

# Examining the Correlation Between School Belonging, Academic Support, and Emotional Self-Awareness in High School Students

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## Abstract

**Background:** School belonging is widely acknowledged as a pivotal factor in academic motivation and achievement of students. It not only influences educational performance but also significantly contributes to the development of their socio-emotional identity. Therefore, the present study aimed to examine the correlation between school belonging and academic support and emotional self-awareness among female high school students in Tehran, Iran.

**Methods:** This descriptive-correlational study examined the statistical population of female high school students aged 13 to 15 residing in Tehran, Iran in 2024. A sample of 361 participants was obtained through multi-stage cluster sampling. The data collection instruments comprised the Sense of School Belonging Questionnaire (SSBQ), Academic Support Scale (ASS), and Self-Reflection and Insight Scale (SRIS). Data were subsequently analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient and stepwise regression in SPSS version 27.

**Results:** This study found a significant positive correlation between academic support and students' sense of school belonging ( $r=0.34$ ,  $P<0.001$ ). Similarly, emotional self-awareness also demonstrated a significant positive correlation with school belonging ( $r=0.45$ ,  $P<0.001$ ).

**Conclusions:** The study confirmed significant correlations between academic support, emotional self-awareness, and school belonging; however, other factors are likely to influence belonging, warranting further research. Schools should foster academic support and emotional self-awareness to enhance belonging but consider other factors like peer relationships and inclusive environments for a holistic approach.

**Keywords:** Schools, Emotions, Emotional Intelligence, Students

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## 1. Introduction

Adolescents and teenagers constitute a significant portion of the global population, representing 24% worldwide and exceeding one-third in certain developing nations (1). This developmental period is crucial, as the behaviors established during these years profoundly influence future lifestyle choices, physical health, and mental well-being (2). Within this critical stage, school belonging emerges as a vital factor. It encompasses students' engagement with teachers, staff, and administrators, alongside their sense of pride in their school. This feeling of belonging is associated with rigorous academic standards, robust teacher support, effective student-adult communication, and a secure socio-physical environment (3). Given that adolescents

spend approximately one-quarter of their time in educational settings globally, schools exert considerable influence over their social and academic trajectories through the interpersonal relationships cultivated with both educators and peers (4). Kiuru and colleagues (5) found that supportive relationships with teachers and peers enhanced adolescents' academic achievement by increasing school well-being. These researchers also reported significant positive associations between school well-being and academic outcomes. Similarly, Zhang and co-workers (6) reported that teacher and peer relationships significantly reduced loneliness among middle school students through social support. In their study, boys' loneliness was influenced by both teacher and peer dynamics, whereas girls' loneliness was primarily influenced

by same-sex peer relationships.

Academic support, identified as a significant predictor by Jin (7), encompasses resources that facilitate academic engagement and has been shown to positively impact school belonging through emotional, instrumental, and cognitive dimensions (8). Academic support refers to any resource that directly or indirectly contributes to students' academic engagement and achievement (9). Its core dimensions include emotional support (e.g., providing encouragement), instrumental support (e.g., offering assignment assistance), and cognitive support (e.g., communicating the importance of academic success) (10). Supportive resources for academic endeavors are derived from three primary sources: parents, peers, and teachers, each contributing uniquely to students' academic support networks (11). These sources operate by transmitting academic values and expectations, offering guidance and feedback to aid in their achievement, cultivating a secure environment conducive to relevant activities, and providing emotional sustenance (12). Beyond its diverse sources, academic support is also characterized by multiple dimensions. Empirical evidence demonstrated that students who receive academic support exhibit enhanced academic performance and engagement (13, 14).

