

Relation between self esteem level and academic achievement

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Abstract:

The aim of the study was to evaluate the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement. It has long been believed by researchers that these two elements are correlated, so this study is conducted to confirm this concept. In the study, the six pillars of self-esteem which consist of living consciously, self-acceptance, self-responsibility, self-assertiveness, living purposefully, and personal integrity were used to identify the existence of self-esteem in the participants who range from middle school students to working adults. These participants were given a questionnaire with Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale to observe the correlation between their self-esteem and academic performance through 12 multiple choice questions. Long answered questions are also included to provide further detail. In this paper, the meaning and level of self-esteem, the variable contributed to high self-esteem level, and how those values affect an individual's academic performance are discussed. As a result, a positive relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement was found.

Keywords — Self-esteem, academic achievement

I. INTRODUCTION

In all societies, some students have outstanding academic performance. There has been a discussion regarding the cause of high academic achievements such as whether the scores of students are caused merely by their knowledge and abilities or other factors. In general, most top students seem to possess a similar trait which is confidence. Self-esteem is one tool to rate their confidence level and the measure of how they value themselves. Therefore, it might mean that high self-esteem in an individual can boost his/her scholastic performance. The study focuses on determining the relativity between the self-esteem level of an individual and his/her academic achievement. It is believed that this study would provide a clearer understanding of

whether self-esteem is a significant variable that affects a person's academic life or not.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-esteem is considered to be a basic human's psychological need because it conveys our confidence to have a positive feeling about ourselves. Being in the fourth layer of the five-tier model of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, self-esteem is stated to be related to the other needs above and below it in the pyramid consisting of self-actualization, love/belonging, safety, and physiological needs. It is moulded internally and externally, and the internal factors comprise an individual's ideas, beliefs, behaviours and conduct. example of a website in [1]. According to his scheme, self-esteem is associated with appreciation

and respect. He believes that people need to sense that they are valued by others and feel that they are valuable themselves.

Further, self-esteem forms from two elements that are closely related, which are self-efficacy and self-respect. Self-efficacy, alternatively known as self-trust, is having the confidence to face the reality and address life problems, while self-respect is the feeling of knowing your own value to be happy. Therefore, self-esteem is the outcome of being aware of your own ability to cope with life challenges and your own worth of fulfillment and pleasure. Currently, self-esteem is thought by several researchers to be interrelated to academic achievement. Generally, self-esteem is said to boost confidence among students by making them believe in their capabilities, thus, making them strive for higher success. It is mentioned by Dr Nathaniel Branden, the author of *The Six Pillars Of Self-esteem*, that building self-esteem for academic achievement is not an overnight accomplishment, so the six pillars of self-esteem are the practice that individuals should have in order to gain a high self-esteem level, example of a book in [2]

The first aspect of the six pillars of self-esteem is the practice of living consciously, which is to have self-awareness of one's deeds, values, purposes, and goals. It is also important to differentiate between facts, opinions, and emotions because opinions and emotions can obstruct the awareness of reality, a practice of living with the present by not worrying about the past or the future. Moreover, in order to have a clear sense of self-awareness, it is crucial to notice your own errors to correct them effectively. A decent self-reflection approach is to ask for feedback to further improve oneself. If we look at this practice in terms of academic achievement, students can identify their errors by looking at their scores or observing their teachers' feedback to reflect on their performance, which they can improve on after that.

The second pillar of self-esteem is the practice of self-acceptance. As previously seen in the practice

of living consciously, self-reflection is needed to improve oneself; however, one must first accept oneself in both the positive and negative aspects. The first step is to have self-value and self-commitment to be alive which leads to the second step where we need to open up to perceive the true self within us. It is crucial to be aware of our own thinking, feeling, desires, deeds, and nature which will further make us really understand who we truly are. These steps will eventually allow us to accept our true abilities and inability. This can be applied to students who might want to walk on a certain career path but lacks the confidence to do so. By accepting one's own competence and flaws, he or she might be able to adjust himself or herself to better achieve his goal.

Thirdly, self-responsibility is another practice to boost self-esteem. It is to comprehend that we are the sole cause of the results of our lives. If anyone does something to make us unhappy, it is not their fault as it is our own job to know that the unhappiness that arises in our hearts is our own choice. Therefore, happiness is a choice that we can choose. Whenever there are problems, we need to concentrate on the actions that need to be taken rather than who to blame. During exams, students who obtained lower scores than they actually should usually blame the distractions around them such as sounds of ongoing constructions or sounds of the surrounding people as the reasons for their lower scores. However, if one focuses on what should be done, he or she would think of a way to ignore those distractions for the next exams rather than blaming them.

