



Analyzing the Relationship between Moral Climate and Sense of Belonging to School and Academic Success: The Mediating Role of Iraqi Students' Academic Hardiness

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Abstract

Introduction: Most learning happens through formal education in schools, and effective school systems require a correct combination of educational resources and facilities, the moral orientation of the school atmosphere, and the characteristics of students. Therefore, the current research was conducted with the aim of analyzing the relationship between ethical climate and the sense of belonging to school and academic success with regard to the mediating role of students' academic hardiness.

Material and Methods: The present research method was descriptive-correlation. The statistical population consisted of 527 students of the fifth grade of literature in Karbala city (Iraq), 334 of them were selected using the Cochran formula by random cluster sampling. To collect data, four standard questionnaires were used: ethical climate, school belongingness skills, academic hardiness and academic success. Data analysis was done using Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis and path analysis in SPSS and Lisrel statistical software.

Results: The results showed that the moral components have a direct and positive relationship with the sense of belonging to the school. The results also showed that ethical climate has a positive and significant relationship with academic success. Also, the mediating role of academic hardiness has a positive and significant effect on the relationship between ethical climate and the sense of belonging to the school and the academic success of students.

Conclusion: According to the findings of this research, any improvement in the ethical climate of the school can be associated with the improvement of the sense of belonging in the school and academic progress.

Keywords: *Ethical climate, Sense of belonging to school, Academic hardiness, Academic success.*

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a key role in determining how a person lives as an adult. In other words, higher level of education means higher income, better health and longer life. Most learning takes place through formal education in schools, and effective school systems require a correct

combination of appropriate educational resources and facilities and ethical orientation [1].

The sense of belonging is one of the basic human needs, which is placed after physiological and security needs in Maslow's pyramid of needs. Since students spend a lot of time in school and

have a lot of opportunities to interact with teachers and students, the sense of belonging to school creates a suitable environment for their learning and health. The sense of belonging in educational environments is defined as the feeling of being accepted, valued and encouraged by others (teachers and peers) in the classroom environment, an important part of classroom life and activity. During the last decade, positive psychology has become one of the major trends in psychology and has quickly found a suitable place in this field. The speed of this trend in turning into a practical and evidence-based approach cannot be compared with the history of any other trend. This speed is particularly impressive in the field of methods and interventions that have been invented and used in positive psychology. The use of positive interventions in order to improve the quality of life, more satisfaction from life, passion, vitality and achieving happiness (mental feeling of comfort). The expansion of these applications has reached the point where in the last few years positive therapies have been introduced [2].

In addition to this issue, the attention of educational planners and practitioners is the academic success of students. Academic success is one of the important issues that have been considered in many studies. Achieving productivity and improving the quality of the educational system is one of the most effective factors in the development of countries. Success is the response or action by which a person reaches the goal or success is a definite step taken towards the goal. However, in education and educational situations, success refers to a degree of efficiency that a person reaches the appropriate satisfaction by using his abilities in his progress [3]. Academic success depends on various factors, including personal, social, academic, educational and psychological factors. Examining these factors and determining the contribution of each of them in academic progress leads to

determining strategies to identify the effective factors in academic success and failure, and this helps educational planners to improve the positive influencing factors and reduce the impact of negative factors [4]. Academic hardiness as a mediating variable can play a significant role in the relationship between the sense of belonging to school and other academic constructs, including academic success [5]. With the increasing growth of awareness in the psychological field and the emergence of new areas, the concept of hardiness as one of the personality traits has attracted the attention of psychological theorists, especially positive psychologists [6]. In this framework, hardiness is defined as a combination of attitudes and beliefs that motivates and dares a person to do hard and strategic work in the face of stressful and difficult situations and work stubbornly to adapt to those conditions to open a way to growth and excellence from among the events that can potentially have disastrous and unpleasant consequences and provide opportunities for growth [7]. Hardiness is a fundamental sense of control that allows the hardy person to draw up and access a list of strategies and fosters an optimistic view of stressors. The results of some studies show that people who have strong psychological toughness, compared to people with weak psychological hardiness, suffer physical or psychological damage in response to less stress [8]. Since the quantitative and qualitative growth of the education system has been expanding in recent years, the psychological variables and academic success of students are considered as sensitive and important issues for policy makers of education centers. Based on this, psychologists and education specialists have emphasized on the investigation and identification of the influencing factors on the mentioned structures. By providing conditions that allow students to cultivate all the talents and abilities that actually lead them to achieve success,

