

THE INFLUENCE OF ATTACHMENT STYLES ON STUDENT'S SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

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Abstract

The main purpose of this research was to investigate the influence of attachment style on the self-directed learning (SDL) among secondary students in Malaysia. This quantitative survey research involved 407 form five students from the state of Sabah. This research used four types of Attachment Style developed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), and Self Regulation in Learning (Borkowski & Dukewich, 1996), as the main platform for the research framework. Data was analysed using SmartPLS 2.0. The main finding demonstrated significant influence of exogenous variable which is attachment styles on the endogenous variable which is self-directed learning (SDL). The SEM analysis using SmartPLS showed that Secure style was the major influence on the student's attachment style (factor loading=.883, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, attachment style contributed 15.6% towards student's self-directed learning. It is hoped this research will be able to contribute valuable input for the enhancement of the national educational system.

Keywords: attachment styles, self-directed learning, SEM

1. Background of Study

a) Attachment Style

Attachment based on Bowlby's theory (1977) conceptualizes "the propensity of human beings to make strong affectional bonds to particular others". At early stage, Bowlby hypothesized that an attachment system evolved to maintain proximity between infants and their caretakers under conditions of danger or threat. Furthermore, recent formulations view the attachment system as functioning continuously to provide children with a sense of "felt security" which facilitates exploration by the child (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Sroufe & Waters, 1977).

A basic principle of attachment theory is that attachment relationships continue to be important throughout the life span (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1982). Although evidence exists documenting the continuity of attachment-related behaviors, investigators have only recently examined the relationship between working models of attachment and social and emotional adaptation in adults. A major premise of attachment theory is that early attachment patterns influence individuals' development across the life span (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bretherton, 1985). Bartholomew (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) proposed a four-category structure of adult attachment. These four categories are now common in the attachment literature and are an extension of the three types for children. The two dichotomous (low and

high) dimensions of *avoidance* and *anxiety* form the four categories. The four categories or quadrants have analogous conceptualizations and names based on individuals' working models of self and others. Negative models of self are associated with anxiety, dependency, and preoccupation with relationships, and negative models of others reflect avoidance of close relationships. Individuals who are low in anxiety and low in avoidance fall into the secure quadrant (positive models of self and positive models of others). Those who are high in anxiety and low in avoidance form the *preoccupied* quadrant (negative models of self and positive models of others). Individuals low in anxiety and high in avoidance fall into the *dismissing* category (positive models of self and negative models of others). Those high in both avoidance and anxiety form the *fearful* quadrant (negative models of self and others).

b) Attachment, Learning Performance, and Self Directed Learning (SDL)

Security of attachment could predict academic performance or achievement. This effect occurs as early as toddlerhood for pre-academic skills. Insecure toddlers tend to have shorter attention spans and perform worse on cognitive tasks than secure toddlers (Bates et al., 1985; Moss and St-Laurent 2001). After they enter school, insecure children tend to have lower verbal ability, math ability, reading comprehension, and overall academic achievement, and exhibit less curiosity than securely attached children (Granot and Mayselless 2001; Pianta and Harbers 1996; Weinfield et al. 1999). For instance, a study by Kerns et al. (2000) found that attachment to mother and father predicted teacher ratings of school adaptation—like academic skills and emotional well-being—for third, fifth, and sixth graders. Insecure attachment in high school may also predict lower achievement during the first year in college. One study found that insecure students were more poorly prepared for exams, did not concentrate as well, feared failure, sought less help from teachers, and gave less priority to studies, as compared to secure students (Larose et al. 2005). Insecurely attached children are less likely to be socially competent throughout childhood than secure children. In addition, insecure children tend to have poor quality friendships. For example, in one study conducted by Grossmann and Grossmann (1991), insecure 10 year olds had no good friends, or they reported having many friends but were unable to name one. They also reported being ridiculed or excluded by peers. While being interviewed, they tended to ignore the interviewer or to be overly close, seeking physical contact.

In another cross-sectional studies indicated that secure children have more harmonious and intimate friendships, are more empathic toward peers, are more well-liked by peers, and are preferred playmates in preschool through first grade. They are described as more socially competent by preschool and high school teachers, as well as by peers in high school (Allen et al. 1998; Clark and Ladd 2000). Even in college, secure freshmen report feeling more validated and cared for (Grabill and Kerns 2000) and have a larger, high-quality social support network (Anders and Tucker 2000). Social competence is foundational to academic achievement because schooling is a social endeavor. Across the school years, children who are prosocial tend to have higher grades and test scores than less prosocial children (Miles and Stipek 2006; Wentzel 1993). In contrast, antisocial and rejected children tend to have lower grades and test scores, more reading and learning disabilities, more attention and thought problems, and greater risk of dropping out (Bub et al. 2007; Malecki and Elliot 2002). Antisocial children tend to spend less time on task in the classroom, exhibit poor academic skills, and complete less homework (Patterson et al. 1989). Antisocial children tend to have low achievement even when other risk factors such as low intelligence, single parent household, high absenteeism, unstimulating home environment, and low SES are statistically controlled (Masten et al. 2005; Prior et al. 1999). Thus, attachment may affect student's performance or achievement at least in part through social competence at school. Attachment also sparks their ability in self-directed learning (SDL) or collaborative learning with friends.

