their abilities. A positive family atmosphere and a cohesive school community are key in reinforcing students' self-efficacy and instilling in them the confidence to succeed. Conversely, a negative family environment can hinder students' self-efficacy if it lacks a sense of unity and closeness.

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