

# A qualitative study of the academic performance and career goal orientation of male adolescents With signs of With signs of dependent personality

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## ABSTRACT

Academic performance and career purposefulness are Important factors in adolescent success, but signs of dependent personality can influence these processes. The aim of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences of adolescents with signs of dependent personality in relation to academic performance and purposefulness. This research was conducted using a qualitative approach and descriptive phenomenological method. The statistical population included male adolescents in Tehran during the 2022-2023 academic year. Using purposive sampling, seven participants were selected. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews (60 to 90 minutes) and analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding. To ensure the validity of the findings, participant review strategies and inter-coder agreement were employed.

In the area of academic performance, the core theme of “dependence as a barrier to academic performance and progress” was identified, which included five organizing themes (such as lack of autonomy in academic management and academic inefficiency due to emotional dependence) and 14 subthemes. In the area of career goal setting, the core theme of “ambiguity in career path due to dependence on support systems” was extracted, which included three organizing themes (such as dependence in macro-decision making and external barriers to goal setting) and six subthemes.

The findings showed that emotional dependency leads to reduced intrinsic motivation, increased reliance on others, and confusion in choosing a career path. Emotional dependency plays a central role in undermining academic performance and creating career goal ambiguity in adolescents. It is suggested that intervention programs be implemented in schools to strengthen autonomy, decision-making skills, and person-centered career counseling. Additionally, it is necessary to increase awareness among families and teachers about the impact of dependent personality traits on academic and career success.

## **Introduction**

Adolescence is a crucial stage in the formation of individual identity and future trajectory. During this period, adolescents face not only physical and hormonal changes but also psychological and social transitions as they cross the threshold from childhood to adulthood (Minotti et al., 2024). Educational environments, particularly schools, play a central role in their lives, as they spend most of their time learning, participating in group activities, and interacting with peers (Cheng et al., 2024). Formal education, beyond imparting basic knowledge, fosters essential skills such as problem-solving, time management, and critical thinking, which are vital for success in adult life (Naeim et al., 2021). However, this period is accompanied by numerous challenges: academic pressures to achieve high grades, familial and societal expectations to choose an appropriate career path, and internal struggles to discover interests and talents all shape the adolescent experience (Beyers et al., 2025).

Academic performance at this age, as an objective measure of educational progress, not only affects access to future opportunities but also shapes an individual's self-perception of their abilities, laying the foundation for self-efficacy and confidence (Bayat et al., 2023). Academic performance, which encompasses educational achievements such as grades, class participation, and problem-solving abilities, is influenced by a network of internal and external factors (Arifin et al., 2024). On one hand, personal motivation, mental health, and self-efficacy beliefs play a determining role (Mohzana et al., 2024); on the other, family support, the quality of the education system, and access to learning resources are equally important (Bayat et al., 2023). Success in this area enables adolescents to set career goals more confidently, as academic progress strengthens their sense of competence and ability to manage challenges (Chowdhury, 2024). Conversely, academic underachievement can create a vicious cycle: low grades diminish self-esteem, which in turn undermines motivation (Hajialiani et al., 2020), potentially leading adolescents to settle for less ambitious career paths. This dynamic illustrates that academic performance is not merely an educational indicator but also a cornerstone for future professional decisions (Zarazaga-Peláez et al., 2024).

Career purposefulness—defined as having a clear understanding of career preferences and actively working toward them—begins in adolescence and gradually takes shape (Otu, 2024). This complex process is influenced by the interplay of internal factors (such as personal interests, values, and self-awareness) and external factors (such as family expectations, social norms, and economic conditions). Adolescents with stronger academic performance tend to set more realistic and flexible career goals, as they have access to broader information, advanced analytical skills, and greater self-confidence (Wohlgezogen et al., 2024). For example, a student excelling in mathematics is more likely to pursue engineering or computer science with certainty. Conversely, academic struggles may limit choices; an adolescent with weak language skills might avoid international careers (Panah et al., 2025), even if interested in them. This underscores the importance of academic performance in expanding career options and reducing constraints (Hajialiani et al., 2020).

