Research Paper

Comparing the Sense of belonging to School, Academic Vitality and Academic Emotions Among First Grade Students in the Era Before and During the Outbreak of Corona

Samaneh Salimi[1] iD **, Sadegh kazemi[2]** iD

1- Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Management, Zahedan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Zahedan, Iran

2- Department of Educational Management, Mehr Arvand Higher Education Institute, Abadan, Iran

Abstract

The current study aimed to compare the sense of belonging to school, academic vitality, and academic emotions in first-grade students of District 2 of Tehran. The research method was comparative causal. Four hundred seventy-five first graders of District 2 of Tehran were the statistical population. The statistical sample of the study included 212 students (106 first-grade students in the Corona era; 106 first-grade students in the pre-Corona era) during 2017 – 2020, selected using the Morgan table and cluster sampling. To collect data, Hossein Chari and Dehghanizadeh's academic vitality questionnaires (2013), Brew, Beatty, and Watt's (2004) student sense of connectedness scale (SSCS), and Pekrun et al.'s (2002) achievement emotions questionnaire (AEQ) were used. The data from the questionnaires were analyzed at descriptive and inferential statistics levels, including independent t-tests through SPSS23. The results revealed a significant difference between the academic vitality, sense of connectedness to the school, and the academic emotions of the first-grade students in Tehran during the period before and during the outbreak of Corona. Consequently, face-to-face education effectively forms a sense of connectedness to the school, creating students' academic vitality and emotions.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

The impacts of Coronavirus and the closure of schools and the challenges created by it in elementary schools, especially in the first-grade students, have been more, compared to the other educational grades since the first-grade students, who should have been familiar with the classroom and school setting, were familiar with only their teacher via computer or phone. Based on the experts, first-grade students understand the real concept of the classroom and education in the first communication with the teacher. However, during the Coronavirus outbreak, the communication and relationship between the first-grade students and the teachers were not established, leading to educational decline, problems in reading and writing skills, educational weakness, and numerous other factors for these students. Significant academic success and progress could be achieved, especially among first-grade students, in the absence of these problems. Thus, many factors affect the pervasive growth and development or drop in student performance. The factors investigated in this study are the sense of belonging to the school, academic emotion, and academic vitality.

Theoretical Framework

The sense of belonging to the school is a psychological state in which students feel that the school supports them and other students. Accordingly, when students face strict rules from the school and are punished or even expelled for their first mistake in school, they will have a lower sense of belonging than students who study in lenient schools (Tachine et al., 2017). Academic emotions are defined as emotions that are directly associated with progress activities or progress outcomes. Past studies focused on the emotions related to progress outcomes, including the emotions of future outcomes such as hope and anxiety, which are respectively related to success and possible failures; and emotions of previous outcomes such as pride and shame, which are respectively related to previous successes and failures. The definition proposed by the control-value theory suggests that activity-based emotions are associated with activities related to current progress and are considered progress emotions, such as enjoyment of learning, fatigue experienced in the classroom, and anger in response to task demands of academic learning (Moghadamnia et al, 2020). Academic vitality refers to a positive, constructive and adaptive response that includes all kinds of challenges and obstacles that occur in everyday and normal educational situations (Putwain & Daly, 2013). Academic vitality is a construction that rises from positive psychology and refers to the fact that it can enable students to successfully deal with academic obstacles and challenges such as poor grades, exam pressure, difficult and arduous tasks that occur during education and school (Fouladi et al, 2017).

Methodology

The present study is applied in terms of aim, and comparative causal in terms of method. The statistical population of the present study includes two groups of first-grade students. The first group includes first-grade students before the coronavirus outbreak, and the second group includes first-grade students during the coronavirus outbreak in District 2 of Tehran (n= 475). To estimate the sample size, Krejcie and Morgan's table was used using the cluster sampling method, so the desired sample size was estimated at 212 first-grade elementary school students. Thus, for this purpose, 212 samples were divided into two groups; first group included 106 (80 girls and 26 boys) first-grade students studying before the coronavirus outbreak, and the second group included 106 (87 girls and 19 boys) first-grade students studying during the coronavirus outbreak. In the present study, three questionnaires were used to collect the required data: Chari & Dehghan Zadeh's (2012) questionnaire was used to

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measure academic vitality; Beri, Beti & Wat (2004) was used to measure the sense of belonging to the school (27 items and 6 components scored on a 5-point Likert scale); and Pekrun & et al (2002) questionnaire was used to measure academic emotions (75 items and 3 components scored on a 5-point Likert scale).

