

Research Article

Self-Esteem as a Correlate of Academic Performance among Secondary School Students in Enugu State

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Abstract: Self-esteem is an important psychological construct in all aspect of life especially in teaching and learning. This is because it affects the physical, social, emotional and academic well-being of an individual. A healthy self-esteem produces a healthy individual whose mindset is geared with “*i can*” attitude towards life because of its evaluative scale of the extent a person can go in life. Therefore this paper examines self-esteem as a correlate of academic performance among secondary school student in Enugu state. Literary research and different academic work in self-esteem expanded the investigation. One research question and hypothesis guided the study accordingly. Rosenberg self-esteem scale face validated by three experts in the field of Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation were administered to randomly selected 600 students in Agbani Education zone. Descriptive statistics were used to answer the research question while Person Product Moment Correlation was used to analyze hypothesis. Cronbach alpha was used to obtain the reliability co-efficient of 0.73. The findings of the study indicated that high self-esteem is an important correlate of academic performance of a student as it affects the motivation to learn, mindset, worthiness, and perseverance of a student amidst academic challenges. It was recommended amongst others that students should be engaged in psychotherapy in order to work on behavioural issues they have. Discovery method and peer-to-peer learning should also be initiated in secondary schools in order to encourage student to believe in themselves and their ability in order to perform better academically.

Keywords: Self-esteem, academic performance, secondary school students.

Introduction

Academic performance is an important parameter in estimating success in students. One of the goals of education is for every student to stand out both in school and outside school hence a student's performance is dependent on both his/her mental and physical capability. Thus one of the major determinants of learning outcome is self-esteem. This is because self-esteem affects the physical, social, emotional and academic well-being of a student. Hence how a student views him/herself including capabilities, worth and value affect him/her academically. Self-esteem is a central construct in clinical, developmental, social and personality psychology with its role studied in psychological functioning for more than a century and often exaggerated to the extent that low self-esteem is often associated with evil and high self-esteem good (Abdel-Khalek, 2016).

Self-esteem is the overall evaluation to self hence the ability of an individual to see him/herself as worthy or worthless. According to American Psychological Association (2021), self-esteem is not hereditary or innate but learned as a result of emotions and experiences an individual has within social environment thus refers to individual perception or subjective appraisal of one's own self-worth, feelings of self-respect, confidence and the extent to which an individual holds positive or

negative views about self. It is subjective because it has a lot to do with the psychological feeling of a person which may be as a result of misconstrued ideas or misconceptions about oneself. APA also opined that self-esteem is the degree to which a person feels satisfied with him/herself while feeling valuable and worthy of respect. This means that self-esteem is related to one's personal beliefs about skills, abilities and social relationship.

According to Mentalhelp.net (2022), self-esteem has to do with the feelings people experience that emanated from their sense of worthiness or unworthiness. It also influences people's choice, decision as well as serves as a motivational tool that allow full exploitation of potentials. This is because self-esteem is a way of thinking which shows that an individual accepts, respects and believe in themselves in comparison to standards across the globe. These standards are also culturally bound. This is because what amounts to worthiness in a particular culture might worth nothing in another.

Furthermore Webster's dictionary (2022) defined self-esteem as satisfaction with oneself, for one's good opinion of his/her dignity or worth. Self-esteem is evident when an individual especially a student accepts him/herself both in good and bad attributes, respects oneself, treat oneself in a way reflective of others respect for him/her believe in oneself with the mindset that he/she deserves the good things of life. Thus this student makes choices and take actions with confidence and optimism about life with so much dependence on his/her ability.

Self-esteem is an everyday language especially among adolescence with three connotative meanings. First it refers to personality variable which captures the way people feel about themselves. This emanated from primitive libidinal impulses and perceptions that one is a valuable member of the universe (Kendra Cherry, 2021). Second, it is an evaluative measure which refers to the way people analyze their various attributes and abilities. For example, a student who doubts his/her ability in school is sometimes referred to someone with low academic self-esteem. This is because self-esteem here is seen from the spectrum of how people evaluate or appraise their personalities and abilities. Third, self-esteem is seen from the viewpoint of feeling of self-worth hence a momentarily emotional state especially from a positive or negative experience. Thus this is what people mean when they speak of experiences that boosts self-esteem or threaten their self-esteem. Self-esteem is also the panacea of modern life because of its ability to motivate or demoralize an individual. This is seen in academic success, health financial and personal fulfilment thus high self-esteem is seen as the antidote to underachievement, crime, depression, suicide, cultism and drug abuse among adolescents and youths (APA, 2021).