Signs of career purposefulness in adolescents include three Important components: (1) awareness of personal preferences and skills, (2) the ability to design practical plans to achieve goals, and (3) persistence in overcoming obstacles. Goal-oriented adolescents typically have a clear future orientation, actively seek career information, and can articulate the connection between their studies and future careers (Panah et al., 2025). However, personality traits strongly influence this process. For instance, individuals with high self-efficacy tend to set career goals based on personal interests and resist external pressures (Onay et al., 2025). In contrast, adolescents with dependent personality traits—due to fear of judgment, need for approval, or avoidance of responsibility—may hesitate in setting goals or choose paths aligned with others' expectations rather than their own aspirations. These

differences highlight how personality profoundly impacts not only career choice but also the decision-making process (Monteiro et al., 2025).

Dependent personality traits, characterized by an excessive need for emotional and practical support from others, can adversely affect academic performance and career goals. In educational settings, dependent adolescents may struggle to complete assignments independently (Monteiro et al., 2024), constantly seek guidance from teachers or peers, or avoid group activities due to fear of failure. These behaviors not only hinder learning but also impede the development of problem-solving and critical thinking skills essential for career success. In career planning, such adolescents often choose the least risky or most socially approved paths (Gilbert et al., 2025), even if these conflict with their interests or talents. For example, they may yield to parental pressure in selecting college majors, driven by fear of losing support or facing conflict (Cui et al., 2024).

In adolescents with dependent personalities, academic performance often becomes a means to gain attention or approval from others rather than a reflection of genuine interest in learning. These students may study for long hours, not out of passion for knowledge, but to please their parents or teachers (Prusiński, 2024). Such an approach not only weakens intrinsic motivation but also leads to academic anxiety and psychological burnout. On the other hand, career goals in this group usually lack originality; their choices may change frequently, as dependence on the opinions of others causes them to alter their course with each new suggestion (Mitra et al., 2024). This fluctuation not only disrupts long-term planning but also exacerbates feelings of confusion and aimlessness. In addition, weakness in independent decision-making skills limits opportunities for experimentation and trial and error, even though this process is essential for discovering a professional identity (Somma et al., 2024).

The relationship between academic performance, career goal orientation, and signs of dependent personality is a complex dynamic in which each variable directly and indirectly influences the others. Poor academic performance, resulting from emotional dependence, can reduce self-efficacy and lead adolescents to choose unrealistic career goals. Conversely, vague or unrealistic career goal orientation weakens motivation for academic effort and creates cycles of apathy and increased reliance on others (Cui et al., 2024). Signs of dependent personality also affect quality of life by limiting intellectual independence and hindering the career discovery process. For example, an adolescent who cannot make decisions about their academic career without parental approval may choose a career misaligned with labor market needs but acceptable to the family. These interactions suggest that educational interventions should focus on strengthening self-awareness, independence, and decision-making skills beyond improving academic performance (Gilbert et al., 2025). In this regard, Panah et al. conducted a study in Iran in 2025 on female students and concluded that the academic performance of adolescents with dependency syndrome and their career goals included two main themes, respectively: "The academic performance of adolescents with dependency syndrome indicates a lack of enthusiasm and academic affiliation, as well as inefficiency in academic functions," and "Adolescents with symptoms of dependency did not show an appropriate goal orientation index due to dependency in choosing their future career and educational path."

The importance of this research lies in filling existing knowledge gaps in the field of educational psychology and career counseling. Previous studies have mainly emphasized the linear relationship between academic performance and career success, while the role of personality types—especially signs of dependent personality traits—has received less attention. In addition, most existing research has used quantitative methods and questionnaires, which, although useful, cannot fully reveal the depth of adolescents' mental experiences, internal conflicts, and decision-making processes. This study, with a qualitative approach, allows us to uncover the hidden layers of these dynamics—for

example, how does the fear of family rejection force a dependent teenager to ignore their true interests? Or how does the pressure to maintain high academic performance come at the cost of mental health? Answers to such questions will not only help develop person-centered career counseling programs but also encourage educational policymakers to reconsider how performance assessment and support are provided to vulnerable adolescents. Finally, this research provides a basis for future studies to examine the long-term impact of signs of dependent personality on job satisfaction, career stability, and mental health in adulthood. It can also serve as a comparative source for differences in the aforementioned cases with research by Panah et al. (2025) and investigate whether there are gender differences in the reported cases.