Self-assertiveness is the fourth practice which involves standing up for oneself. It is to be true to ourselves and respect our innermost feelings. When a decision is made, it should be made from our own values and not due to others' expectations. In society today, most people tend to fake themselves and lose their own values to be accepted by others, but that is not portraying self-assertiveness. Some students willingly or reluctantly change their

positions to gain the acceptance of their friends, just like an upright student who reluctantly helps his friend to cheat in an exam because he is forced by the whole class to do so. By doing this, one is losing self-respect and values.

Another practice of the six pillars is living purposefully which is to have clear goals in life. In short, goals are what propel us forward. Everyone lives to fulfill short-term and long-term plans, and self-discipline will be evident once a goal is established because discipline is what helps people to work more effectively. When it comes to academic achievement, it is very obvious that a majority of students have the desire to achieve high scores and get enrolled in the universities of their dreams, so they need to have the discipline to study hard for this.

The last practice of the six pillars is personal integrity. Whatever goals we have, we need to conform to them and not go back on our words. In other words, it is to act according to our goals, meaning that we also need to behave according to our words. Going against our own integrity is like lying to ourselves and also losing our own self. An obvious example is a student who vows to never watch entertainment videos on Youtube before her exam date to fully concentrate on revising for her exam, but she somehow could not resist her urge and watch some at the end of the day. Doing this, a sense of guilt must be evident and she feels her lack of integrity.

The six pillars of self-esteem can have a positive impact on achievement as illustrated by other researchers, according to Fathi-Ashtiani et al. (2007), who deemed self-esteem to be the attitude of individuals towards themselves, which is how capable or competent they think they are. Aryana (2010) inferred that pupils with high self-esteem will be more willing and daring to face challenges, making them have outstanding academic achievement which is different to those with low confidence. Similarly, Naderi, Abdullah, Aizan, Sharir, and Kumar (2009) underscored that it was

apparent from the research that the more people see the value in themselves, the better their academic accomplishments would be. This study observed the personality variables and achievement among students to see the link between them, example of a journal article in [3].

While other researchers established the positive relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement, Joshi and Srivastava (2009) have demonstrated that it is not always a positive relationship, it was reported that self-esteem can be both a positive and negative feeling which arises from success or failure of individuals and that self-esteem is interrelated to academic achievement. Academic success can boost the self-esteem of students, but academic failure can also erode their confidence. This paper attempts to find out the association between empirical and theoretical basis of self-esteem and achievement, example of a journal article in [4].

As seen above, the six pillars of self-esteem which consist of living consciously, self-acceptance, self-responsibility, self-assertiveness, living purposefully, and personal integrity are all the basis of self-esteem that can be the factors to boost academic achievement. From past studies, self-esteem is seen to positively relate to academic accomplishment, so this relationship will be tested through our research.

III. METHODOLOGY

Variables:

1. Definition and interpretation of self-esteem: “the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and of being worthy of happiness” Dr Branden (2006) contends that self-esteem is composed of two components: I. Self-efficacy - confidence in one's ability to think, learn, choose, and make appropriate decisions. II. Self-respect - confidence in one's right to be happy and in the belief that achievement, success, friendship, respect, love, and fulfillment are appropriate to us.

2. Definition of Academic Achievement: Academic performance is the outcome of education, the extent to which a student, teacher, or institution has achieved their educational goals , example of a journal article in [5].

Procedure:

There were 41 participants who range from middle school students to working adults. Data collection through questionnaires was divided into two distinct sections to allow specific interpretation of following the key idea of the six pillars. The first section focuses mainly on determining the self-esteem of the participants where 12 questions in total were asked based on the six pillars of self-esteem discovered by Dr Nathaniel Branden. 2 questions are derived from each pillar partly based on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, example of a journal article in [6], which comprises Likert scale with items answered on a five-point scale. All 12 questions sum up to 60 points from which the participant is classified into 3 categories: low self-esteem, moderate self-esteem, and high self-esteem.