Emotional self-awareness has also been recognized as a potentially influential factor in fostering students' school belonging (15). Ghobadi Mehr and colleagues (16) found a significant positive correlation between emotional self-awareness and school belonging in secondary students. This suggests that a greater understanding of one's own emotions is associated with a stronger sense of connection to the school environment. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Korpershoek and colleagues (17) observed a positive correlation between emotional self-awareness, a facet of social-emotional competencies and school belonging. Their findings suggested that enhanced emotional self-awareness contributes to greater emotional engagement and a more pronounced sense of connectedness within the school environment. Conceptualized as a lifestyle approach integrating mindfulness practices into daily routines, emotional self-awareness facilitates individuals' comprehension of dual mental states and their conscious use as a unified cognitive framework. This process enables individuals to recognize not only the act of

thinking but also the capacity to observe their own thought processes (18). Drawing from Buddhist philosophical traditions, emotional self-awareness is defined as the conscious recognition of both internal and external experiences as they occur in the present moment (19). Broadly, it encompasses cognitive processes wherein individuals direct their attention to the experience of emotions and events occurring in their immediate internal or external environment. Emotional self-awareness involves an individual's focused, non-judgmental attention to, or acceptance of, present-moment experiences (20).

Empirical evidence indicated that students who report a stronger sense of school belonging tend to exhibit increased classroom engagement and more positive social behaviors. A meta-analysis (17) of 82 studies found that school belonging in secondary education significantly correlates with improved motivational, social-emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes, including higher classroom engagement. Additionally, Allen and co-workers (21) highlighted that strong student-teacher relationships foster school belonging, which in turn promotes positive social behaviors and greater participation in classroom activities, as evidenced by qualitative and quantitative data from multiple studies (17, 21). Nevertheless, a discernible decrease in this sense has been documented in recent years, particularly among students in the early stages of secondary education, potentially resulting in adverse educational and psychological outcomes. Therefore, identifying factors that strongly enhance this sense, particularly among female students who face complex developmental and social challenges, is of utmost importance. The findings of this study had the potential to guide targeted intervention strategies designed to cultivate students' sense of belonging, which could ultimately enhance the overall effectiveness of the educational system. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate the correlation among school belonging, academic support, and emotional self-awareness specifically within female high school students in Tehran, Iran.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Design

This descriptive-correlational study was conducted in Tehran, Iran during the 2024 academic year.

## 2.2. Selection and Description of Participants

The target population included all female high school students in Tehran, Iran aged 13 to 15 years, during the 2024 academic year. A multi-stage cluster sampling technique was employed. Initially, District 3 of Tehran, Iran was selected, followed by the random selection of six first-year secondary schools within that district. Subsequently, three classes were randomly chosen from each selected school. Sample size determination, guided by recommendations for structural equation modeling, involved allocating 5 to 15 participants per parameter (22). Given that this study encompassed 35 parameters, a sample size of 350 participants (35 parameters  $\times$  10 participants per parameter) was initially targeted. To mitigate potential participant attrition, 385 participants were recruited. Research questionnaires were administered to students in the selected classes. After excluding incomplete or invalid responses, a final sample of 361 participants was retained for data analysis. The inclusion criteria required participants to be female students aged 13 to 15 years, to be free from diagnosed psychological disorders, and to provide informed consent. Incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the study.

## 2.3. Data Collection and Measurements

### 2.3.1. The Sense of School Belonging Questionnaire (SSBQ)

The Sense of School Belonging Questionnaire, measures students' perceptions of belonging within their school environment. This 27-item instrument uses a four-point Likert-type scale, ranging from "completely agree" to "completely disagree," and includes six subscales: peer belonging, teacher support, fairness, safety, academic engagement, and wider community involvement. For this study, the overall scale score was used for analysis (23). The Persian version of the questionnaire has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with Makian and Kalantar (24) reporting a reliability coefficient of 0.88. They also found a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.79 and a Content Validity Ratio (CVR) of 0.81 for the Persian adaptation (24). In the present study, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83 was obtained, indicating robust internal consistency.

### 2.3.2. Academic Support Scale (ASS)

To assess perceived academic support from

parents, a modified version of the Academic Support Questionnaire was used. This instrument, originally developed with 24 items on a 4-point Likert scale (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 4 = "strongly agree"), measures academic support across four subscales: peers, teachers, fathers, and mothers, with six items per subscale (25). For the Persian version, Maleki and colleagues (26) reported strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85, alongside, robust validity was confirmed by a CVI of 0.97 and a CVR of 0.93 (26). In the present study, the internal consistency of the scale was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.79, which is considered acceptable.

