Original Article

The mediating role of fear of negative evaluation in the relationship of attachment dimensions with social and academic adjustment among visually impaired students

Fahimeh Rezaeipour[1]; *Kazem Barzegar Bafrooei[2]

[1]M.Sc. in eEducational Psychology, Yazd University, Yazd, Iran.
[2]Associate Professor of Educational Sciences, Department of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Yazd University, Yazd, Iran.

Abstract

Introduction: Considering the effect of vision on emotional, communication, and academic activities, also to prevent the negative impact of impaired vision, the present study aimed to investigate the mediating role of fear of negative evaluation in the relationship between attachment dimensions and social and academic adjustment in students with visual impairment.

Materials and Methods: The statistical population of this descriptive-correlational study included students with visual impairment at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels of all Iranian universities in the academic year 2017-2018. Amongst them, 211 cases were selected through snow-ball sampling method and responded to Collins' Attachment Scale, a brief version of the Fear of Negative Evaluation of Leary and social and academic adjustment subscales of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire Baker and Siryk. Data analyzed by structural equation modeling using AMOS 22 software.

Results: The results showed that the hypothesized model fits the experimental data and the direct effects of attachment anxiety and fear of negative evaluation on social ($P< 0.05$) and academic adjustment were significant ($P< 0.01$). Also, attachment avoidance by mediating fear of negative evaluation had a significant effect on social ($P< 0.01$) and academic adjustment ($P< 0.05$). The effect of attachment anxiety on fear of negative evaluation in social ($P< 0.05$) and academic adjustment ($P< 0.01$) was also confirmed.

Conclusion: Based on the research findings, attachment and fear of negative evaluation can predict students' social and academic adjustment with visual impairment. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to secure attachment, adjustment and prevention of fear of negative evaluation in these students.

Keywords: Adjustment, Attachment, Fear, Visual impairment

[1] ***Corresponding Author:***
Department of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Yazd University, Yazd, Iran
k.barzegar@yazd.ac.ir

Introduction

The university period is one of the most tensional periods of life, as much as the students face basic changes in education, social and family communications, and personal affairs. During this period, the students experience various challenges associated with decreased academic performance (1) and psychological disturbances such as loneliness, homesickness, grief, and increased likelihood of substance use (2). On the one hand, some of the university students are those with visual impairment. According to the medical commissions of the Welfare Organization of Iran and based on the international classification, visually impaired people are severely blind in three areas of disability, function, and health (3). One of the most important human senses is vision, which plays an important role in emotional, communication, and academic activities. Lack or deficiency in this sense can affect the development of social skills, especially those that require visual acuity (4). People with visual impairments have limitations in imitating and understanding the body postures and body language. This affects how they communicate (5) and may lead to passive behaviors. Social isolation, which is sometimes one of the consequences of blindness, creates the potential for more anxiety and stress in these individuals (6). If blind people cannot adapt to their circumstances and environment, they will feel insecure and frustrated, leading to maladaptive behaviors and psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, and stress (7). Hence, the investigation of adjustment and its interfering causes in these students has primary importance.

Adjustment can be defined as the process of balancing one's needs with the demands of one's environment. This balance requires the individual to change or actively change the environment (8). The adjustment has various areas, the most important is an adjustment in social and academic fields. Social adjustment involves achieving personal goals in social interactions while maintaining positive relationships with others over time and under different circumstances (9). On the other hand, academic adjustment refers to the ability of learners to adapt to the conditions and requirements of education and the plans that the school or university as a social institution puts in front of them (10). Undoubtedly, various factors affect social and academic adjustment,

one of which is the attachment dimensions (11-13) According to Bowlby, the theoretical basis of the present study, the attachment means the emotional bond formed in childhood between the child and his primary caregiver and affects the child's social development and feelings throughout life (14). Contemporary models of adult attachment typically consider individual differences in attachment as a scatter in the continuum and two dimensions of anxiety and attachment avoidance (15). In short, high attachment anxiety is associated with high fears of abandonment, rejection, and dislike, while avoidance of attachment indicates avoidance of intimacy and closeness to others (16).

