
The Mediating Effects of Self-Differentiation on the Relationship between Parenting Attitudes and School Adaptation Perceived by Middle School Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the mediating effects of self-differentiation on the relationship between parenting attitudes and school adaptation as perceived by middle school students. The research participants were 215 middle school students located in Gyeonggi-Do, Republic of Korea. The final data were analyzed following the procedures established by Baron & Kenny (1986). The findings of the study are as follows: First, self-differentiation partially mediated the relationship between parenting attitudes and school adaptation. Second, many of the sub-factors of self-differentiation—cognitive emotion function, family projection, emotional cutoff, and family regression—had a partial mediation effect. However, self-integration did not have a mediation effect.

Keywords: parenting attitude, school adaptation, self-differentiation, mediating effect

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Introduction

Adolescence is a period when the self develops physically, psychologically and socially, and students experience society via a school life that includes various psychological changes in peer relations (Cho, 2011). In particular, the early middle school years of adolescents is a time of opportunity for mature development, while at the same time, many difficulties due to new academic, behavioral and social needs arise (Song, 2010). Since adolescents experience social development in schools rather than in the home, middle school students' adaptation to school is an important part of adolescence. Adolescents' adaptation to school means social adjustment. School adaptation has been identified as a major factor in improving adult adaptability (Lee, 2004). In particular, adolescents are exposed to many conflicts and tensions due to environmental and situational conditions, and at the same time face psychological and social adjustment problems in the face of social demands and parental expectations (Choi & Cho, 2016). If an adolescent positively adjusts to school, their experiences in school can help them to cope with various forms of anxiety and stress, but if they do not adapt to school, it can lead to a suspension of their studies (Kwon, 2017; Shin, Shin, & Song, 2018). The quality of adaptation to school during adolescence plays an important role in the social adaptation of later adulthood (Kim, 2014). The adaptation of adolescents to school is important for career choice and preparation, and career achievement as they transition to adulthood (Kim, 2009).

Among the factors affecting adolescents' adaptation to school, the primary and persistent influence is parenting attitude. The relationship between parents and their children at home is an important factor that establishes the psychological and social adaptation of adolescents (Jung, 2015). The atmosphere of the family, the behavior patterns of parents, and the relationship between parents and their children are closely related to peer relationships as well as school life. The more positive the parenting attitude is, the more independent, active and adaptive the adolescents are (Kim & Kim, 2014), and the more students perceive parenting attitude as positive, the higher their level of adaptation to school (Byun, 2013; Oh, 2013).

Another of the factors influencing adolescents' adaptation to school is self-differentiation (Byeon & Lee, 2007; Lee, 2013). Self-differentiation refers to the ability to maintain individuality and emotional independence without losing intimacy with family members (Lee, 2017). Bowen (1978) describes a theory self-differentiation in the family system, which refers to the ability of an adolescent to emotionally and physically separate from the family in which they were born, and, at the same time, it refers to their emotional ability to interact with others and their ability to achieve independence including emotional maturity. People with low levels of self-differentiation are emotionally unstable, losing their individuality and showing a sense of dependence on oth-

ers to gain recognition, love, and affirmation (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). On the other hand, a person with a high degree of self-differentiation is not only more confident in their identity and free in forming relationships, but is more likely to succeed in all aspects of life, pursuing meaningful goals (Friedman, 1991). Byeon & Lee (2007) and Lee (2013) report that the self-differentiation of middle school students has a positive effect on school adaptation. At the same time, the self-differentiation of adolescents is influenced by parenting attitude (Han & Kim, 2013; Lee, 2017).

Based on the above discussion, it is possible to infer another route via which self-differentiation mediates between parenting attitudes and school adaptation as perceived by middle school students, as well as parenting attitudes directly affects their school adaptation; namely, the possibility of educational intervention to enhance the self-differentiation of middle school students in order to improve their school adaptation.

Recent major studies conducted in relation to the school adaptation of middle school students have looked at the mediating effects of hope on the relationship between academic self-efficacy and school adaptation (Kim & Hwang, 2019), the influence of family leisure activities on adolescents' family relationships and adaptation to school (Song, 2019), the effect of school environmental variables on the adaptation of middle school students to school (Kim & Kim, 2018), effects of resilience of middle school students on school adaptation (Yoon, 2018), and the effects of parental emotional abuse on adolescents' adaptation to school (Seo, 2018).