Self-esteem as a psychological construct dates back to American William James in early 19th century as seen in his book "*principles of psychology*", however phenomenology and humanistic psychotherapy of 20th century gave it prominence and a central role in personal self-actualization especially in the treatment of psychic disorders. Thus psychologists started considering personal satisfaction in psychotherapy which as well gave insight on why people feel less worth, discouraged and unable to understand their challenges (Abdel-Khalek, 2016). This made self-esteem a household name amongst teachers, parents, therapists, adolescents and youths with focused efforts on the assumption that high self-esteem have a positive outcome and benefits especially in academic performance. This is because self-esteem is a collection of an individual's attitude towards him/herself which gave insight on how he perceive, think and analyze behaviour aimed at him/her. Self-esteem can either be healthy (high) or unhealthy (low).

According to Kendra Cherry (2022), attributes of unhealthy self-esteem include: lack of self-confidence, negative view of life, perfectionistic attitude, blaming behaviour, fear of taking risks or ridiculed, feeling of being unloved, dependence on others in order to make decisions and distorted view of self while signs of healthy self-esteem are confidence and self-driven, awareness of personal abilities and capabilities, ability to accept mistakes and failures both from self and others, optimism, independence, trust and cooperative attitude.

Self-esteem is an important academic construct especially in education. According to APA (2021), it is one of the catalyst of education which enables learners reach their highest potential socially, intellectually, morally and physically. This is because it has a lot to do with how students feel about themselves and how much they like themselves socially and academically. Subsequently this like for self by a student affects the way he/she listens to the teacher, attends class activities, join in class work and values how the learning experience gained will help improve him/her as well as general attitude to life. Furthermore, apart from research naturally human thought influences feeling and behaviour as well as performance which turns life into self-fulfilling prophesy. Therefore a student who has self-doubt and lacks self-acceptance is unlikely to attain academic excellence. The big question is *“how can a student who lacks a sense of self-esteem establish a challenging goal or concentrate fully on academic work when he/she believes and feels it can't be achieved?”* (Jerylene Priyaharshini and Relton, 2014).

Self-esteem and academic performance inherently work in partnership positively and negatively each with a lasting effect on the other. It plays out not only in academic performance but in social and personal development. Jerylene Priyaharshini and Relton (2014) further opined that high self-esteem fosters high expectation on student which as well gives them confidence that their efforts will lead to success. This is because high self-esteem leads to heightened level of intrinsic motivation which makes student more ambitious as well as facilitate challenge to stimulate focused and sustained effort. Further research has also shown that a healthy self-esteem leads to development of a stronger sense of self-competence and efficacy as well as refocuses attention and effort on academic tasks and difficulties.

Students with healthy self-esteem persevere in the face of academic failure and obstacle. This sustained and focused effort also promote the attainment of academic performance which subsequently reinforces feeling of self-esteem. Moreover, students with unhealthy or low self-esteem set lower academic expectations in their academic pursuit. They also underestimate their academic capabilities, lack realistic knowledge of their own abilities and self-confidence to accomplish a task. Thus when a student develops unhealthy self-esteem, he/she may lose motivation in learning. For example, if a student loses confidence in his ability in school activity his/her grades will ultimately be affected as well as give up on academic dreams, hopes and plans for the future hence begins to feel unworthy of obtaining his/her goals which foster more low self-esteem.

According to APA (2021), self-esteem largely influences the degree of relationship a student has with other student including academic tasks. This is because positive self-esteem enables students develop positive relationship with peers, teachers and other members of the society while low and unhealthy self-esteem breeds in student feeling of deficiency and inability such that they feel rejected and subsequently affects their academic performance. It is also a crucial element of confidence and motivation students need in order to engage and achieve educational pursuits (Ferkany, 2018).

Furthermore, healthy self-esteem facilitates achievement of life goals as well as development of coping skills, confidence, feelings of worthiness and the ability to accomplish academic task. Students with healthy self-esteem also set goals as well as strives to achieve them with determination, commitment and steadfastness while students with unhealthy self-esteem lose hope in the face of failure, criticism rejection. They also suffer from anxiety and depression which results in withdrawal from efforts in order to achieve a goal (Kendra Cherry, 2022). This is because they lack diligence to use variety of strategies in order to overcome challenging tasks.