Self-esteem levels, example of a journal article in [7] :

1. Low self-esteem (12-35 points) ; This group of people think of themselves as below average. They often get into depression and have a high level of anxiety which is the feeling of sadness and worry or fear resulting from the lack of self-acceptance and confidence. The result from the questionnaire reveals that individuals with a lack of belief in themselves and who frequently underestimate their ability receive a lower academic achievement compared to those who can accept and reflect on their weaknesses.
2. Moderate self-esteem (36-45 points); An average self-esteem person tends to have a fair opinion about themselves and their own self-worth. They generally view themselves in an overall positive light having their own beliefs and values but not too strict and willing to adapt to suit their environment with ease. It is evident that they will be likely to admit their mistakes

and learn from them but often wait for others to guide or not solve any challenge right away. (living consciously)

3. High self-esteem (46-60 points); People who have high self-esteem tend to love and accept themselves. They have the confidence that whatever challenges might come, they will be able to surpass them without regret or feeling anxiety about the future outcome (living consciously and self-responsibility). According to the self-acceptance pillar of self-esteem, these people are ready to learn new things as they accept the truth that they do not know everything and also take corrective criticism.

In the second section, the participants were asked to demonstrate their views on their capacities in their studies. The different levels of self-esteem will then be evaluated with their academic performances to see their relationship.

TABLE I
QUESTIONS USED TO EVALUATE SELF-ESTEEM LEVELS BASED ON PILLARS

No.	Question	Corresponding Pillar
1	How often do you regret things from the past or worry for the future?	Living Consciously
2	Do you consistently ask for feedback or self-reflect?	Living Consciously
3	Do you think your strong academic subjects match that grade you got?	Self-acceptance
4	Are you comfortable talking about your weaknesses?	Self-acceptance
5	Do you feel responsible for the result of your own act/ choice?	Self-responsibility
6	When you are facing a personal problem, what will you do?	Self-responsibility
7	Do you think you have a strong sense of your identity and personality?	Self-assertiveness
8	When you enter a new society, how far are you willing to change to fit in?	Self-assertiveness

9	Do you have a clear image of what you see yourself doing in the future?	Living purposefully
10	Do your short-term and long-term plans align?	Living purposefully
11	If you are forced to do a certain action that goes against your values, will you do it?	Personal Integrity
12	If you are grading your own work during revision and you see that you got some questions wrong due to silly mistakes, will you give yourself a mark?	Personal Integrity

20a	Academically, I am satisfied with myself.
20b	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

TABLE 2
SELF-ESTEEM AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

No.	Question
13a	Does the academic achievement you received identify who you are?
13b	How do you feel about your strong subject in relation to your identity?
13c	How might your response in 13b affect your perception of the grade associated with that subject?
14a	What grade do you achieve in your strongest subject?
14b	Do you expect a higher grade for your strong subject?
14c	What is your strongest subject and how do you feel about it?
15a	What grade do you achieve in your weakest subject?
15b	Do you expect a lower grade for your weak subject?
15c	What is your weakest subject and how do you feel about it?
16a	Do you think your favorite subject is easy?
16b	Do you think your favorite subject is easy for others too?
17	What do you think about this sentence "I like a certain subject because I can do it well."?
18	How would you compare yourself to other students?
19	How do you feel about the value of a cheated grade?

IV. RESULT & DISCUSSION

For the questionnaire, altogether 41 people participated with 95% of them being teenagers. Regarding the responses that reflect the first pillar of self-esteem, these are seen in the first two questions. There were 53.7% of the participants who ‘Often’ regret things from the past or worry about the future. The second question has 39% of the volunteers who ‘Sometimes’ ask for feedback or self-reflect. Following closely is ‘Often’ at 34.1%, while ‘Rarely’, ‘Always’ and ‘Never’ were the smaller portion of 26.9% altogether. These results suggest that most volunteers tend to worry about their past and future, but this is an inevitable issue for people in general. In reality, only a few people are able to focus on only the present, which is what living consciously involves, so this result can display a realistic aspect of society. Regardless, more than half of the volunteers ask for feedback or self-reflection, so it is reasonable that they still follow the idea of living consciously for the first pillar.

As for questions 3 and 4 that portray the second pillar which is the practice of acceptance and improvement, 56.1% agree to some extent that their strong academic subjects match the grade they got. These results suggest that a majority of the participants are well aware of their competencies and weaknesses which truly conforms to the second pillar of self-acceptance.

When asked if they feel responsible for the outcome of their own actions in question 5 which illustrates the third pillar, 82.9% ‘agree’ while only a few opted for the other choices. For how they face problems (question 6), ‘Identify the problem and solve it by myself’ - 58.5%, ‘Ask others for help before I fix it myself’ - 29.3%, ‘Procrastinate and then solve the problem later’ - 9.8%, ‘Run away from it.’ - 0%, ‘Cry and fall into depression’ - 2.4%As associated with the third pillar of self-

responsibility which is the practice of keeping focused on what needs to be done rather than who or what is to blame. A huge number of the people here tend to be emotionally responsible for what they did. This can be seen from the result that most of them identify problems and solutions on their own.

