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Attachment Styles and Academic Performance Relationship

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Abstract

According to attachment theory, often and intensively experienced attachment behavior in infancy and childhood will shape one's relationships with others in the adulthood. Previous studies have proven the existence of correlation between attachment and individual's psychological and social experiences. For example, secure attachment is a function which reduces the effects of negative situation such as stress and anxiety. In addition, people with secure attachment style are able to control negative feelings occurred due to stress, they have self-confidence in fixing their negative emotions and they can feel empathy. They have less chance of experiencing depression and have high levels of self-esteem with the ability to easily express their emotions. Aim of this study is to examine correlation between attachment styles of university students and their academic performance. Accordingly, survey was carried out among the first-year and second-year students at Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences of Akdeniz University by employing random sampling method. Students' attachment styles were perceptively measured while GPA was being used in order to measure the academic performance. In total, 142 questionnaires were evaluated. Research results indicated a high correlation between secure attachment style and academic performance. Obtained results were discussed and interpreted within the regarding literature. It is believed that the results of this study will provide important cues for future studies interested in evaluating and improving students' academic performance.

Keywords: Attachment Styles, Academic Performance

1. Literature Review

Attachment behaviour is being used to describe the stronger, smarter and/or differentiated closeness to the other person and this type of behaviour is being established as a result of preserving this closeness. It is intensively and frequently used by infants and young

children (Hazan and Shaver, 1994: 3) and continues to manifest throughout life, especially in cases of distress, illness or fear (Ainsworth, 1985: 792). Attachment theory proposes that the consequences of an individual's bonding behavior, which he/she frequently and intensely tried in infancy and childhood, shape relationships with other people in the later stages of one's life.

Introducing his theory of attachment in his speech among the British psychoanalytic community in 1957, John Bowlby suggested that behaviors such as smiling, crying and monitoring may predicted behaviors that may help in maintaining proximity and accessibility to mother (considering that usually mother is the main caregiver to her baby) (Ainsworth et.al., 2015: 16). When babies are smiling parents find their smiles a rewarding. When babies are crying parents are motivated to comfort them. Parents are moving and babies are following them visually or physically. These with time and experience are integrated within the attachment behavior system that is sensitive to internal and environmental cues and circumstances. Any real or perceived obstacle to maintain closeness will cause anxiety and irritability that trigger attachment behaviors designed to restore this closeness. The attachment system is activated automatically and provokes baby's protest reaction toward separation. These behaviors continue until the targeted closeness is reached (Hazan and Shaver, 1994: 3). This implies that the most basic objective within the attachment system is to protect the closeness with caregiver. It means trust for children, in case proximity and accessibility is needed, and a shelter for protection in the event of danger (Sümer and Güngör, 1999: 72).

In order for babies to develop trust-based bonding in their future life, based on a healthy emotional state, the child must have an uninterrupted, consistent, responsive, and always attainable care delivery. The refusal or excessive negligence of the caregiver may lead to child wanting to be independent before time in the future, or having a tendency to break away from the attachment object/person. It is believed that negative expectations that will arise from caregiver's frequent repetition of unreliable behaviors will lead to future problems in adult relationships. At an early age, the mental models which define the knowledge about "others" and "social relations" are shaped. Those who are raised with secure relationship, perceive themselves as worth of loving and with a positive self model, they evaluate others as trustable, supportive, consistent and reachable (positive "others-model"). On the other hand, those raised with insecure relationships evaluate others as cold, mistrustful and inconsistent by developing negative self-model with non-worthy feelings (negative "others-model") (Bartholomew, 1994: 170; Sümer and Güngör, 1999: 72-73)

Following the Bowlby's theory, Mary D. Salter Ainsworth and her colleagues (2015) categorize children's attachment into three categories as secure, anxious / unstable or anxious / resistant and avoidant. Children with a secure attachment pattern display an indication of disturbance when they leave the caregiver, but when they come back together they easily calm down. Their curiosities about exploring the environment continue. A child with anxious-unstable attachment pattern experiences intense anxiety and restlessness when separated from his/her caregiver, but does not calm down easily when brought together again. Finally, children with avoidant pattern are not so infected when they are separated from care-givers. When they are

brought together again, they avoid establishing contact as they seem to be more interested in continuing playing with their toys.