Not only is there not much research on school adaptation of middle school students, but efforts to comprehensively the relationship between parenting attitude, self-differentiation, and school adaptation have been insufficient. Therefore, this study examines the mediating effects of self-differentiation on the relationship between parenting attitudes and the school adaptation of middle school students. The results of this study may hold significant implications for middle school students' school adaptation.

Method

Research subject

In this study, a total of 250 male and female students of middle school A in Gyeonggi Province, Republic of Korea were studied. Of the completed questionnaires, 215 were used for the final analysis. The frequency of gender and grade in the study is as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Research subjects' gender and grade

		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	93	43.3
	Female	122	56.7
Grade	First	115	53.5
	Second	100	46.5
Total		215	100

Instruments

Parenting attitude

This study used the parenting behavior test developed by Huh (1999). With the exception of neglect and punishment, six variables—supervision, affection, inconsistency, over-expectation, excessive interference, and rational explanation—were used. The response format is a 4 point scale from 'very much' (1) to 'not at all' (4). The overall Cronbach α of the parenting attitudes scale is .881, while the sub-variables were .827 for supervision, .862 for affection, .728 for inconsistency, .695 for over-expectation, .701 for excessive interference, and .688 for rational explanation.

School adaptation

School adaptation was measured using the school adaptation scale developed by Min (1991). The response format is a 4 points scale from 'very much' (1) to 'not at all' (4). The overall Cronbach α of the school adaptation scale was .894, while the sub-variables were .779 for learning activity, .825 for school rules, .680 for peer relations, and .832 for teacher relations.

Self-differentiation

The self-differentiating scale developed by Je (1989) was used to measure self-differentiation. The scale consists of five sub-components: cognitive emotional function, self-integration, family projection process, emotional breakdown and family regression. The response format is a 4 points scale from 'very much' (1) to 'not at all' (4). The total Cronbach α of self-differentiation scale was .671, while subscales were .723 for cognitive emotional function, .563 for self-integration, .840 for family projection process, .822 for emotional breakdown, and .808 for family regression.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS 22.0. First, frequency analysis was performed to analyze the individual characteristics of the research subjects. Second, descriptive statistical analysis was performed to calculate the mean, standard deviation, kurtosis, and skewness of the variables. Third, the coefficient of Cronbach α was calculated to verify the reliability of the instrument. Fourth, Pearson's correlation analysis was carried out to identify the relationship between parenting attitude, school adaptation, and self-differentiation variables. Finally, in order to verify the mediating effects, the three-step mediating effect validation procedure of Baron and Kenny (1986) and Aroian Test (1947) was performed.

Findings

Descriptive statistics and correlation of parenting attitude, school adaptation, and self-differentiation

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of parenting attitude, school adaptation, and self-differentiation. Table 3 shows correlation among the variables.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the variables

		M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Parenting attitude	supervision	1.73	.63	.806	.762
	affection	1.66	.65	1.091	1.334
	rational explanation	2.02	.66	.481	.251
	inconsistency	2.02	.77	.549	-.067
	over-expectation	2.24	.69	.380	-.186
	excessive interference	2.08	.64	.457	-.035
			1.96	.47	.478
School adaptation	learning activity	2.05	.62	.539	.168
	school rule	1.83	.58	.532	-.301
	peer relation	1.82	.52	.633	.609
	teacher relation	1.79	.61	.649	.315
		1.87	.46	.579	.825

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	cognitive emotional function	2.24	.52	-.107	-.123
	self-integration	2.53	.50	-.095	.795
self-differenti ation	family projection process	2.03	.64	.463	.115
	emotional breakdown	1.98	.71	.502	-.196
	family regression	3.14	.56	-.354	-.030
		2.39	.29	.237	.357