### 2.3.3. Self-Reflection and Insight Scale (SRIS)

The Self-Reflection and Insight Scale, was used to measure emotional self-awareness. This 33-item instrument is divided into five subscales: recognition (6 items), identification (5 items), transformation (7 items), environment orientation (10 items), and problem-solving (5 items). The participants respond on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("never") to 5 ("very much"). The total score, ranging from 33 to 165, is calculated by summing all item scores (27). For this study, the total scale score was used in the analysis. Naeimi and co-workers (28) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.79 for the reliability of the Persian version of the Self-Reflection and Insight Scale. They also confirmed its validity for Persian-speaking populations with a CVI of 0.90 and a CVR of 0.82 (28). In the present study, the overall scale demonstrated strong internal consistency, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84.

## 2.4. Procedure

The research protocol began with obtaining ethical approval from the relevant institutional review board in Tehran, Iran. This step ensured adherence to research standards and safeguarded participant rights. Subsequently, researchers visited six randomly selected first-year secondary schools within District 3 of Tehran, Iran. Meetings were conducted with school administrators and educators to articulate the significance of the study, emphasizing its potential to augment students' school belonging and inform pedagogical interventions. Informed consent was obtained from both participating students and their parents or guardians. This process ensured a thorough

understanding of the objectives of the study, emphasized the voluntary nature of participation, and guaranteed the confidentiality of all responses. To mitigate potential participant attrition, 385 students were initially recruited. The School Belonging Questionnaire, Academic Support Questionnaire, and Emotional Self-Awareness Questionnaire were administered during scheduled class periods under the supervision of the research team. The study participants completed the questionnaires anonymously to preserve privacy. Students with diagnosed psychological disorders were excluded to ensure the integrity of the data. Following questionnaire collection, incomplete or invalid responses were removed, resulting in a final sample of 361 participants for data analysis.

### 2.5. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were calculated to summarize the data. At the inferential level, Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed to examine the relationships between variables, and stepwise regression was used to predict students' school belonging based on academic support and emotional self-awareness. Data analysis was done using SPSS version 27.

## 3. Results

The participants comprised 361 female high school students aged 13 to 15 years. Demographic

data revealed that 102 students (28.3%) were in the seventh grade, 118 students (32.7%) were in the eighth grade, and 141 students (39.0%) were in the ninth grade.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the variables under investigation. The mean score for school belonging was 62.99, with a standard deviation of 11.26. The distribution of school belonging scores exhibited a skewness of -0.82 and a kurtosis of 1.29. For academic support, the mean score was 53.19, with a standard deviation of 18.24, a skewness of 0.26, and a kurtosis of -1.02. Finally, emotional self-awareness demonstrated a mean score of 98.63, a standard deviation of 21.13, a skewness of -0.30, and a kurtosis of 0.67.

The findings indicated a positive and statistically significant correlation between academic support ( $r=0.34$ ) and school belonging, as well as between emotional self-awareness ( $r=0.45$ ) and school belonging ( $P=0.001$ ) (Table 2).

Academic support and emotional self-awareness were entered as predictor variables, with school belonging serving as the criterion variable. As presented in Table 3, Model 1 revealed that emotional self-awareness was the primary predictor of school belonging, accounting for 20% of the variance. This variable demonstrated a correlation coefficient of 0.45 with school belonging. In Model 2, academic support was added to the regression equation, increasing the combined

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics of the research variables

Variables	Means	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
School Belonging	62.99	11.26	-0.82	1.29
Academic Support	53.19	18.24	0.26	-1.03
Emotional Self-awareness	98.63	21.13	-0.30	0.67

SD: Standard Deviation

**Table 2:** Correlation coefficients of school belonging based on academic support and emotional self-awareness

Variables	School belonging	P
Academic support	0.34	0.001
Emotional self-awareness	0.45	0.001