In contrast, secure attachment individuals show lower levels of anxiety and avoidance (17) and have higher social skills and higher academic performance and adjustment than individuals with insecure attachment (18-21). Because visually impaired children experience increasing problems with their mother due to lack of eye contact and environmental deprivation due to poor eyesight, they often have an insecure attachment (22). The results of Jafari (23) also showed that blind students scored higher in attachment anxiety than ordinary people. In addition to this variable, another variable that is expected to predict social and academic adjustment is the fear of negative evaluation (24-26). Fear of negative evaluation can be described as a fear that people experience when in an evaluation position. Regardless of their effective performance, this fear leads them to believe that others are judging them negatively or only evaluating their weaknesses, which causes the person to worry and avoid the situation altogether. Such people may experience anxiety in interpersonal communication and also experience feelings of social disapproval (27). Research shows that students who are concerned about the evaluations of others and feel uncomfortable in social situations such as meeting strangers face social and academic adjustment problems (24,28).

On the other hand, family factors such as attachment can influence the fear of negative evaluation (29- 31). It can be confessed that the quality of a child's attachment leads to the creation of internal working models of self and others, in the way that the children of warm and responsive parents have a positive view of themselves and others and make positive working models. However, the children of

unstable, rejective, and unresponsive parents create negative working models of themselves and others (32). One of the results of making working models is the formation of dysfunctional cognitions, such as fear of negative evaluation, which is considered one the most important features of a social anxiety disorder (33). According to the outcome of previous studies, insecure attachment is associated with high levels of symptoms of social anxiety (34). People with visual impairments have more social anxiety than ordinary people due to their sensory deprivation (35) and communication less with others (36). Lack of opportunity to observational learning, on the one hand, failure, lack of honest feedback from others, negative attitudes of society and inappropriate behaviors towards them and predisposing to negative interactions and the formation of defective cognitions and emotions (35) such as fear of negative evaluation are presented in these people. All in all, the review of previous studies which had investigated the relation between attachment dimensions, the fear of negative evaluation, and social and academic adjustment show that the outcomes of these studies have not been presented in a coherent and consistent model.

Additionally, the accomplished studies are primarily about ordinary people, not special groups of society. Therefore, this study's purpose is to represent a model and determine its fit for the relation of attachment dimensions with social and academic adjustment by the intermediary of fear of negative evaluation in the students with visual impairments based on experimental data. The outcomes of this study can help the related institutions such as the Centers of higher Education, the Welfare Organization, and the blind constitutions to plan and make suitable decisions for the hold of workshops, semesters, and various services to these people.
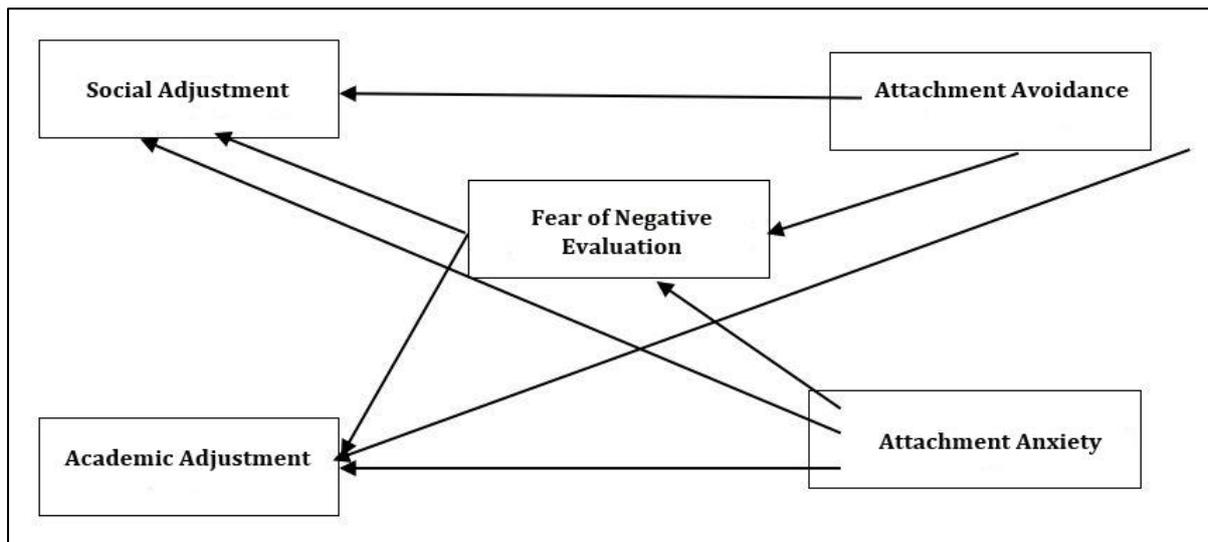

Figure 1. A conceptual model of research

Materials and Methods

The method of this research is descriptive-correlational and investigates the relationships between research variables in the form of one model. The dimensions of attachment are exogenous variables, the mediator variable of the fear of negative evaluation, and social and academic adjustment of the final endogenous variables.