the education system becomes a center for cultivating life skills. According to the issues raised, this research was conducted with the aim of analyzing the relationship between moral climate and the sense of belonging to school and academic success with regard to the mediating role of students' academic hardiness.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present research method was applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-correlation in terms of data collection. The statistical population included 527 students of the fifth grade of literature in Karbala city (Iraq). The sampling method in the present study was a multi-stage cluster sampling method. In this way, first, among the multiple districts of Karbala province, 1 district was randomly selected. Then, 2 high schools for girls and 2 high schools for boys were randomly selected from the selected area. Finally, the selected schools were considered as sampling units and the students of those schools were evaluated. Cochran's formula was used to determine the statistical sample size. The estimation of Cochran's formula showed that 325 people should be selected as a sample, and in order to be surer and prevent the dropout factor, 350 questionnaires were distributed, and finally 334 complete questionnaires were returned and analyzed.

Four standard questionnaires were used to collect research data:

Victor and Cullen's Ethical Climate Questionnaire (1988): This questionnaire was created by Victor and Cullen in 1988. The purpose of making this questionnaire was to evaluate the ethical atmosphere of the organization. This questionnaire has 26 questions and 6 dimensions: care and attention, rules and regulations, criteria, instrumental, efficiency-oriented and independent. The validity of this questionnaire has been confirmed by experts, and the reliability of Victor and Cullen's moral

atmosphere questionnaire has been estimated with Cronbach's alpha of 0.81.

Questionnaire of sense of belonging to school by Brown and Evans (2002): Questionnaire of sense of belonging to school was designed and validated by Brown and Evans (2002). This questionnaire contains 16 closed-ended items based on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire measures the four dimensions of teacher-student interaction, participation in society, sense of justice and positive feeling towards the school. The questionnaire has been validated by Moniei (2013), in the aforementioned study, the reliability of the questionnaire was reported based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.85. In the current research, its content and form validity were confirmed by the opinion of experts and professors of educational and management sciences. The results of the factor analysis of the feeling of belonging to the school questionnaire obtained the desired four components, in which 63% percent of the variance of the questions was extracted. KMO=685% ($P<0.000$) showed that the sample size is sufficient and these factors exist in the statistical population. The results of factor loadings higher than 3% with orthogonal rotation obtained the desired four components. The reliability of the questionnaire was also calculated based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.92.

Academic hardiness questionnaire by Jiménez et al. (2014): The academic hardiness questionnaire was designed and validated by Moreno-Jiménez et al. (2014). This questionnaire contains 17 closed-ended items based on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire measures the three dimensions of control, challenge and commitment. The questionnaire has been validated by Akbari et al. (2014), in the aforementioned study, the reliability of the questionnaire was reported based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.86. In the current research, its content and form validity were confirmed by the opinion of experts and professors of

educational and management sciences. The results of the factor analysis of the academic tenacity questionnaire obtained three desired components in which 71% percent of the variance of the questions was extracted. KMO =896% ($P<0.000$) showed that the sample size is sufficient and these factors exist in the statistical population. The results of factor loadings higher than 3% with orthogonal rotation obtained the desired three components. The reliability of the questionnaire was also calculated based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.90.

Academic success questionnaire by Pham and Taylor (1999): This questionnaire is adapted from the research of Pham and Taylor (1999) in the field of academic success, which has been validated for the society of Iran. With 48 questions, the academic performance test can measure 5 areas related to academic success as follows: self-efficacy factor, emotional effects, planning, consequence control and motivation. A score has been assigned to each of these factors, which are 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. This questionnaire has been validated in the research of Ghermezi (2013). In the mentioned research, the reliability of the questionnaire was reported as 0.71. In the current research, its content and form validity were confirmed by the opinion of experts and professors of educational and management sciences. The results of the factor analysis of the

academic success questionnaire obtained the desired five components, in which 69% percent of the variance of the questions was extracted. KMO=783% ($P<0.000$) showed that the sample size is sufficient and these factors exist in the statistical population. The results of factor loadings higher than 3% with orthogonal rotation obtained the desired five components. The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.87.

Data analysis was done using Pearson correlation coefficient analysis and path analysis by SPSS and Lisrel.

RESULTS

In Table 1, descriptive indices of the variables including mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis are presented. Kline (2011) suggests that in causal modeling, the distribution of variables should be normal. He suggests that the absolute value of skewness and kurtosis of the variables should not be more than 3 and 10 respectively. According to table number 1, the absolute values of skewness and kurtosis of all variables are lower than the values proposed by Kline (2011). Therefore, the assumption of causal modeling, i.e. univariate normality, is maintained.