**Table 3:** Summary of stepwise regression analysis

Model	Variables	R <sup>2</sup>	B	SE	Beta	t	P
1	Emotional Self-awareness	0.20	0.24	0.03	0.45	9.59	0.001
2	Emotional Self-awareness	0.24	0.20	0.03	0.38	7.67	0.001
	Academic Support		0.09	0.02	0.19	4.5	0.001

R<sup>2</sup>: Coefficient of Determination; B: Unstandardized Regression Coefficient; SE: Standard Error; Beta: Standardized Regression Coefficient; t: t-statistic



correlation coefficient to 0.49 and explaining 24% of the variance in school belonging ( $R^2=0.24$ ), a 4% increase in predictive power. However, this modest explained variance suggests that other factors may also influence school belonging and warrants.

To clarify the relative predictive power, beta coefficients were examined. Emotional self-awareness, with a beta coefficient of 0.45 in Model 1, exhibited the strongest individual predictive influence on school belonging. When both variables were included in Model 2, emotional self-awareness and academic support jointly demonstrated a significant predictive capacity for school belonging, with emotional self-awareness maintaining a standardized beta coefficient of 0.38, indicating its substantial predictive role even when accounting for academic support.

#### 4. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the correlation of school belonging with academic support and emotional self-awareness among female high school students in Tehran, Iran. In summary, the findings indicated a significant correlation among academic support, emotional self-awareness, and students' sense of school belonging. The positive correlation between academic support and school belonging aligned with prior research by Korpershoek and colleagues (17), which reported a meta-analytic correlation between academic support and school belonging, and Uslu Gülşen (29), who found that academic support enhances school belonging through teacher and peer interactions. While a significant correlation between academic support and school belonging has been observed, a study by Allen and co-workers (30) reported a weaker association, suggesting that the influence of academic support may be contingent on cultural context and the quality of support provided. Academic support, which includes teacher encouragement, parental involvement, and peer collaboration, likely cultivates school belonging by addressing students' psychological needs for connection, competence, and acceptance, consistent with self-determination theory (10). Furthermore, from an attachment theory perspective, secure relationships formed with teachers and peers may generalize into a broader attachment to the school institution itself, thereby strengthening students' sense of belonging and emotional security within the educational environment (15). The significant

role of academic support in this study may be attributed to the cultural emphasis on academic achievement in Tehran, Iran, where teacher and parental support are highly valued, often reinforced by societal expectations for academic success. However, this cultural specificity suggests potential variations across different demographics, such as rural versus urban settings or diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, which may influence the effectiveness of academic support. Additionally, the role of school policies, such as teacher training programs or peer mentoring initiatives, could further mediate this correlation, highlighting the need for future research to explore these contextual factors and their impact on school belonging across diverse populations (30).

Furthermore, peers, a critical component of students' support network, strengthen school belonging through positive social interactions, collaborative task completion, and fostering group acceptance. Research indicated that students with stable and supportive peer relationships exhibit a greater inclination to attend school and perceive it as a safe and welcoming environment (11). Conversely, experiences of peer rejection or lack of support can diminish school interest and foster alienation. Thus, the synergistic integration of teacher, parental, and peer support is expected to facilitate and enhance school belonging (29). From an attachment theory perspective, secure and reliable relationships with teachers and peers within the school environment facilitate the generalization of attachment to the school institution, thereby fostering a broader sense of belonging (15). Moreover, in line with social determination theory, the fulfillment of fundamental psychological needs, such as connection and acceptance, occurs when individuals perceive themselves as integral members of a significant social group (25). Academic support contributes to satisfying these needs, consequently augmenting school belonging.

The present study corroborated a significant positive correlation between emotional self-awareness and school belonging, a finding that aligned with the results reported by Ghobadi Mehr and colleagues (16) among Iranian secondary students. This suggested that the capacity to recognize and understand one's own emotions plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of connection and acceptance within the school environment. While Arslan and Allen (31) noted a slightly weaker

correlation, implying the potential influence of moderating variables such as emotional regulation abilities or the broader school context, our findings underscored the substantial link between emotional self-awareness and school belonging in our participant group.