Research Findings

The mean vitality variable was 3.83 before the coronavirus outbreak and 2.66 during the coronavirus outbreak. The difference between the mean of these two groups (1.27) was examined by an independent T-test. Based on the obtained T-test score and the significance level ($p < 0.01$), it can be stated with 95% confidence that the mean academic vitality of students before the coronavirus outbreak is higher than that during the coronavirus outbreak and this difference is significant. The mean sense of belonging to the school and its components, including teacher support, participation in the community, respect and justice in the school, positive feeling toward the school, the person belonging to the school, and scientific participation, was obtained at 3.71, 3.59, 3.69, 3.98, 3.58, 3.60, and 3.99, respectively, before the coronavirus outbreak. It was also obtained at 2.40, 2.40, 2.45, 2.32, 2.50, 2.34, and 2.33, respectively, after the coronavirus outbreak. The difference between the means of these two groups (1.31, 1.81, 1.23, 1.66, 1.08, 1.25, and 1.65) was examined using an Independent T-test. Based on obtained T test score and the significance level ($p < 0.01$), it can be stated with 95% confidence that the mean variable of belonging to the school and its components, including teacher support, participation in the community, respect and justice in the school, positive feeling toward the school, the person belonging to the school, and scientific participation before coronavirus is more than that during the coronavirus. This difference is significant. The mean variable of academic emotions and their components, including positive emotion and negative emotion was 3.54, 3.33, and 3.63, respectively, before the coronavirus; and 2.46, 2.50, and 2.46, respectively, during the coronavirus. The difference between the mean of these two groups (1.077, 0.826, and 1.19 respectively) was evaluated using an independent T-test. Based on the obtained t-test score and the significance level ($p < 0.01$), it can be stated with 95% confidence that the mean variable of academic emotions and its components (positive emotion and negative emotion) before coronavirus is more than that during the coronavirus. This difference is significant.

Conclusion and Discussion

The present study was conducted to compare the sense of belonging to the school, academic vitality, and academic emotions of first-grade students before and during the coronavirus outbreak. The results of the first question showed a significant difference between the two groups of first-grade students studying before the coronavirus outbreak and the first-grade students studying during the coronavirus outbreak regarding academic vitality. Since no similar study has been conducted to compare the academic vitality of students during and before the coronavirus outbreak, it is not possible in this section to compare the results of this question with the results of other studies.

The result also showed that the variable of sense of belonging to the school and its components (teacher support, participation in the community, respect and justice in the school, positive feeling toward the school, the person belonging to the school, and scientific participation) is different before and during coronavirus. The factors that expand the sense of belonging to the school are three factors: 1. Acceptance by others, 2. Interpersonal support, 3. Experienced sense of belonging. Since no similar research has been conducted so far to compare the students' sense of belonging to the school during the coronavirus and before it, in this section, it is not possible to compare the results of this question with the results of other

studies. The results also showed that the variable of academic emotion and its components (positive emotion and negative emotion) are different before and during the coronavirus. Since no similar research has been conducted so far to compare the academic emotions of students during and before the coronavirus, in this section, it is not possible to compare the results of this question with the results of other studies. Based on the results, it is recommended that the quality of spending time in class should be proportional to the psychological characteristics of students. The structure of the class should not be traditional and the table and chairs should be arranged in such a way that the communication and access of the students to the teacher should be equal to each other. Since this study was conducted on first-grade students in Tehran, we should treat it with caution in generalizing its results to other students. Hence, this study has limitations from this point of view.

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