The statistical population of the present study included all students with undergraduate and postgraduate visual impairment studying in all Iranian universities in the academic year 2017-18. To estimate the sample size in correlation and regression studies, Kline (37) divides the types of path analysis models into three types: simple, slightly complex, and complex and asserts that the amount of sample in the simple model is under 100 cases, slightly complex models between 100 and 200 and in complex models are above 200. Concerning the number of analyzed variables, the present study is a slightly complex model, and the sample amount is estimated at 200 cases.In order to prevent the sample from falling, 220 (10% more than the sample size) male and female students with

bachelor's and master's degrees with visual impairment were selected using the snowball sampling method. In this way, each student with visual impairment introduced the next person, and the researcher sent the questionnaire link to them through cyberspace.

At last, nine questionnaires were removed due to incompleteness, and analyzes were performed on 211 people. Yazd University approved this study, and the inclusion criteria included satisfaction with participating in the study. Exclusion criteria also included not answering more than 30% of the questionnaire questions. In order to observe ethical considerations and gain the trust of the participants to keep their information confidential, there was no need to mention the name and surname. The SPSS and AMOS software was used to analyze the data.

Research Instruments

A) The Attachment Scale: this scale was developed by Collins (38) to self-assess how attachment relationships are formed about images of adulthood attachments and have eighteen questions, and each answer to each question has a mark from one (never applies to me) to five (completely applies to me).

Based on the factor analysis method, Collins introduced two aspects of anxiety (six questions) and avoidance (which in itself consists of two highly correlated dimensions of dependence and closeness) (12) for the instruments and reported the reliability of dimensions equal to 0.78-0.85 based on Cronbach's Alpha. Anxiety and avoidance attachment scores range from 6 to 30 and 12 to 60, respectively.

Also, Rahimi and Zarei (32) reported the reliability of instruments based on Cronbach's Alpha (anxiety dimension 0.85 and avoidance dimension 0.70). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was used to measure reliability, and its level in anxiety factor was obtained by omitting question 9 due to a lower factor load of 0.30 equal to 0.68 and in avoidance factor equal to 0.94.

A brief version of the Fear of Negative Evaluation: this scale was designed by Leary (36) in order to describe frightening and disturbing believes and includes twelve questions and answer to each question has a mark from one (never applies to me) to five (hugely applies to me). The minimum score is 12, and the maximum is 60. In order to evaluate

the reliability of this instrument, Leary reported the internal consistency of the scale as 0.96 and the reliability of the retest interval after four weeks as 0.75. In the research of Momeni, Karami, and Sardari (26), the reliability of the instrument has been calculated based on Cronbach's Alpha, and it was 0.74. In the present study, the coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha has been 0.78.

B) The Students' Adaptation to College Questionnaire: This 67-questions scale made by Baker and Siryk (40) and includes four sub-scales of academic adjustment (24 questions), personal-emotional adjustment (15 questions), social adjustment (20 questions), and institutional attachment (8 questions) and social and academic adjustment have been used in this study. The answer to each question has a mark from one (does not apply to me at all) to five (completely applies to me). Social and academic adjustment scores range from 20 to 100 and 24 to 120, respectively.

Baker and Siryk investigated the validity of the instrument by the use of factor analysis, and generally, four factors of "Academic Adjustment", "Personal-Emotional Adjustment", "Social adjustment", and "Institutional Attachment" were deduced respectively. The reliability of the instrument for social and academic adjustment is reported in a range from 0.81 to 0.90 and 0.83 to 0.91 based on Cronbach's Alpha in Baker and Siryk's research. In research by Ehyakonnandeh, Yousefi, and Khormaei (41), the reliability of the instrument based on Cronbach's Alpha is reported 0.72 and 0.71 for the coefficient reliability of social and academic adjustment, respectively. In the present study, Cronbach's coefficient alpha are 0.94 and 0.95 for social and academic adjustment, respectively.

