

A Literature Review of How Children Secure Attachment Predict Better Academic Performance

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Abstract. Parental attachment theory provides the fundamental theory for how children have been emotionally bonded with their primary caregiver. This attachment was found to be critical in children's cognitive and social-emotional progress. How proximity children's attachment with primary caregivers will directly influence their attachment style. The current research aimed to discover whether securely attached children predict higher academic performance among primary school children. Secure attachment refers to children who have developed a secure, comfortable and confident with the primary caregivers, which enables these children to securely explore the world. Securely attachment children were found to outperform insecure attachment children in mathematics, reading, and verbal skills, these abilities could be traced from the preschool period. The underlying reason why secure attached children outperform is due to their better attention skills, more independent in problem-solving during the study, and higher study motivation. Suggestions have also been widely discovered in the current study that sensitive parenting is the most critical in forming a secure attachment. By studying this, educational assistance could be applied to support children with insecure attachment and educate parents who want to improve their children's academic scores.

Keywords: Secure attachment; Academic performance; Sensitive parenting.

1. Introduction

Areas of attachment first conducted by Bowlby have recognized a variety of human bonding styles with each other, and children's attachment styles with parents are considered pertinent to every individual's development. Specifically, different types of attachment with parents have a profound influence on children's status emotionally, and physically and result in various future sequences. As conceptualized by Bowlby that he identifies four types of attachment style that humans learn in relation to others, which includes a secure attachment, anxious-insecure attachment, avoidant-insecure attachment, and disorganized-insecure attachment. It provides a fundamental structure to understand an individual's adaptation across life stages. Secure attachment, the research focus of this study, explains children who have cultivated a secure relationship with primary caregivers. In addition, their parenting style is characterised by warmth, synchrony, interactive and responsive.

For instance, some researchers have identified that attachment-avoidant of maternal caregiver is reported to have greater difficulties in emotional regulation one year later. However, the parental secure attachment could predict overall positive development outcomes and emotional competence due to a more supportive parental response. Furthermore, some studies have directly supported the idea that different attachment styles could cause different results in how children explore the world. Several developmental researchers also suggest that parent-children's relationships have an influence on children's academic outcomes and this parent-children is considered as an important predictor for students' future academic competence. Secure attachment is considered the most relevant to students' competence, independence in solving difficulties, and motivation. Therefore, the importance of parental attachment on children's development could be seen and it is beneficial to cultivate secure attachment with children. In this essay, it will focus on the influence of secure attachment on academic performance among primary school students since academic score is inevitable progress for every child's development. This paper is divided into three parts. The first part will investigate whether a parental secure attachment style would result in higher academic performance. And the second part is about discussing the underlying reasons why securely attached children outperformed the other

three attachment styles. And what is considered most important in cultivating secure attachment figures will be discussed till the end.

Past literature mainly focuses on selective groups, while this research provides a longitudinal study across different gender and ethnic groups. By studying this, substantial educational and psychotherapy programs could be attached to assist parents in how to increase their children's academic performance and cultivate secure attachment to children. In addition, this paper is also significant in recognizing the reasons how attachment theory will influence emotional and social development that further results in forming attachment style throughout life. Individuals will form a better understanding of their own emotional development process.

2. The Underlying Reason of Why Secure Attached Children Perform Better Academically

2.1 Does Attachment Theory Predict Future Development?

According to Hazan and Shaver's model of the future work on Bowlby's attachment theory as cited in, they introduce the idea that parental attachment provides a basement for individuals to relate with one another and how they are attached to a primary caregiver is likely to be continued in later life. Which indicate that if children have formed a secure attachment with their parent at an early age, how they form a relationship with others and how children explore the world is based on this fundamental attachment style. In other words, Primary caregivers are the first people a child attaches to after birth. From the very first needs of food and shelter to survive to the clothing and affection children need, children therefore are cultivating a bond based on their existing relations with their parents.

2.2 Secure Attachment Leads to Higher Academic Performance

Securely attached children tend to feel confident and safe to explore the world around them, have confidence in their abilities, and are more independent, while the insecure attached children tend to have the characteristics of stress, and emotionally experience abandonment and isolation. In addition, securely attached children are shown to be more interested and confident.

In a study done by Granot & Mayseless, suggested that the security of attachment has been found to be positively related to academic scores. In their study, 113 students were recruited from 4th grade and 5th grade, followed by a self-report of their attachment type and test aimed to evaluate students' academic performance. All data have been included in the dataset, and according to the questionnaire about which type of attachment students are, participants have been divided into groups, with each group indicating one attachment style. Results demonstrate that participants with parental secure attachment types outperform the other three groups. And they made an additional finding that children scored higher than the other three groups, and securely attached children were also found to have a better ability in school adjustment and school-related social status. Another study done by Moss et al. demonstrates that securely attached children have higher academic scores even two years after they have been examined as securely attached children. While this informs the audience that attachment style hardly changes, it is also significant in verifying the critical role of the importance of primary caregivers. Consistent with the greater academic performance among securely attached children, the secure group also exhibited better skills in mathematical ability, verbal skills and reading comprehension. In comparison, children with insecure attachment were found to have an overall lower academic score, poorly prepared for exams and less concentrated as well.