The highest percentage was observed for being 'Moderate' at 46.3% with 'Partially agree' at the second place at 36.6% when inquired if the volunteers have a strong sense of their identity and personality on question 7 to convey the fourth pillar. According to the result, even though most opted for being moderate about having a strong sense of identity, the second highest option was 'Partially agree' which still means that a reasonable amount of them still respect their own innermost feelings and values. This is supported by having 56.1% of them changing only what they can agree on, meaning that regardless of the condition, they will still stick to their own values which fits in with the self-assertiveness pillar which is being genuine and grounded on your value.

As far as the fifth pillar is concerned in questions 9, 10a, 10b and 10c, the highest response of whether the subjects have a clear image of what they see themselves doing in the future was 19 people who chose 'agree'. Similarly, in 10c, 63.4% of the people 'Partially agree' and 'Totally agree' when asked if their short-term and long-term plans align. Turning to the concept of living purposefully in the 5th pillar, the outcomes match because there are more people opting for having a clear image of themselves in the future and having their short-term and long-term plans aligned. This means that we have clear goals and purposes in their lives.

According to question 11 relating to the sixth pillar concerning the participants' willingness to do a certain action that goes against their values, a total of 65.9% of the volunteers chose 'disagree'. Turning to question 12 if they would give themselves a mark if they were grading themselves and got a question wrong due to silly mistakes,

63.4% 'disagree'. As for personal integrity in the sixth pillar, most of the people were quite true to themselves because they are unwilling to do anything against their values and nearly all of them do not agree on giving themselves a mark when they make a silly mistake if they can actually add one secretly. These illustrate how they would not betray their own values that can make them lose their own faces afterwards, which absolutely complies with the sixth pillar.

In terms of the link between self-esteem and academic achievement as seen in 13a, 36.6% of the participants agreed that their academic achievement can identify who they are. Turning to 13b where they are asked how they feel about their strong subject in relation to their identity, 22 out of 41 thought they see the relation, while 7 stated that there is no relation between their strong subject and identity. The group with the positive relation shows that they have high self-esteem according to the first and second pillars where they know how to live consciously and know their strength. Moving on to question 13c which further asked how the response in 13b affects the perception of the grade associated with that subject, 25 mentioned that it made them want to improve themselves, showing how self-acceptance is crucial in making students want to achieve higher grades.

Looking at the grades of the strongest subject of the participants in 14a and 14b, it can be seen that 41.5% of them got the highest grade (A*), while the majority, 43.9%, got an A. This shows that everyone participating in this study has considerably high academic accomplishments in their strong subjects, which can easily be used to study their self-esteem. This conforms to the fact that 61% of them expect a higher grade for their strong subject. It shows their awareness of their competencies, further confirming that their self-esteem goes hand in hand with academic achievement. As for 14c asking what their strongest subject is and how they feel, the answers tend to vary a little, however, most of them have clear

goals and self-acceptance which demonstrate self-esteem from the second and fifth pillars.

Turning to the grades of the weakest subjects of the volunteers in 15a, it is evident that only 14.6% of them got A-A*, while the rest got below B-E. When asked if they expect a lower grade for their weak subject in 15b, 48.8% of them disagreed with 29.3% being neutral. The result conveys that these people were aware of their weaknesses, but a majority of them want to get a higher grade which should be due to their high self-esteem that they might be able to do better. Looking at 15c asking what their weakest subject is and how they feel, nearly all of them could provide a subject and some even said they need to improve on these subjects. This is a confirmation that the second and fifth pillar have a role in influencing the students' awareness of their competency and academic objectives.

Regarding the perceptions of the students about the easiness of their favorite subjects in question 16a, 24 out of 41 people agreed, with 6 being neutral. Similarly, the outcome for 17a when volunteers were asked if they like a certain subject because they can do it well, 30 people agreed to this. This illustrates that students tend to find their favorite subject less difficult and easier to get good scores, which might be a part of a reason why it is their favorite subject. It is evident that this conforms to the principle of the first pillar, where students know their own strengths and weaknesses which might lead to an academic improvement. Moving on to 16b, when the participants are further asked if they think their favorite subject is easy for others too, the results showed an opposite trend. Here, 21 people disagreed. This is a clear illustration of the competency of the students because if their favorite subjects are not easy for others, it means that these individuals might be practicing how to live consciously and self-acceptance from the first and second pillars. Identifying errors to correct and improve themselves might result in better grades. Some

might even train themselves on the initially difficult subjects until they master these subjects to eventually become really adept at understanding them.