Results

From 211 participants in this study, 113 are female (%53.6), and 98 are male (%46.4). One hundred twenty-four of them are the B.A students (%85.8) and 87 persons are M.A students (%41.2).

Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation, and matrix of correlation coefficients of research variables. After ensuring the acceptability of the measurement model, the structural model of the research was drawn in Amos software. The standard and non-standard coefficients of the structural model of the research are visible in Table 2.

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, and matrix of correlation coefficients of research variables

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	1	2	3	4	5
Attachment anxiety	15.68	6.53	1				
Attachment avoidance	36.18	13.41	0.40	1			
Fear of negative evaluation	35	5.34	0.63	0.38	1		
Social adjustment	64.11	15.10	-0.61	-0.43	-0.57	1	
Academic adjustment	78.99	19.26	-0.50	-0.38	-0.47	0.86	1

Table 2. Standard and non-standard coefficients of structural model of the research

Path		Non-standard coefficient	Standard coefficient	S.E	CR	P
Attachment avoidance	Fear of negative evaluation	0.085	0.162	0.35	2.411	0.016
Attachment anxiety	Fear of negative evaluation	0.425	0.674	0.062	6.876	0.001
Fear of negative evaluation	Academic adjustment	-0.717	-0.450	0.184	-3.907	0.001
Fear of negative evaluation	Social adjustment	-0.960	-0.632	0.175	05.500	0.001
Attachment anxiety	Academic adjustment	-0.273	-0.272	0.106	-2.578	0.010
Attachment anxiety	Social adjustment	-0.210	-0.220	0.090	-2327	0.020

According to standardized coefficients (Beta), which can be seen in Table 2, the paths of the structural model of this study are significant. The beta amounts of these correlations and their levels of significance can be seen in the table. The amount of direct, indirect, and total effects of all the research variables can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Direct, indirect, and total effects

Path	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect
Attachment avoidance on fear of negative evaluation	0.162**	-	0.162**
Attachment anxiety on fear of negative evaluation	0.674**	-	0.674**
Attachment anxiety on social adjustment	-0.220*	-0.426*	-0.646**
Fear of negative evaluation on social adjustment	-0.632**	-	-0.632*
Attachment anxiety on academic adjustment	-0.272**	-0.304**	-0.576*
Fear of negative evaluation on academic adjustment	-0.450*	-	-0.450**
Attachment avoidance on social adjustment		-0.102**	-0.102**
Attachment avoidance on academic adjustment		-0.073*	-0.073*

As seen, the attachment anxiety affected directly (-0.220) and on the level of $P< 0.05$ on social adjustment (-0.272) and the level of $P<0.01$ on academic adjustment. Additionally, the anxiety of attachment with the mediation of fear of negative evaluation affected social adjustment (-0.426) on the level of $P< 0.05$ and academic adjustment (-0.304) on the level of $P< 0.01$. Also, attachment avoidance only affects social adjustment (-0.102) on the level of $P< 0.01$ and academic adjustment (-0.073) on the level of $P< 0.05$ based on the mediation of fear of negative evaluation.

In the following, the fitness indices of the structural model of the research are observed.

In this research, for the fitness test, a combination of fitness indices including the index of Chi-Square or relative index (CIMIN/DF), which an amount under 5 is acceptable for it, comparative fit index (CFI) which amounts above 0.9 is considered acceptable for it, parsimony comparative fit index (PCFI) that an amount above 0.5 is acceptable for it, root mean square error of approximation that an amount lower than 0.08 is acceptable for it and Holter index that amounts above 200 is acceptable for that (42), will be used. As seen in the table, the structural model of research has an acceptable level of fitness.