Table 3. Pearson's correlation matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1	1														
2	.594**	1													
3	.344**	.430**	1												
4	.127	.171*	.360**	1											
5	.278**	.373**	.618**	.558**	1										
6	.438**	.671**	.281**	.143*	.269**	1									
7	.382**	.366**	.162*	-.049	.125	.265**	1								
8	.411**	.363**	.228**	.022	.231**	.329**	.578**	1							
9	.267**	.365**	.224**	.048	.173*	.326**	.571**	.470**	1						
10	.322**	.446**	.237**	-.001	.140*	.393**	.428**	.451**	.481**	1					
11	.287**	.341**	.199**	.175*	.305**	.293**	.390**	.457**	.305**	.192**	1				
12	.232**	.194**	-.060	.047	-.019	.095	.026	.140*	.141*	.080	.214**	1			
13	.348**	.445**	.358**	.240**	.404**	.292**	.398**	.375**	.324**	.210**	.425**	.150*	1		
14	.465**	.574**	.470**	.163*	.428**	.452**	.345**	.405**	.325**	.318**	.378**	.090	.555**	1	
15	-.406**	-.559**	-.362**	-.348**	-.445**	-.487**	-.304**	-.378**	-.356**	-.352**	-.426**	-.104	-.434**	-.441**	1

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Note: Parenting attitude (1. supervision, 2. affection, 3. inconsistency, 4. over-expectation, 5. excessive interference, 6. rational explanation), school adaptation (7. learning activity, 8. school rule, 9. peer relation, 10. teacher relation), self-differentiation (11. cognitive emotional function, 12. self-integration, 13. family projection process, 14. emotional breakdown, 15. family regression)

Mediating effect of self-differentiation on the relationship between parenting attitudes and school adaptation

Mediating effect of self-differentiation

In order to test the mediating effects of self-differentiation on the relationship between parenting attitudes and school adaptation, the three-step mediation procedure of Baron and Kenny (1986) was performed (see Table 4). In the first phase, the effect of parenting attitudes on school adaptation was significant ($\beta=.433$, $p<.001$). In the second phase, the effect of parent attitudes on self-differentiation was also significant ($\beta=.453$, $p<.001$). In the third phase, parenting attitudes, which is a predictor variable, had a significant effect on school adaptation ($t=4.566$, $p<.001$), and self-differentiation, which is a mediating variable, also had a significant effect on school adaptation ($t=4.260$, $p<.001$). While controlling for the effect of self-differentiation, which is a mediating variable, on school adaptation, the effect of parenting attitudes on school adaptation remained statistically significant, but the effect was significantly reduced ($\beta=.453 \rightarrow \beta=.304$). This shows that self-differentiation has a partial mediating effect on the relationship between parenting attitudes and school adaptation of middle school students.

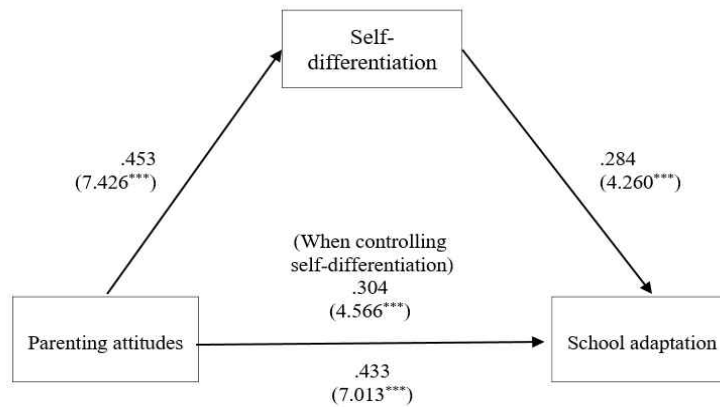
Table 4. Mediating effect of self-differentiation

Criterion	Model	Non-standardization coefficient		β	t	R^2	F
		B	SE				
1 School Adaptation	(constant)	1.037	.122	.433	8.486***	.188	49.186***
	Parenting attitudes	.426	.061		7.013***		
2 Self-differentiation	(constant)	1.833	.077	.453	23.946***	.206	55.140***
	Parenting attitudes	.282	.038		7.426***		
3 School Adaptation	(constant)	.215	.226	.304	.953	.252	35.645*** *
	Parenting attitudes	.299	.066		4.566***		
	Self-differentiation	.448	.105		.284		

** $p<.001$

The Aroian Test (1947) was conducted to verify the significance of self-differentiation on the relationship between parenting attitudes, which is a predictor variable, and school adaptation, which is a criterion variable (see Figure 1). The mediating effect of self-differentiation on the relationship between parenting attitudes and school

adaptation was statistically significant ($Z=3.674$, $p<.001$).