From a theoretical perspective, emotional self-awareness, a central tenet of emotional intelligence, likely contributes to school belonging through several mechanisms. Students with higher levels of emotional self-awareness are better equipped to navigate the emotional demands of academic and social interactions. This includes identifying and managing negative emotions such as anxiety or frustration, which can impede engagement and social integration (16). As emphasized by social-emotional learning models (31), this foundational skill facilitates the development of effective interpersonal skills, enabling students to build stronger relationships with peers and educators. These supportive networks, in turn, reinforce a sense of belonging. The relatively strong association observed in this study may be partly attributable to the developmental stage of the adolescent participants, a period characterized by heightened sensitivity to emotional experiences and the development of self-regulation skills.

Empirical studies consistently demonstrated that individuals with elevated levels of emotional self-awareness exhibit a greater propensity for active participation in group activities, report fewer interpersonal conflicts, and display a more positive orientation toward the school environment (18, 32). Conversely, students with a diminished capacity for identifying and regulating their emotions are more susceptible to experiencing feelings of loneliness, social anxiety, and alienation from the educational setting (16). These findings underscored that emotional self-awareness functions not merely as an individual competency but as a pivotal socio-emotional determinant in the cultivation of school belonging. Grounded in these theoretical underpinnings and empirical evidence, the current hypothesis posits a positive and statistically significant association between emotional self-awareness and school belonging among middle school students (17). This association is likely mediated through various interconnected mechanisms, including the enhanced ability to navigate emotional challenges, the improvement of social relationship quality

fostered by better emotional understanding, and the augmentation of participation in school-related activities, which further strengthens connections to the school community (29). By understanding their own emotional states, students can engage more constructively with peers and teachers, build stronger social bonds, and feel a greater sense of integration within the school.

#### 4.1. Limitations

The present study had certain limitations that should be considered when generalizing the results. The study exclusively focused on female high school students aged 13 to 15 in Tehran, Iran, limiting the generalizability of the results to male students, other age groups, or different geographical and cultural settings, thus requiring further empirical investigation to assess broader applicability. Additionally, the study did not account for several potential confounding variables, such as familial socioeconomic status, which could influence access to academic resources, as well as school culture and educational policies, which may shape the quality of academic support and the school environment, potentially affecting the observed correlations. The implementation was further constrained by the reliance on self-reported measures, which may introduce response bias, such as social desirability effects, where participants might overreport their sense of school belonging or emotional self-awareness. The lack of longitudinal data also limited the ability to explore how these variables interact over time, particularly during critical developmental transitions. Finally, the sample was drawn from a single district in Tehran (District 3), Iran, which may not fully represent the diversity of educational experiences across the city, especially in schools with varying resources or student demographics, highlighting the need for future research to address these gaps and enhance the robustness of the findings.

#### 5. Conclusions

The present study demonstrated the significant positive correlations between academic support, emotional self-awareness, and school belonging in high school students. The study results underscored the importance of both academic support strategies and the development of emotional self-awareness in fostering a positive sense of belonging among students. While the model accounts for a

statistically significant proportion of the variance in school belonging, the explained variance of 23% suggested that other salient factors are also involved. Therefore, future research should investigate additional factors, such as social dynamics, school climate, and individual student characteristics, to inform more holistic interventions and support systems aimed at enhancing school belonging.

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### Authors' Contribution

Raheleh Abolghasemi Hedeshi: Substantial contributions to the conception and design of the work; the acquisition, analysis, and interpretation of data for the work; drafting the work. Zohre Mousazadeh: Substantial contributions to the conception and design of the work; the acquisition, analysis, and interpretation of data for the work; drafting the work and reviewing it critically for important intellectual content. Mohammad Azad Abdollahpour: Substantial contributions to the design of the work; drafting the work and reviewing it critically for important intellectual content. Molouk Khademi Ashkzari: Substantial contributions to the design of the work; drafting the work and reviewing it critically for important intellectual content. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work, ensuring questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

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### Ethical Approval

The Ethics Review Board of Islamic Azad University, North Tehran Branch, Tehran, Iran approved the present research with the code of IR.IAU.TNB.REC.1403.262. Also, written informed consent was obtained from the participants.

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