Table 1: Descriptive indices of research variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Ethical climate	3.31	0.61	-0.23	0.45
Belonging to school	3.20	0.55	-0.18	-0.07
Hardiness	3.23	0.69	-0.18	-0.04
Academic success	3.25	0.59	-0.25	0.63

Table 2 shows the correlation matrix of research variables. According to Table 2, the relationship between research variables is positive and

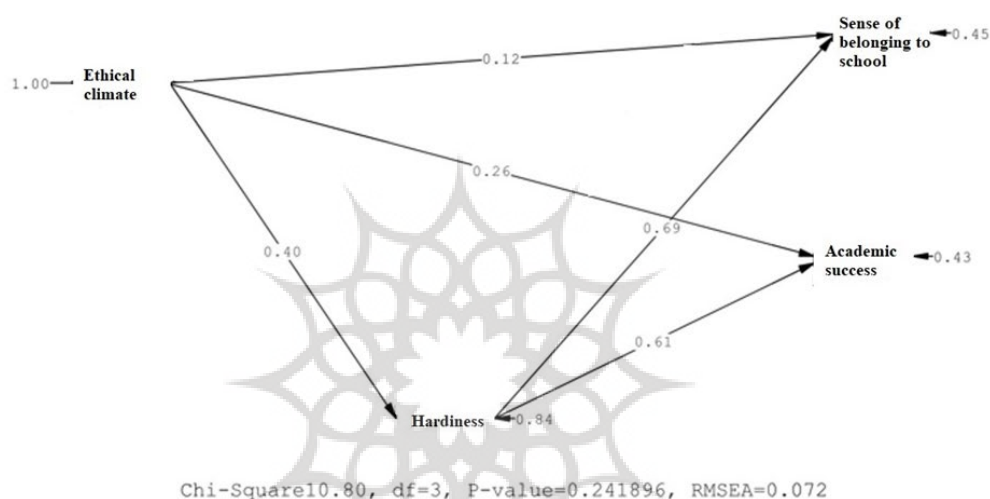
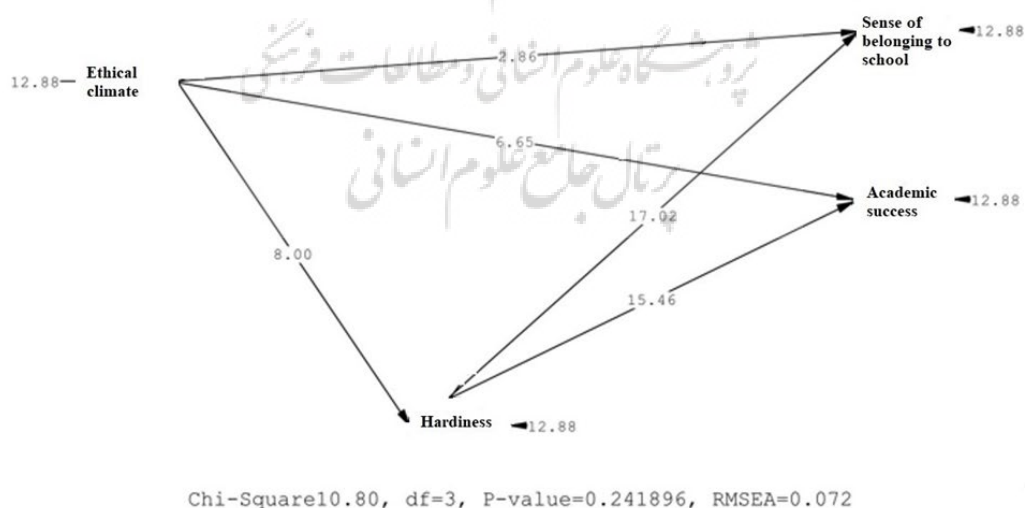
significant at the 0.01 level. Path analysis has been used to examine the relationships between variables.

Table 2: Correlation matrix of research variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
Ethical climate	1			
Belonging to school	0.40**	1		
Hardiness	0.46**	0.72**	1	
Academic success	0.50**	0.71**	0.79**	1

According to pictures 1 and 2, the moral atmosphere with a sense of belonging to the school is positive and significant at the level of 0.01. Ethical climate has a positive and significant relationship with academic success at the level of

0.01. The effect of moral atmosphere with sense of belonging to school and academic success with the mediating role of academic persistence is positive and significant at 0.01 level.

**Figure 1:** The tested model of the research in the standard mode**Figure 2:** The tested model of the research in the meaningful state

In Table 3, the values obtained in the present study and the acceptable limit of each of the fit indices are reported. According to this table, all the fit indices are at the optimal level and it can

be concluded that the tested model has a good fit with the collected data.