*** $p<.001$

Figure 1. Mediation effect of self-differentiation for Aroian Test

Mediating effects of sub-variables of self-differentiation

In particular, it is necessary to examine the mediating effects of the sub-variables (cognitive emotional function, self-integration, family projecting process, emotional breakdown, and family regression) of self-differentiation on the relationship between parenting attitudes and school adaptation. First, cognitive emotional function partially mediated the relationship between parenting attitudes and school adaptation (see Table 5). The result of the Aroian Test (1947) also showed that cognitive emotional function had a statistically significant effect on the relationship between parenting attitudes and school adaptation ($Z=3.735$, $p<.001$).

Table 5. Mediating effect of cognitive emotional function

	Criterion	Model	Non-standardization coefficient		β	t	R^2	F
			B	SE				
1	School adaptation	(constant)	1.037	.122		8.486***	.188	49.186***
		Parenting attitudes	.426	.061	.433	7.013***		
2	Cognitive emotional function	(constant)	1.421	.141		10.069***	.144	35.964***
		Parenting attitudes	.420	.070	.380	5.997***		

3	School adaptation	(constant)						
		Parenting attitudes	.652	.141	.317	4.615***		
		Cognitive emotional function	.312	.062	.305	4.992***	.267	25.315***
			.271	.056		4.792***		

*** $p < .001$

No mediating effect was found for self-integration (see Table 6).

Table 6. Mediating effect of self-integration

Criterion	Model	Non-standardization coefficient		β	t	R^2	F	
		B	SE					
1	School adaptation	(constant)	1.037	.122		8.486***	.188	49.186***
		Parenting attitudes	.426	.061	.433	7.013***		
2	Self-integration	(constant)	2.303	.145		15.848***	.012	2.628
		Parenting attitudes	.117	.072	.110	1.621		
3	School adaptation	(constant)	.883	.180		4.895***	.193	25.315***
		Parenting attitudes	.418	.061	.425	6.847***		
		Self-integration	.067	.058	.072	1.167		

*** $p < .001$

Next, the mediating effect of the family projection process was analyzed, and there was a partial mediating effect on the relationship between parenting attitudes and school adaptation (see Table 7). The result of the Aroian Test (1947) also showed that the effect of family projection process was statistically significant ($Z=3.469$, $p < .001$).

Table 7. Mediating effect of family projection process

Criterion	Model	Non-standardization coefficient		β	t	R^2	F	
		B	SE					
1	School adaptation	(constant)	1.037	.122		8.486***	.188	49.186***
		Parenting attitudes	.426	.061	.433	7.013***		
2	Family projection process	(constant)	.684	.164		4.162***	.250	70.947***
		Parenting attitudes	.688	.082	.500	8.423***		
3	School adaptation	(constant)	.909	.123		7.372***	.239	33.352***
			.297	.068	.302	4.365***		

Parenting attitudes					
Family projection process	.188	.049	.263	3.797***	

*** $p < .001$

In the case of emotional breakdown, there was a partial mediating effect on the relationship between parenting attitudes and school adaptation (see Table 8). The result of the Aroian Test (1947) also shows that the effect of emotional breakdown was statistically significant ($Z=3.530$, $p < .001$).

Table 8. Mediating effect of emotional breakdown

Criterion	Model	Non-standardizat		β	t	R^2	F
		ion coefficient B	SE				
1 School adaptation	(constant)	1.037	.122		8.486***	.188	49.186***
	Parenting attitudes	.426	.061	.433	7.013***		
2 Emotional breakdown	(constant)	.164	.116		.984	.373	126.633***
	Parenting attitudes	.930	.083	.611	11.253***		
3 School adaptation	(constant)	1.007	.119		8.469***	.238	33.069***
	Parenting attitudes	.256	.074	.260	3.439***		
	Emotional breakdown	.183	.049	.283	3.736***		

*** $p < .001$

Finally, analysis of the mediating effect of family regression showed a partial mediating effect on the relationship between parenting attitudes and school adaptation (see Table 9). The result of the Aroian Test (1947) also showed that the effect of family regression was statistically significant ($Z=3.457$, $p < .001$).