Furthermore, this higher level of academic ability could be predicted even during preschool and the effect of parental attachment on children could be seen as early as a toddler. There is a difference between a secure toddler and an insecure toddler, secure infants demonstrate a longer attention span and perform better on cognitive tasks than insecure toddlers. For example, secure infants tend to be more engaging while reading books with their mother and are more willing to stay on their mothers'

laps when reading. Which indicates that securely attached children are verified to develop a better habit in reading and attitudes.

2.3 Secure Attachment Increase Academic Performance – Attention

Attachment styles do not directly increase academic performance, but instead, they increase academic performance adversely through the prolong the length of children's attention. As mentioned by Stevens & Bavelier that selective attention refers to paying attention to a particular input, which suppresses irrelevant and distracting information simultaneously. This process could be explained by both external and internal progress. External processes could be understood as auditory and visual stimuli while internal processes explain internal thoughts. Both of the processes are considered as critical attributes to the length of attention and how concentrated individuals are. Greeff et al. provide evidence that it depicts a positive correlation between attention and academic performance. In other words, the more concentrated children attend, the higher academic performance could be predicted.

Besides, securely attached children with primary caregivers were found to score higher on attention levels. In a study done by Pallini et al. that 67 children were administered into their study, and their results demonstrate that secured attached children are less likely to have attention problems, while insecurely attached children more likely to be disturbed by irrelevant stimuli when finishing work. Similar outcomes have been uncovered by Main, and they made additional comments that secure attachment provides children the ability to alter their attention flexibly based on demand. Either focus on a longer period of circumstances or switch attention when it is needed. Therefore, children with secure attachment tend to pay more attention in class, and selectively focus on what is considered important and the process of attention switching is considerably faster than insecure attached groups. Thus, making the secure children score higher on school academic scores.

2.4 Secure Attachment Increase Academic Performance – Independent in Solving Difficulties

Another important reason for why securely attached children prefer academically is due to their supportive and sensitive caregiver connection, which further results in children's better ability of independence. Sensitive caregiver refers to the phenomenon which parents attend to children's signals, understand children's perspective and interpret their signals precisely. By doing so, parents will communicate with children on how they feel and what they need. These parental child-rearing details have been perceived as momentous during earlier children's development because parents are successful in recognising and meeting children's physical and psychological needs. Furthermore, this parental behaviour is regarded as encouraging, interesting and reassuring to children in dealing with difficult tasks, this provides children with the important signal that they could achieve what they need, have enough confidence in what they are doing and do not lack the courage to explore. Therefore, it is likely that when children are facing difficulties at school, secure children have more confidence and courage in dealing with the hardship themselves instead of avoiding the difficulties. Furthermore, these theories have been verified by several experiments. In a quantitative study done by Karyanto et al., investigating whether children with secure attachment figures are more independent and social interactions. After analysing the data collected from 137 children, they concluded that democratic parenting and secure parenting style have a positive correlation with children who are more independent and social interaction. Similar evidence has been revealed in Ali & Asrori that children's independence is true to be influenced by both internal and external factors, with one of the most important factors being parenting style.

Besides, children who are more independent tend to score higher academically. In a study done by Tinajero & Paramo, students of both genders who are more independent cognitively have found to have higher academic performance after they were being accessed by school curriculum. Thus, children with independent figures tend to be more independent and independent children were found to score higher academically. Independence is therefore considered as one of the predictors on why securely attached children outperform insecure children. This sensitive parenting style enables children to develop independence over dependence, which future attributes to academic performances.

2.5 Secure Attachment Increase Academic Performance – Motivation

As defined by educational psychologists, that motivation refers to enthusiasm in the study, which has been found to be positively related to academic performance, children's secure motivation has been suggested to be positively related to motivation as well. A study done by Wang argued that secure attachment tends to be more interesting in academics because they are less likely to internalise aggressiveness and sadness when it comes to studies, while evident children tend to internalised and externalised difficulties in order to express the need for secureness. Consequently, insecure attachment children are more tending to negatively influence their persistence and decrease their motivation toward studies, which further results in a lower score in academic performance. How secure attachment will positively influence academic outcomes has further been developed by several researchers. For instance, if children are more interested in doing one thing, then it is expected that the children will spend more time doing this, and tend to be more focused and engaging as well. The term motivation was further found to be positively related to secure attachment with the primary caregivers. According to cross-sectional and longitudinal studies based on elementary school children, the majority of participants who were involved in the study will initially be accessed by their intrinsic academic motivation, then followed by an academic performance test two year after the motivation test. After analysing the data they concluded that children's intrinsic academic performance positively related to academic scores even with two years latency of motivation variation. In this way, children who are considered more motivated in studies were also found to score higher academically later. In addition to academic performance, made additional suggestions that motivation will increase the level of IQ and decrease test-related stress, which could further influence academic performance. This result is compelling in showing how motivation could positively influence studies straightly and indirectly.