2. Research Question

Is there any influence of attachment styles towards student's self-directed learning (SDL)?

3. Hypothesis

H_0 : There is no significance influence of attachment styles towards student's self-directed learning (SDL).

4. Methodology

Sample: 407 Malaysian secondary students (average 17 years old) participated in the study, applying purposive and random sampling technique.

Instruments: Attachment Styles were measured using adapted instruments of Attachment Style Questionnaire (Feeney and Noller, 1990; Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991; Thorpe and Caltabiano, 2004). Self-Directed Learning (SDL) was measured using adapted instruments of SDL (Findley, 2009; Williamson, 2007; Fisher *et al.*, 2001). All instruments used 5 Likert Scale from Strongly Disagree – Strongly Agree.

Validity and reliability: Exploratory Factor Analysis showed that all items for both variables carried minimum factor loadings for each construct (>.40). In addition, Cronbach's alphas were also adequate for both variables (>.70).

Data Analysis: Applying Structural Equation Model (SEM) using SmartPLS software. Main advantage of SmartPLS compared to other SEM software is it could analyze reflective and formative type simultaneously.

5. Findings

Figure 1: Influence of Attachment Style on Self Directed Learning (SDL)

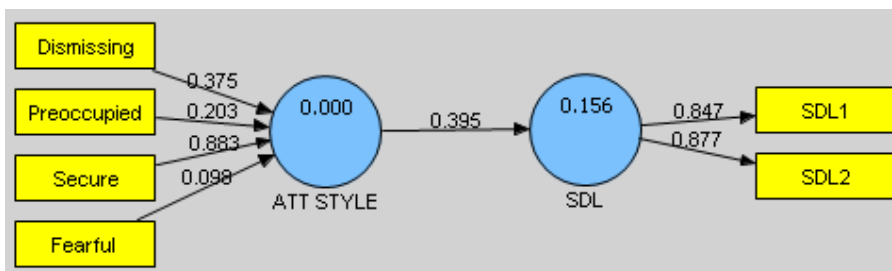


Figure 1 shows that Secure style was the major influence towards the attachment styles (factor loading=0.883). The second major influence was Dismissing style (factor loading=0.375) followed by Preoccupied style (factor loading=0.203). Thus, supported previous findings that Secure attachment was the most dominant style influencing student's attachment (Beshara, 1996; Borkowski and Dukewich, 1996; Foster *et al.*, 2007). The findings also indicated that attachment style contributed 15.6% towards student's directed learning ($\beta=0.395$, $\text{sig}=0.001$). Therefore H_0^1 which stated that 'There is no significance influence of attachment styles towards student's self-directed learning' is rejected. Meanwhile factor loading for SDL2 (0.877) which was collaborative learning was slightly higher than SDL1 (0.847) which was self learning. These higher loadings proved and validated the fact that self-directed learning (SDL) consists of those two sub-constructs which were strongly interrelated to each others.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study revealed concrete evidence on the importance of attachment styles toward self-directed learning (SDL). In addition, Secure attachment style is the most dominant style compared to other types followed by Dismissing style. Thus, indicated that students who possessed positive thought of themselves will have

better implementation of self-directed learning (SDL). In contrast, students with Preoccupied and Fearful type of attachments, who possessed negative thought about themselves, will have poor implementation. Several previous studies also reported that students with Secure attachments demonstrated higher academic achievement and able to have good communication with their friends (Miles and Stipek 2006; Wentzel 1993).

Furthermore, they tend to have better self-efficacy which will enhance their learning ability particularly in collaborative learning. Secure attachment students are easily to be bound together with peers and are not hesitate to share ideas and learning materials with others because instead of they possessed positive thought of themselves, they also possessed positive thought of others. Infact, they also have high level of confidence and are not afraid of committing mistakes especially in trying or exploring something new such as conducting experiment or project for academic purposes. Based on findings in this research, students who were able to implement an effective self-directed learning, were actually understand how to manage their self learning as well as managing their collaborative learning.

In conclusion, educators should pay more attention on this issue of student's attachment styles. In long run, attachment styles possessed by the students will shape their personality and permanent attitude (Bowlby, 1977; Ainsworth, 1989; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). School is the best platform to remould and reshape student's attitude because it is no doubt that attitude is the most important and critical aspect in life. Attitude and good personality must always be the priority, ahead of knowledge and skill. Besides that, educators are urged to instill or embed noble values especially during the teaching and learning process and not only focus on the content of the subject matter per se. That is why some prominent scholars like al-Ghazali gave emphasised on learning as the process of transformation rather than the process of transferring knowledge and skills. Secure attachment style, if possible should be possessed by all the students in order for them to be able to implement self-directed learning (SDL) both effective and efficiently, anywhere and anytime.

7. References

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