

# Development of a Structural Model of School Belonging Based on Academic Identity: The Mediating Role of Academic Engagement

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## R e v i e w e r s

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## 1. Round 1

### 1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

"There is a general consensus that schools are large social environments..."

While the general role of schools is described well, the inclusion of data or examples specific to the Iranian context or the region where the study was conducted would strengthen the argument for this research's relevance.

"One of the factors influencing students' academic life is the sense of belonging to school..."

This statement is critical, yet the linkage between academic identity and school belonging is not sufficiently established. Provide more detailed theoretical background to firmly connect these two constructs from prior studies.

"School Belongingness was developed by Barry et al. (2004) with 27 questions and six components..."

It's recommended to provide more detail on how culturally appropriate the translated scales were for the Iranian population. Discuss any validation process for using these scales in a non-Western context.

The Cronbach's alpha reliability for "positive feelings toward school" (0.48) is low. Justify whether this scale's reliability is sufficient for inclusion or whether modifications to the item structure should be considered.

"Developed by Vaz and Isakson (2008) with 40 items and four subscales..."

More clarity is needed on how "academic identity" was translated and contextualized for Iranian students. Discuss if any cultural adaptations or pilot tests were conducted to ensure the scale's relevance.

"Structural equation modeling was used for data analysis..."

Expand on the model fit indices (SRMR, d\_ULS) mentioned in the results. Explain why these particular indices were chosen and provide more comprehensive model diagnostics such as CFI, TLI, or RMSEA to offer a better evaluation of the model's fit.

"There are significant correlations between the model variables..."

The description of correlations is insufficiently detailed. Provide more interpretation on the strength and direction of these correlations, especially focusing on why certain identities, such as "delayed academic identity," show weaker or non-significant relationships with school belonging.

"Successful Identity → Academic Engagement → School Belonging (0.120,  $p < .001$ )"

The indirect effects are significant, but it would strengthen the discussion if you provided real-world examples or explanations of how these mediated relationships manifest in students' day-to-day academic lives.

"In explaining this finding it can be said that the characteristic of academic identity..."

This explanation lacks depth. Include references to previous research or theoretical models that explain the mechanisms by which academic identity directly impacts school belonging, particularly in non-Western educational settings.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

## 1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

"The period of schooling is a challenging phase for students..."

The introduction could benefit from more recent references that emphasize the evolving challenges faced by students in post-pandemic educational environments, especially concerning virtual or hybrid learning models.

The article lacks a clear hypothesis formulation. While the research question is implied, adding explicit hypotheses will help clarify the expectations and direction of the study.

"Participants were selected through multistage cluster random sampling..."

The sampling strategy is well-defined, but a justification for why 800 participants were chosen, aside from increasing validity, should be explained. Did the sample size meet a statistical power analysis, or was it based solely on Barclay et al.'s rule of thumb?

"However individuals with a confused academic identity avoid academic issues..."

It would be helpful to explore how external factors such as family support or societal pressures might exacerbate or mitigate the effects of confused academic identity on school belonging. More contextual information is needed here.

"Another finding showed a direct relationship between academic engagement and school belonging..."

The statement could be enriched by discussing different dimensions of engagement (e.g., emotional vs. cognitive) and how each uniquely contributes to school belonging, particularly in light of cultural and gender differences in the population studied.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

## 2. Revised

Editor's decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief's decision: Accepted.