When looking at studies on attachment styles of adults, in their research, Hazan and Shaver (1987) defined romantic love as attachment process and proposed the classification of attachment styles parallel to those proposed by Ainsworth and her colleagues. In their study, those participants who defined themselves as those with secure attachment style have more positive experiences and faith in both romantic and parental relationships. Positive correlation was found between secure attachment with the trust and closeness and negative with jealousy. Anxious/ ambivalent participants tend to be jealous in general relationships and obsessive with their partners while avoidant participants have no trust in others, have negative expectations and beliefs about relationships and romantic love, resulting in avoidance of establishing close relations with others. Opposite to the Hazan and Shaver's notion about exact overlap of attachment styles in childhood and adulthood, other researchers believed that there should be difference with adults due to the combination of bonding, care and sexual elements. For this reason, unlike Hazan and Shaver's model, Bartholomew and Horowitz, proposed two types of avoiding attachment styles (fearful and dismissing) and based on Bowlby's concept of mental models proposed four new attachment styles such as secure, dismissing, fearful and preoccupied. In this model preoccupied attachment style corresponds to Hazan and Shaver's anxious/ambivalent while fearful and dismissing styles are compatible with avoidant attachment style (Bartholomew, 1990: 151,163; Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991: 227).

Figure 1. Adults Attachment Models

		Self Model (Dependency)	
		<i>Positive (Low)</i>	<i>Negative (High)</i>
<i>Positive (Low)</i>	Secure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive self perception • High self-esteem and confidence • Seeing yourself worthy of being loved • Positive expectations about others as trustworthy, supportive, attainable and well-intentioned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An ongoing effort to reach others in order to meet bonding needs • Feeling worthless or not worthy of being loved, positive evaluation of others • A tendency to self-verify or prove in close relationships • Unrealistic expectation and obsessions in relationships
	Dismissing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive self-perception • Autonomy is extremely important • Reject the necessity of close relationships with others • Autonomy at the expense of feeling of closeness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative self-perception • Avoiding closeness in order to prevent frustration • Low self - esteem • High anxiety
Others Model (Avoidance)			
<i>Negative (High)</i>			

Source: Bartholomew, 1990: 163; Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991: 227.

When looking at the research on the relation between attachment styles and psychological variables, the attachment styles of individuals was being related with variables such as: decision making, subjective well-being, coping with stress (Terzi and Çankaya, 2009: 11), anxiety (Tolan, 2002: 80; Mikulincer and Florian, 1995: 406), establishing relationships and being sensitive to emotional distress of others, anxiety and depression (Parker, 1982: 57), transmit and balance feelings (Cassidy, 1994: 228), emotional awareness, empathy and positive / negative emotional state (Laible, 2007: 1193), self-esteem, stress level, and even pain-complaint complaints (Kart, 2002: 125, 126). In general, secure attachment style is a function that reduces negative effects of states such as stress and anxiety. In addition, people with secure attachment style can control negative emotions arise due to stress, they believe that they can fix states of negative emotions, make empathy, feel less anxiety and depression, have higher self-esteem and can easily show their emotions. According to results of Erözkan's (2011: 70) study there is the significant relation between attachment style and decision making strategies in a way that individuals with secure attachment style can make rational and independent decisions. In addition, attachment styles on the whole influence self-esteem and style in decision making (Deniz, 2011: 101), while anxious attachment influence alexithymia points (Batıgün and Büyükşahin, 2008: 105).

In the study of Morsünbül (2009: 1368) individuals with negative self-models showed more risk taking behaviour than compared to those with positive ones. In another study, which

had the relation between attachment pattern and identity development in its focus, individual with secure attachment style had individual development in more positive direction (Morsünbül and Çok, 2011: 567).

Guy et al. (2016) were examining mediating effect of attachment styles in the relation between academic success of university student and employment – unemployment. Results showed that in predicting academic success students' attachment styles (secure vs. dismissing) and state of employment had a strong interaction. Students with dismissing attachment style mean scores in the first period of academic life are lower than with secure attachment styles. Results of this study showed that students with dismissing attachment style have higher risk of experiencing academic difficulties than those students with secure attachment style. Another study was examining relation between students' attachment styles and social skills score and whether social skills scores can be predicted with the attachment style (Dereli and Karakuş, 2011). According to results of this study there is the significant positive correlation between secure attachment style and scores such as emotional expression, emotional sensitivity, social expression and social control. However, negative correlation was detected between fearful attachment style and social control and emotional expression scores.

2. Method

Goal of this study is to examine relationship between students' attachment styles and academic performance. Following this aim, correlation analysis between attachment dimensions and performance was being conducted. In order to define attachment styles of participants, Relationship Scale Questionnaire (RSQ) was used. In this scale, which was first introduced in international literature by Griffin and Bartholomew (1994) and adapted to Turkish by Sümer and Güngör (1999), items are grouped under four dimensions: secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing. Students' academic performance was being assessed through their Average general academic grade scores. In order to define relationship between academic performance and attachment styles Pearson correlation analysis was used.