The summary of the results of the research paths tested in the path analysis is presented in Table 4.

Table 3: goodness of fit indices of the tested research model

Indicator	X ₂ /df	RMSEA	P
Obtained value	3.60	0.07	0.24
Acceptable limit	Near to zero	Less than 0.08	More than 0.05

Table 4: Paths tested in the structural equation model

Variables	Direct effects	Indirect effects	Total effects
On belonging to school			
Ethical climate	0.20**	0.26**	0.46**
Hardiness	0.65**	-	-
On academic success			
Ethical climate	0.26**	0.24**	0.50**
Hardiness	0.61	-	-
** p<0.01			

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the first hypothesis of the research showed that the relationship between the moral atmosphere and the feeling of belonging to the school is positive and significant. This result is consistent with the results of some researches in this field [9-12]. In line with the obtained results, it can be said that the school can be considered as the second home of the students. It can be safely said that the amount of time students spend in the school environment is second only to the family environment. A healthy family environment is a warm environment, an environment where children and teenagers enjoy the presence and relationship with its members (father, mother, siblings). The school environment, like a healthy family environment, should be an environment based on ethics, warm and full of love and affection. It means an environment where students have safety and well-being like a family environment. This reduces the student's desire to be absent from school, increases interest in studying, increases academic progress and increases mental health, and reduces the desire to join unhealthy groups, creates opportunities for

individual independence and acceptance among friends.

The analysis of the second hypothesis of the research showed that the relationship between moral climate and academic success is positive and significant. This result is consistent with the results of some researches in this field [13-15]. Based on this study, it can be said that the moral atmosphere of the school is the strongest protective and driving factor for students to go to school so that they can be successful in academic performance with effort and involvement in school learning processes.

The analysis of the third hypothesis of the research showed that the effect of moral atmosphere on the sense of belonging to the school with the mediating role of academic hardiness is positive and significant. This result is in line with the results of some researches in this field [16, 17]. In line with the obtained results, it can be said that the moral atmosphere of the school increases the feeling of belonging to the school. As a result, moral climate leads to academic hardiness. This effect increases the sense of belonging to the school and the desire to

study and attend school. In fact, the moral atmosphere of the school has been able to create a suitable platform for the development of academic hardiness and lead to its improvement among students.

The analysis of the fourth hypothesis of the research showed that the effect of moral climate on academic success with the mediating role of academic hardiness is positive and significant. This result is in line with the results of some researches in this field [18, 19]. In explaining the obtained results, it can be stated that academic hardiness is one of the important issues that facilitate the role of moral climate on the academic success of students. Academic hardiness as an important variable causes some personality aspects of students to come under the influence and encourage them to attend and work hard in school. In other words, the moral atmosphere only improves their attendance and quality of attendance in schools. In completing it, academic hardiness causes students to solve their problems in an appropriate way when facing academic challenges and problems and smooth the conditions for academic success. As a result, academic hardiness increases some of the motivations needed to improve academic performance among students and also expands the efforts of students to achieve academic success.

In line with the obtained results, the following suggestions are presented:

- It is suggested that teachers establish positive relationships with students through components such as respecting students, observing justice among them, dealing without discrimination and active listening, using teaching methods and interactive learning. This importance can provide a sense of belonging to the school.
- Teachers should try to make a connection between learning topics and the real life environment of students. That is, to show the

applications of a lesson, for example, social studies in the real-life environment, this important context provides the connection between life and the school environment in students.

- Administrators should try to provide the facilities available in the school equally to the students and not to provide these facilities only to the strong students.
- Teachers should use new teaching methods such as cooperative learning methods as well as new methods of measuring students' learning such as descriptive and qualitative methods.
- Teaching students how to strengthen social bonds among peers in order to improve the sense of belonging to school and other functions of social relations.
- It is suggested to provide the basis for students' academic success by teaching students to manage and control problems in order to solve academic challenges while improving students' academic hardiness.

CONCLUSION

Ethical school climate represents shared perceptions of school practices related to ethical decision-making and includes issues related to power, trust, and ethical interaction in the school. Therefore, ethical climate is activities or aspects of work in the environment that are related to ethical behavior. According to the findings of this research, any improvement in the moral atmosphere of the school can be associated with improving the sense of belonging in the school and academic progress.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical issues (such as plagiarism, conscious satisfaction, misleading, making and or forging data, publishing or sending to two places, redundancy and etc.) have been fully considered by the writers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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