Considering the above, the goal of this qualitative research is to answer two questions:

Question 1) What is the academic performance of adolescents aged 13 to 18 with signs of dependency from their perspective?

Question 2) What is the career goal setting of adolescents aged 13 to 18 with signs of dependency from their perspective?

## **Method**

This research was designed and conducted using a qualitative methodology based on a descriptive phenomenological approach. The main aim of this study is to discover and explain how academic performance and career purposefulness manifest among adolescents with signs of dependent personality. To obtain reliable and in-depth data, purposeful and accessible sampling was employed. Relying on the participants' phenomenological perspectives and their life experiences, a suitable platform was provided for collecting primary information related to the research topic. In this regard, observation and semi-structured in-depth interview tools were used to comprehensively and accurately examine the subjects' perceptions and experiences. The phenomenological approach allowed for careful examination of the participants' mental experiences and revealed hidden dimensions of the research subject. Choosing a qualitative method and focusing on individual experiences enabled the researcher to emphasize the depth and richness of the data rather than its quantity and to provide a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon under study.

Given the nature of qualitative research, in which the population and the research sample are mutually exclusive, the sampling process was carried out purposefully with access to participants in selected schools. The statistical population of this study consisted of male adolescents aged 13 to 18 living in Tehran who exhibited signs of dependency and were enrolled in the 2022–2023 academic year. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven students, each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. Given the repeatability of the participants' responses and the attainment of theoretical saturation, the data collection process was completed. The interview data were recorded in writing and, after coding, were analyzed and interpreted. The analytical methods used in this study included open, axial, and selective coding, which helped the researcher identify meaningful patterns in the data. To ensure the validity of the findings, various strategies—such as participant review and inter-coder agreement—were employed to confirm the accuracy and reliability of the results.

## **Findings**

In this study, 7 people participated who voluntarily entered this study. We tried to conduct the interviews with these people in the best possible way and with minimal interference from the researcher. Demographic information of the participants is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 : Demographic information Participants**

R ow	Partici pant name	A ge	Base	String	Num ber of families	Father's education	Father's job	Mother' s education	Mother' s job
1	Code A	16	Tenth	Art	4	PhD	Univers ity professor	Master' s degree	Transla tor
2	Code B	18	twelft h	Technic al	3	Cycle	Taxi driver	Elemen tary	Seller
3	C - code	17	Eleve nth	Sports	6	Bachelo r's degree	Sports coach	Diplom a	Hairdre sser
4	Code D	15	Ninth	-	5	Postgrad uate diploma	Technic ian	Cycle	Babysit ter
5	E- code	17	twelft h	Mathem atics	4	Diploma	Electrici an	Master' s degree	Author
6	F - code	14	Eight h	-	3	Illiterate	Farmer	Illiterat e	Daily wage worker
7	G - code	16	Eleve nth	Human	5	Master's degree	Progra mmer	PhD	Resear cher

Based on the research findings, the extracted themes in the two tables presented indicate the major challenges students face in two areas: academic performance and career goal orientation. In Table 2, the core theme of “emotional dependency as a barrier to academic performance and progress” was identified, which included three organizing themes: lack of autonomy in academic management (with 4 subthemes and a total frequency of 26), reduced commitment to educational interactions (with 2 subthemes and a total frequency of 12), and helplessness resulting from unsuccessful experiences (with 3 subthemes and a total frequency of 14). Additionally, lack of goal-oriented learning (with 3 subthemes and a total frequency of 16) and academic inefficiency due to emotional dependence (with 2 subthemes and a total frequency of 17) were identified as other organizing themes. In total, this table includes 5 organizing themes and 14 subthemes, indicating the profound impact of emotional dependence on academic performance.

In Table 3, the core theme of “uncertainty in career path due to dependence on support systems” was presented, which includes two organizing themes: dependence in macro-decision making (with 3 subthemes and a total frequency of 17) and confusion due to fear of the future (with 2 subthemes and a total frequency of 7). Additionally, external barriers to goal setting (with 1 subtheme and a frequency of 9) was identified as the third organizing theme. This table has a total of 3 organizing themes and 6 subthemes, indicating the role of external factors and environmental constraints in shaping career ambiguities.