3. Validity and Reliability of Measurement Scale

First, validity and reliability analyzes were conducted for the relationship scale questionnaire. Cronbach Alpha values, indicator of internal consistency, were calculated to access reliability of the scale, while confirmatory factor analysis was used for construct validity. For each dimension values are provided in Table 1. Calculated values were all being higher than the accepted limit of 0,70 (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 1. Reliability Test Results for Relationship Scale

Factor	Cronbach's Alpha
Secure	0,88
Fearful	0,81
Preoccupied	0,86
Dismissing	0,82

For construct validity, the four-factor structure of scale was tested by confirmatory factor analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis showed that 30 items and 4 sub-dimensions are compatible with the proposed scale. When examining model's compatibility index it is shown that all items are compatible. These findings show that expressions are clearly explained by the factors and can be regarded as proof of the structural validity of the scale.

Table 2. Compliance Indexes for Relation Scale Measurement Model

Model	χ^2	χ^2/sd	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	CFI	TLI	NFI
	902,57	2,95	0,058	0,92	0,90	0,91	0,90	0,91

4. Results

Table 3 shows the average of the attachment styles and the standard deviation values of the university students participating in the survey according to the gender variable. General average academic grade mean scores for students who participated in the study was 2, 57. When looking at gender variable, it can be said that women are more successful than men.

When examining average scores of attachment styles in general, students with secure attachment style show the highest scores while preoccupied attachment style averages show the lowest ones. The highest average attachment style score was attributed to the dismissing style for female and secure style for male.

Table 3. Average of scores for attachment styles - General and Gender Variable

Gender		Secure	Fearful	Preoccupied	Dismissing	GPA
	Average	3,91	3,17	2,93	3,27	2,48
Male	N	90	90	90	90	90
	Standard Deviation	0,75	0,66	0,68	0,68	0,61
Female	Average	3,42	3,45	3,03	3,63	2,69
	N	52	52	52	52	52
	Standard Deviation	0,73	0,64	0,69	0,73	0,49
Total	Average	3,86	3,34	2,99	3,49	2,57
	N	142	142	142	142	142
	Standard Deviation	0,74	0,66	0,69	0,73	0,56

Table 4 shows the relationship between the attachment styles of students and their academic performances in general. The results of the analysis show that the bonding style with the highest level of relationship with academic performance is secure attachment style. A meaningful relationship between performance and other forms of attachment has not been detected.

Table 4. Correlation Values between Attachment Styles and Academic Performance

Attachment Styles	Performance
	Correlation Coefficient
Secure	0,55**
Fearful	0,04
Preoccupied	-0,06
Dismissing	0,05

** Correlation significant at level of 0,01.

N= 142

5. Conclusion

The results of the research provide evidence for the existence of the relationship between academic performance and attachment styles. There is a relationship between the academic achievement of the students participating in the research and the secure attachment style. It is known that individuals with secure attachment style have higher levels of self-esteem and self-confidence. They also believe in their decision making abilities (Erözkan, 2011). Before making decision they are rationally and carefully evaluating all the alternatives. There is negative relationship between secure attachment and internal unplanned decision making (Morsünbül, 2009). It is known that there are strong findings that the academic performance of the well-planned and organized students is higher.

On the other hand, it is known that individuals with secure attachment style have positive self perception. Students with secure attachment styles behaving more rationally in decision making, they take risks and study regularly. In addition, due to the fact that secure attachment is a function that decreases the effects of negative states such as stress and anxiety, it can be considered as a factor that increases academic success. Secure attachment style can control and correct the negative emotions that stress creates. They experience less anxiety and depression (Mikulincer and Florian, 1995). All of the mentioned characteristics can positively affect the academic performance of the students.

Strong bonds that students establish with their parents, can positively affect their academic performance (Fass, 1998). Students with weak relationship bonds with their parents, show lower academic performance - due to the lack of communication and encouragement. Transition period at the beginning of university life is less stressful for students with a secure attachment style. When comparing these types of students with those who have insecure attachment style it can be seen that secure attached ones show more positive attitudes towards university lessons, they are strong in social integration and show more emotional attachment to communities (Pfeil, 2000). It is considered that the findings of the current study can provide

important clues for future studies on evaluation and improvement of students' academic performance.

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