3. Forming Secure Attachment

The importance of parental attachment style could have already been widely discovered in the current paper, it influences not only children's academic performance but also their school abilities and social skills have been well developed. In addition, secure children have an overall better selective attention ability and stronger courage in dealing with difficulties during schooling, which enables them to attend more and independently deal with difficult tasks in their studies. The benefits of secure attachment on academic performance could be clearly depicted. However, in current societies, it is necessary for parents to balance their work and to raise a child. The question has been raised of how parents could succeed in secure parenting while working at the same time. However, research suggests that it is not the time parents spend with children that matters for the security of children, but rather the quality of parenting accompanying them. Sensitivity in parenting is the most critical in cultivating secure children. According to their research, participants include both mother and son. While mothers mostly return to full-time jobs within their children's first year of life, in order to minimize the variations included in their study, only mothers with a minimum 30 hours of work only be administered in their study. Mothers were first interviewed for two nights to make reference for the researchers on how they balance work and parenting. Then the mothers will be rated into five levels of the parenting scale, while the highest level refers to parents who provide a warm, easy and relaxing relationship with their son while the lowest level is regarded as a relationship which is predominated by anger and frustration. In addition, these ratings were being accessed by trained psychologists. Their results depict that when mothers demonstrate more emotions, the sons have a higher level of secure attachment. Therefore, their mother has created a warm and caring environment for their children so that the son is able to remain reassured in the absence of the mother. In this way, the children are considered securely attached to their mother. This research concluded that it is the quality of parenting and children spent together instead of how long the children are accompanied by the parents.

4. Limitation

Different research papers and regions assess children's academic performance differently. Therefore, the question of to what extent secure parental attachment predicts academic performance has been excluded. In other words, even if the children have the same extent of secure bonding with their parents across different studies, how children have assessed on their academic scores is not standard. Thus, only an approximate tendency of secure attachment to predict better academic performance could be revealed.

In addition to this, the extent of how securely children is attached to primary caregivers is distinctly based on various family and environmental conditions. For instance, a study by Ribera et al. revealed that not only do parents have a role in forming attachment types with their children, but domesticated pets also have a critical role in mediating children's positive psychological adjustment as well. In this way, pets as a compensation factor for the deficits of maternity support. Children apparently being identified as securely attached children might vary across family environments and social conditions. While some children are inclusively securely attached because of parents, while some securely attached children might be influenced by additional factors. As a consequence, the extent of whether it is the secure attachment with parents that result in a higher academic score or supplementary condition lack accuracy. It is necessary for further studies to take other social factors into account.

Despite the underlying reasons why secure attachment style with parental caregivers increases academic performance have been widely discussed in this paper, this research excludes children who have been raised by grandparents, which is titled as custodial grandchildren. According to Nadorff et al. that the number of custodial grandchildren is occupied 8% of the overall children population in the US, which is considered a substantial population. These children have been fostered by grandparents for several reasons, including desertion, parent divorce, and adolescent parents; whether it is the parent as primary caregivers or grandparents will significantly impact children's development, and this is likely to predict the different result of whether grandparental secure attachment style will result in the future academic score and how children explore the world. In addition, the underlying reason for this predictability is more intertwined. Therefore, future research should investigate whether custodial children's attachment style influences children's attachment differently compared with children who are raised by parents. Additionally, the current paper only focuses on children raised by biological parents, it is possible that there is an inconsistency for children who are raised by single heterosexual mothers or single further. Some evidence has revealed that fatherless families will influence children's relationship with their mother. Therefore, it is unclear whether children raised by single parents will have a further effect on the attachment type and their school performance. Further research should pay attention to families with different structures.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the current research examines how secure parental attachment influences children's academic outcomes in a longitudinal studies. Securely attached children have an overall higher academic performance and scholastic abilities. This ability could be traced during infancy and further developed in the future. In addition, the underlying reason why a securely attached parenting style could predict children has also been mentioned in three ways. Firstly, securely attached children have a better ability in focusing classroom content and are more engaging compared with the other three attachment styles. Secondly, due to the secure caregiver's sensitive parenting style, showing that this secure figure will increase a child's independence in exploring the world, including solving difficult academic questions. Lastly, a secure parenting style was also found to be positively related to children's intrinsic motivation, enabling them to engage in studies and score higher academically. Besides, how to cultivate a secure attachment style has also been mentioned in the current study that the quality of the time parents and children spend together matters for the attachment style instead of the total amount of time they are together, which is how sensitive the primary caregiver is in children rearing progress.

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