The findings suggest that dependence on the support system (family and society) negatively impacts not only educational decisions but also career orientations.

**Table 2: Factors related to the academic performance of adolescents with addiction symptoms**

The essence of the	Organizing content	Under the Ramadan	A bund ance
Depende ncy as A barrier	Lack of autonomy in educational management	Doing homework under external pressure	12
		Lack of long - term planning	5
		Relying heavily on the guidance of others	6

to academic performance and progress	Reduced commitment to educational interactions	Avoiding personal responsibility	3
		Fear of judgment in group activities	8
		Minimal participation in projects	4
	Helplessness resulting from unsuccessful experiences	Negative self - concept regarding abilities	7
		Feeling helpless in facing challenges	5
		Disappointment over improving the educational situation	2
	Lack of goal - oriented orientation in learning	First of all , non - redirecting activities	9
		Regardless of positive feedback	4
		procrastination in completing tasks	3
	Academic inefficiency due to emotional dependency	Concentration disorder caused by relationship conflicts	10
		Adjusting goals based on the wishes of others	7

In Table 2, the most important themes in terms of frequency include concentration disorder due to relationship conflicts (10 items) and prioritizing non-academic activities (9 items), which indicate a significant impact of emotional dependence and lack of goal-oriented orientation on academic performance. In contrast, despair of improving academic status (2 items) and avoidance of accepting personal responsibility (3 items) have the lowest frequency, which probably reflects adolescents' lesser willingness to explicitly express these challenges. Other cases, such as doing homework under external pressure (12 cases) and adjusting goals based on the demands of others (7 cases), also indicate the destructive role of dependency in reducing autonomy and academic motivation. Overall, the data show that excessive dependence on external factors severely negatively affects academic performance.

**Table 3: Themes related to the career goals of adolescents with signs of addiction**

The essence of the	Organizing content	Under the Ramadan	Abundance
Ambiguity in career purpose due to dependence on the support system	Dependency in macro decision making -	Choosing a major under the influence of family	8
		Fear of making goals independent	6
		Aligning goals with social expectations	3
	Confusion in fear of the future	Lack of a clear vision of future jobs	5
		Inability to prioritize interests	4
		Pessimism about the possibility of employment in the field of interest	2
	Off - target inhibitors	Financial constraints as a major obstacle	9

In Table 3, the most important of the following themes in terms of frequency include financial constraints as the main obstacle (9 items) and family-influenced major choice (8 items), which indicates that external factors such as family pressure and economic problems play an important role in adolescents' ambiguity of career goals. In contrast, pessimism about the possibility of employment

in the field of interest (2 items) and the alignment of goals with social expectations (3 items) have the lowest frequency, which may indicate adolescents' relative lack of attention to these issues or their lack of explicit expression. Other themes, such as fear of goal independence (6 items) and lack of a clear vision of future careers (5 items), also indicate that dependence on a support system weakens the ability to plan an independent career. In general, these findings indicate that dependence on external factors poses serious challenges to adolescents' career decision-making.

### **Discussion and Interpretation**

In this study, two core themes were identified and analyzed below. The findings from the analysis and data related to these topics are discussed.

**Question 1: What is the academic performance of dependent male adolescents from their perspective?**

**Analysis of the results revealed a core theme titled Dependency as an Obstacle to Academic Performance and Progress, along with five main themes and fourteen sub-themes. The findings from data analysis related to this topic are discussed below.**

#### **1. Lack of Performance and Autonomy in Educational Management**

Scientific studies indicate that low levels of academic self-efficacy in adolescents stem primarily from their limiting beliefs about their cognitive and metacognitive competencies. This phenomenon is not confined to educational environments, families, or external settings but operates as a multidimensional challenge influenced by the complex interplay of intrapersonal and extrinsic factors. Empirical studies (Thomas et al., 2021) support that poor academic performance is often significantly correlated with extrinsic motivational styles, cognitive dependence on others, and a lack of self-regulatory strategies.