Table 4. The fitness indices of the structural model of the research

Structural model of research	X2	df	P	CMIN/DF	CFI	PCFI	RMSEA	HOLTER
	4788.438	2405	0.001	1.991	0.901	0.740	0.068	201

Results

This study aimed to present and determine the fitness of the relationship model between the dimensions of attachment and social and academic adjustment mediated by the fear of negative evaluation in students with visual impairment based on experimental data. According to the research findings, attachment anxiety was a negative and significant predictor of social and academic adjustment. Numerous studies have emphasized the role of the family in adjustment and academic performance (13,20,43). In this regarding in line with this finding, research by Ghorbanian, Poor Ebrahim, Seyed Mousavi, and Habibi (20) have compared social adjustment and academic performance in girl students with secure and insecure attachment. The findings showed a significant difference among attachment styles, social adjustment, and academic performance of student kids, and the highest level of social adjustment and academic performance are in kids with secure attachment styles. Also, in research by Chen (13) titled "Parents-Adolescence Attachment and Academic Adjustment: The Mediating Role of Self-Worth", the mediatory role of self-worth has confirmed the importance of parents' interfering methods based on attachment to develop and preserve academic adjustment. This means that the teenagers who gain higher levels of attachment to parents are more likely to feel a higher level of self-worth, which leads to their enhancement of academic engagement and performance. In explaining the obtained results, it can be acknowledged that children with visual impairment have a limited set of communication behaviors that affect their emotional dependence on parents (23). These cases may lead to high attachment anxiety in children with visual impairment and lead to the development of negative functional models in these people. The quality of attachment in adulthood also shows its effects and clarifies how people deal with stress (44). People with high attachment anxiety have poor coping skills (45) and little satisfaction in social relationships. In addition, attachment anxiety is often associated with outbursts of anger and

violent behaviors (46) that jeopardize social adjustment. Also, people with attachment anxiety are always worried about being rejected, which is when they need the support of others (12). When anxious and restless, he does not have stability and security in emotional and interpersonal relationships; he has difficulty trying and concentrating on establishing effective relationships with others and actively participating in educational situations such as a university. The study environment is not satisfactory for these students. They have low self-esteem, cannot enter and occupy the educational environment, and most likely do not spend much effort exploring and engaging in classroom projects. In this way, they have difficulty coping with the educational requirements that the university has set for them.

In contrast, people with secure attachments have higher self-confidence and more social skills than insecure people (47), can influence and control the environment, and seek to participate in activities that lead to effective relationships with others. As a result, they have a positive attitude towards educational environments such as universities and are socially and academically well-adjusted. Another finding of the study was that anxiety and avoidance of attachment positively and significantly predict fear of negative evaluation, and fear of negative evaluation is a negative and significant predictor of social and academic adjustment. Therefore, it can be said that the fear of negative evaluation mediates the relation between attachment dimensions and social and academic adjustment. Unfortunately, no study was found to examine this model.Explaining this finding, it can be said that insecure attachment students make negative models of themselves and others and have low self-confidence. So, they are expected to experience a high level of fear of negative evaluation. They do not have a correct understanding of their abilities and highlight their slight weakness, and they likely think that because of their visual impairment, others judge them negatively and only pay attention to their shortcomings and limitations. For these

university students, it is a threatening situation where they may make mistakes or fail. Therefore, they have a negative attitude towards the educational environment and the goals set in this environment. They feel dissatisfied with their interpersonal relationships and have little motivation to learn and get help from classmates and teachers. Such people have poor coping skills and have difficulty coping with social and academic challenges. In general, the findings of this study indicate the mediating role of fear of negative evaluation in the relationship between the dimensions of attachment and social and academic adjustment, which can theoretically add to the existing literature in this field. However, it should be borne in mind that people with visual impairments as part of this community, If they enjoy a warm and intimate relationship in early childhood, by gaining secure attachment, they can overcome the fear of their possible negative evaluation and in the later stages of development, benefit from a more favorable psychosocial status and thus adapt to all aspects of their lives, Achieve successive successes. This study was performed on students with visual impairment, which reduces the possibility of generalizability of the results to other communities. Therefore, it is suggested that research be conducted on other students.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, attachment anxiety negatively and significantly predicts social and academic adjustment. In addition, fear of negative evaluation mediated the relationship between anxiety and avoidance of attachment to social and academic adjustment. Therefore, by holding workshops on early information and education (from birth to the visually impaired) to parents about the adverse effects of insecure attachment and ways to prevent and reduce these adverse effects, problems related to adjustment can be prevented.

In addition, by providing opportunities for assertiveness and exploration in family, social, and educational settings, the fear of negative evaluation can be reduced, and consequently, students' social and academic adjustment to visual impairment can be improved.

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