Table 9. Mediating effect of family regression

Criterion	Model	Non-standardizat		β	t	R^2	F
		ion coefficient B	SE				
1 School adaptation	(constant)	1.037	.122		8.486***	.188	49.186***
	Parenting attitudes	.426	.061	.433	7.013***		
2 Family	(constant)	4.592	.129		35.608***	.387	134.685***

	regression	Parenting attitudes (constant)	- .743	.064	-.622	-11.605***		
3	School adaptation	Parenting attitudes	2.087	.314		3.391***		
		Family regression	-.229	.063	-.278	-3.618***	.235	32.534***

*** $p < .001$

Conclusion and implications

The purpose of this study was to examine the mediating effects of self-differentiation on the relationship between parenting attitudes and school adaptation of middle school students. Based on the results of the study, we can draw the following conclusions.

First, self-differentiation had a partial mediating effect on the relationship between parenting attitudes and school adaptation. This means that the higher the level of self-differentiation of middle school students, the higher the level of school adaptation. Specifically, while the parenting attitudes perceived by middle school students directly affects their adaptation to school life, there is also an indirect influence on school adaptation through self-differentiation.

Second, five sub-variables—ego-differentiation, cognitive emotional function, family projection process, emotional breakdown, and family regression—showed a partial mediating effect, however, self-integration did not show any mediating effect. Interestingly, in the case of family regression, the relationship between parenting attitudes and school adaptation was partly mediated but showed a negative effect on school adaptation. This means that middle school students' negative perception of their parents' adoptive attitudes will react negatively to various situations and relationships between family members, which will lead to a poorer school life. The results of this study are consistent with the findings of Geun (1993) that the lower the self-differentiation level of adolescents, the greater the number of problem behaviors, while the higher the level, the healthier the adaptation. The results are also consistent with research by Jung (2015), Kim (2010), and Byun (2013), who reported that the more positive the relationship between parents and their children, the better the youth adjust to school life. This is also in line with the results of a study (Song, 2010) showing that middle school students with high self-differentiation levels have higher levels of school adaptation than lower ones. In particular, emotional breakdown, which is a sub-variable of self-differentiation, showed a statistically significant correlation with school adaptation at the highest level. This suggests that middle school students who

perceive parenting attitude positively can distinguish their own thoughts and emotions properly, recognize the situations correctly, and adapt well to school life. In short, when there are stable emotional exchanges between middle school students and their parents, a good level of self-differentiation is achieved. This in turn has a positive effect on their school adaptation, resulting in more stable interactions with their peers and teachers.

The implications of this study are as follows: First, active counseling education intervention is required to enhance the level of self-differentiation, and subsequently improve the level of middle school students' adaptation to school life. In particular, it is necessary to develop and implement a counseling program for students with low self-differentiation levels. Self-differentiation programs (Kim, 2017; Lee, 2015) have been developed in recent years, but the targets have been middle-aged women. The group counseling program for high school students (Kim, 2012) is the only case reported involving adolescents. These programs have the limitation of being one-time programs performed for the purpose of research. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a customized, ongoing ego-differentiation counseling program for middle school students with school maladjustment problems. Second, parent education is required to develop positive parenting attitudes. As discussed previously, parenting attitudes have a positive effect on middle school students' school adaptation. Therefore, it is necessary for schools to provide regular parental education programs for parents. The main contents of the parent education program should be positive communication techniques with middle school students, understanding of the physical and psychological development of adolescents, and positive parental support.

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Korean Abstract

중학생이 지각하는 부모양육태도와 학교생활적응 간의 관계에서 자아분화의 매개효과 분석¹

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이 연구의 목적은 중학생이 지각하는 부모양육태도와 학교생활적응 간의 관계에서 자아분화의 매개효과를 검증하는 것이다. 연구참여자는 경기도 소재의 중학교 1, 2학년 총 215명이다. 수집된 자료는 Baron과 Kenny(1986)의 3단계 매개검증 절차와 Aroian Test(1947)를 이용하여 분석되었다. 연구결과는 다음과 같다. 첫째, 중학생이 지각하는 부모양육태도와 학교생활적응 간의 관계에서 자아분화는 부분 매개효과가 있었다. 둘째, 자아분화의 하위변인 가운데 인지정서기능, 가족투사과정, 정서적 단절, 가족퇴행은 부분 매개효과가 있었지만, 자아통합은 매개효과가 없었다. 이러한 연구결과를 바탕으로 시사점을 제시하였다.

주제어: 부모양육태도, 학교생활적응, 자아분화, 매개효과

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