From a developmental psychology perspective, adolescents exhibiting dependent behavioral patterns typically face significant challenges in independent decision-making, effective time management, and problem-solving. These functional deficits often lead to maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as self-destructive behaviors, avoidance of academic challenges, and reduced psychological resilience. The lack of metacognitive and self-regulatory skills severely limits their ability to meet the demands of complex learning, perpetuating a cycle of academic failure. Such conditions ultimately hinder the realization of their potential.

Research by Panah et al. (2025) further confirms this issue, showing no significant difference compared to previous studies by Panah. Only minor changes in sub-topic titles were observed, while the main content and overall structure remained unchanged. The findings also highlight a lack of difference between the two sexes.

#### **2. Reduced Commitment to Learning Interactions**

Research suggests that academic motivation is largely shaped by the dynamic interaction between individual characteristics and environmental contexts. A meta-analytic study by Mamadou (2022) revealed that personality components—particularly a sense of agency and belief in self-determination—play a decisive role in predicting academic success. This study underscores the importance of psychological traits such as achievement motivation and self-efficacy during adolescence, which serve as motivational mechanisms facilitating the attainment of educational goals.

The findings indicate that a lack of self-referential beliefs about cognitive abilities often leads to diminished academic performance. Adolescents with dependent learning styles typically face limitations in maximizing their learning potential. Such individuals require targeted interventions focusing on promoting self-regulation, increasing academic commitment, and strengthening

compensatory strategies to reduce performance gaps with their peers. These findings emphasize the need for educational programs that enhance individual agency and metacognitive skills.

A study by Panah et al. (2025) also supports this issue, with results strikingly similar to previous research by Panah. Minor changes in subheadings were noted, but the main content and overall structure remained consistent, reinforcing the lack of differences between the sexes.

### **3. Helplessness Resulting from Unsuccessful Experiences**

Feelings of helplessness and passivity among the target group have been a focal point for researchers, suggesting that personal development programs (encompassing psychological and educational dimensions) could significantly improve their situation. However, adolescents in educational settings lacking essential infrastructure in science and technology lag in growth and development. Despite possessing cognitive and skill-based potential, these individuals exhibit declining academic performance and reduced intrinsic motivation due to unreliable behavioral patterns.

Research by Sanaei et al. (2019) confirms that individual differences in facing educational challenges lead to varied outcomes. The findings highlight the need for participatory educational models that encourage students to develop self-regulated strategies rather than relying solely on teacher guidance. Such an approach not only strengthens problem-solving abilities but also fosters a positive long-term attitude toward learning.

Targeted interventions providing practical solutions could gradually reduce dependency patterns and enhance self-efficacy in this group. Notably, research by Panah et al. (2025) confirms this issue, though no significant differences from Panah's earlier study were observed. Minor changes in sub-topic titles were noted, but the main content and overall structure remained similar, continuing to emphasize the absence of differences between the sexes.

### **4. Lack of Goal-Oriented Orientation in Learning**

Intrinsic motivation and active cognitive engagement are essential prerequisites for deep and sustainable learning. Multidimensional environmental factors—including family emotional relationships, peer support networks, teacher interaction styles, and sociocultural contexts—significantly influence academic enthusiasm through self-regulatory mechanisms and intrapersonal evaluation processes.

Research by Palos et al. (2019) and Panah (2025), framed within self-determination theory, suggests that educational performance deficiencies stem primarily from a lack of intrinsic motivation and weak cognitive self-efficacy. Psychological constructs such as academic procrastination and self-regulation deficits not only reduce motivation but also systematically impair learning efficiency by creating dysfunctional cognitive-emotional cycles.

Insecure attachment patterns and unhealthy emotional dependencies further diminish information processing efficiency and academic performance by activating maladaptive defense mechanisms and intensifying negative emotions. These findings underscore the need for multi-level interventions (individual, interpersonal, and environmental) that strengthen intrinsic motivation while improving underlying conditions.

### **5. Educational Inefficiency Due to Emotional Dependency**

Complex family interactions profoundly impact students' mental and physical health, subsequently affecting academic performance. Research indicates that high stress from these relationships can lead to adverse cognitive and emotional outcomes. Conflicts between individual needs and collective expectations create significant challenges, often resulting in reduced academic performance.