For question 18, the participants needed to evaluate themselves on how they perceive themselves compared to others. 73.2% thought they are just an average student, with 14.6% thinking that they perform better than others. Superficially, with most of them thinking they are average, we might think that they are merely being modest and try not to boast their abilities. However, this is actually an approach to show self-esteem. In the first and second pillars, individuals should be aware of their own errors and flaws to improve themselves for the better. Some stating that they are average might mean that although they know they are smart, they also know that they still have some flaws to manage and remove, making them become an average student who has good academic achievement. Others might have a higher standard on their academic performances which leads to different perspectives of how they perceive their position academically.

When inquired on how they feel about the value of a cheated grade on question 19, 30 out of 41 people said they felt that it is worthless. This result truly conforms to the sixth pillar of self-esteem where people stick to their own integrity and value. Most of these volunteers thought that cheated grades are worthless, meaning that they tend to stick to their own values and positions. As a result, their self-esteem in terms of personal integrity might be the reason why a majority of them managed to get high academic achievement.

Observing the trends of the level of satisfaction, questions 20a and 20b reveal an overall self-esteem level of an individual towards both academic and general aspects of life. It can be clearly noticed that, ranging from the lowest to the highest satisfaction with the scale between 1-5, there was an average of 40% at level 4 (20a and 20b), with only an average of 14% at level 5. The similarity of trends in both

questions illustrates that academic achievement has a positive correlation to the level of overall self-esteem. This question is also interrelated to questions 13 and 14, where people were asked to state their academic performance in terms of grades. It can be noticed that an individual that obtains a higher grade (an A or A*) is more likely to be in level 4 or 5 on question 20. This further proves the identity of an individual that higher self-esteem leads to higher academic achievement.

In accordance with a volunteer with low self-esteem, she scored 33/60 in the first section, resulting in a low self-esteem tier. When asked how she feels about her weakest subject, she replied, "It's very useless and hard" showing her lack of motivation which also reflects low self-esteem. She also stated that her favourite subject is easy for others, meaning that she admits that her ability is limited. Moreover, she claimed that she is an average student. She seems neutral about a cheated grade and is not satisfied with herself, which is sufficient to express her lack of self-esteem, not to mention the six pillars of self-esteem.

Turning to the one with moderate self-esteem, this person has 40/60 which was in the moderate self-esteem tier. Although this person seemed to have a strong sense of his own strength and weakness, he said that his academic achievement does not identify who he is and that he is just an average student. He also added that he likes his favourite subject just because it is easy for him, but it is not easy for others. Furthermore, he chose 'neutral' when asked if he is satisfied with himself academically and as a whole. These results lead to the idea that a person can have contrasting characteristics within the six pillars of self-esteem (self acceptance and living consciously), or he might just be a humble person who does not directly express himself.

Looking at an individual participant with high self-esteem, the volunteer scored 47/60 in the first section which is in the range of a high self-esteem tier. Question 13b, "I can do everything if I put

effort on" reveals a strong sense of self-responsibility shown by a participant. This suggests good self-reflection skills and confidence which is a good sign of a high level of self-esteem. Link to question 14a, we can clearly see that this participant achieved an A+ in her strong subject. It is also evident from question 13b that preference for a certain subject does not affect her grade. This can be seen from the quote "According to my grades some subjects might appear to be one of my strong subjects but they actually are my least fav." A high level of self-esteem can also be clearly confirmed by her answer to question 20, where she strongly agrees with the statement "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself." This is due to the fact that people who have high self-esteem tend to love and accept themselves. They are also ready to learn new things as they accept the truth that they do not know everything and also take corrective criticism, which beautifully results in higher academic achievement.

v. CONCLUSION

To provide a summary, the results illustrate a positive correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement because the participants who perform well in school tend to possess at least one or more characteristics out of the six pillars of self-esteem. On the other hand, those who tend to lack the six pillars of self-esteem are more likely to display self-doubt and moderate to low academic performance. These convey the idea that when individuals have high self-esteem, it is likely that they are following the six pillars of self-esteem. They are observed to have clear goals for their future careers, they avoid cheating to get good grades, they are aware of their strong and weak subjects, they are more likely to be able to solve their own problems, and they try to continuously improve themselves.

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