Brandt et al. (2020) found that personality factors such as altruism and intelligence correlate with



academic achievement, with personality traits playing a more defining role than other variables. Attachment styles also differentially affect children's social adjustment and academic success. Educational interventions focusing on self-regulation and independence yield more favorable outcomes than exclusionary methods, improving both academic performance and mental health.

Panah et al. (2025) confirmed this issue, with results showing no significant difference from Panah's earlier study. Minor changes in sub-topic titles were observed, but the main content and overall structure remained consistent, reinforcing the lack of differences between genders.

## **Question 2: What are the career goals of dependent male adolescents from their perspective?**

**The interview data revealed one core theme, three main themes, and seven sub-themes.**

### **1. Dependency in Decision-Making**

Research shows that individuals lacking autonomy tend to delegate career choices to others, avoiding responsibility for decisions, which can lead to reduced job performance and goal attainment. These individuals often prioritize others' needs over personal preferences, increasing the likelihood of career failure.

Conversely, research emphasizes that independent decision-making is crucial for talent development, a skill that should be nurtured from childhood in family and educational settings. Kermani et al. (2021) found that factors such as individual independence, economic considerations, social support, guidance, job security, and personal motivations critically influence career path selection. Strengthening critical thinking and independent decision-making skills significantly impacts future success.

Dependent individuals often struggle to assess their interests and talents, neglecting their potential. Improving knowledge, shifting attitudes, and enabling free choice in various contexts are fundamental for personal growth. Such individuals can achieve both educational progress and lasting career success. These findings align with Panah et al.'s (2025) research.

### **2. Confusion and Fear of the Future**

A Important challenge for dependent adolescents is insufficient knowledge of suitable career paths and an inability to align choices with personal abilities and interests, leading to unsuitable employment and reduced job satisfaction.

Choi et al. (2022) found that factors such as hope for future work, perceived educational usefulness, and advancement motivation critically influence educational and career success. Structured counseling programs in schools—focusing on talent identification, long-term goal formulation, and individual priorities—are essential. Exposure to challenging situations from childhood can enhance decision-making and problem-solving skills. Systematic information gathering, data analysis, and preference-based prioritization reduce ambiguity and guide informed choices, fostering lasting success.

Panah et al. (2025) confirmed this issue, with results showing no significant difference from Panah's earlier study. Minor changes in sub-topic titles were noted, but the main content and overall structure remained similar, continuing to emphasize the lack of differences between genders.

### **3. Off-Target Inhibitors**

Financial challenges are a major obstacle to educational goals. Students with emotional dependency often lack adequate knowledge and structured plans for social participation and academic progress, reflecting a prescriptive approach in educational policy. Effective management can mitigate these challenges and optimize the next generation's potential.

Ghorbani et al. (2018) found that attachment styles affect children's educational success and social adaptability, with secure parent-child relationships improving academic performance and motivation. Self-esteem and financial management ability also correlate significantly at individual and family

levels. A strong self-concept and financial competence enhance goal focus, while unfavorable social interactions impair professional performance.

Panah et al. (2025) confirmed this issue, with results showing no significant difference from prior research. Minor changes in subheadings were observed, but the main content and overall structure remained similar, reinforcing the lack of differences between sexes.

### **Limitations**

This study faced significant limitations affecting implementation and results:

Negative perceptions of dependent personality traits among individuals and families, coupled with schools' low awareness of this disorder and its concealment among adolescents, hindered sample selection.

Limited cooperation from participants due to academic commitments and fear of revealing performance further challenged data collection.

### **Recommendations**

The following policy and implementation solutions are proposed for stakeholders (educators, parents, researchers):

**Educational Programs:** Schools should design structured programs fostering self-awareness of individual abilities and teamwork through active participation in multidimensional projects.

**Family Education:** Targeted interventions to improve mental health literacy among families regarding dependency manifestations.

**Workshops:** Educational sessions for adolescents and parents on the long-term cognitive and vocational consequences of dependency.

**Inclusive Decision-Making:** Integrating dependent students into school decision-making as a rehabilitation strategy.

### **Research Recommendations:**

Investigate intercultural barriers to talent development.

Analyze the functionality of existing educational laws.

Evaluate digital technologies' role in empowering dependent adolescents.

Examine links between self-esteem, creativity, and educational participation.

These studies should adopt interdisciplinary approaches and integrated methodologies.

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