Importance of healthy self-esteem to Academic performance

- 1) Less fear and anxiety over school work, failure and mistakes which can be damaging to academic and social life. A healthy self-esteem help a student break out of the cycle of overthinking while embracing his/her full potential, explore new subject, role, hobby as well as follow their ambition without worry over people's perception of them.

- 2) It helps to improve both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of students. This is because low self-esteem can make a student feel like his/her goals and dreams are unachievable and impossible to reach. They also feel unworthy of achieving their dreams which subsequently make it impossible for them to maintain the required level of dedication and motivation required to excel academically.
- 3) More resilience in school activities. This is because when a student have a healthy self-esteem about him/herself, school and societal setbacks will be handled with ease. Instead of being crippled by failure, they get up quickly, learn from mistakes and try again. Also they believe so much in themselves to accept the fact that failure is part of life hence resorts to trying again while scouting for more opportunities which leads to academic success.
- 4) Stronger sense of real self. This becomes their real fuel and source of power because they understand who they are, their strength and self-worth which allows them embrace their full potentials despite setbacks and weaknesses.

How Teachers can help students develop healthy self-esteem

According to APA (2021), teachers can do the following in order to improve the self-esteem of students:

- a) By giving specific and genuine positive feedback on student's efforts rather than outcome.
- b) Teachers can point out concrete signs of progress regardless of size.
- c) By showcasing student's accomplishment or displaying their academic work in front of the class in order to encourage other student as well as calling parents to tell them how proud they should be as a result of a student's effort.
- d) Students should be engaged in conversation about their academic work, interest, skills and abilities while pointing out their weakness and subsequently pointing out ways of improving on them.
- e) Teachers should be mindful of ensuring equity in acknowledging and provision of positive feedback to students.

Education at secondary school level is the bedrock and foundation for higher knowledge in tertiary institutions. It is an investment as well as instrument for achieving technological, scientific, cultural, social and political developments. This is why the Federal ministry of Education (2014) stipulated national policies for secondary school as an agent of national development that fosters individual development for further societal worth and development with equal opportunities for all. However, no nation can function academically when her students are enveloped with unhealthy or low self-esteem hence there is need for self-esteem to be taken seriously as it has the capacity to destroy the country's younger generation and future workforce.

Furthermore, academic performance among secondary school students has always been a matter of great concern to educational stakeholder comprising parents, educators, students and government. Though a lot of measures has been taken over the years in order to improve on the situation nevertheless, a large number of secondary school students still perform poorly. Secondary school students in recent times also performed below expectations in internal and external examinations giving rise to a lot of unanswered questions as a result of this abnormally. This also led to serious investigation by researchers on the reasons for the poor academic performance including attributions to self-esteem among others.

Academic performance is the extent to which a student has attained a short or long term educational goals (Aryana, 2010). Academic performance is important because it is strongly linked to the positive outcomes we value. Students who are academically successful with high level of socio-emotional intelligence are more likely to be employed, have stable employment than those with less education (Regier, 2011). Academically, successful students have high self-esteem, lower level of depression and anxiety, less likely to abuse alcohol and engage in substance abuse. Academic performance is also very important for the successful physical, social, psychological, mental and medical development of students and better integration into the society.

In Nigeria, academic excellence, qualifications and high performance attainment have been regarded as the parameters for recruitment, placement and advancement in both public and private sector. Most important, these parameters are highly adopted in selection of candidates for admission into tertiary institutions and colleges. This is because grades serve as medium of communication to students, teachers and parents about a student's mastery of the object and criteria for graduation hence gives necessary information on a student for admission. Due to the high premium placed on academic performance, individuals do everything to obtain excellent results. Also because of the high premium attached to tests and grades as predictive factors, self-esteem has been considered as a major psychological construct affecting teaching and learning. Based on this expectations and the societal demand for excellence; students on their part thrive to compete and excel depending on their view on themselves and about themselves while schools are expected to influence their learning, socialization and vocational preparedness. This is because academic instruction is arguably the primary business of education and measurement of academic performance occurring at multiple levels for different purposes.

Theoretical Frame work

The essence of theoretical framework in a study of this nature is to establish scientific justifications why certain phenomenon occurs as it were with possibility of empirical verification hence the theoretical framework of this study was based on the following theories: Self-determination and Rosenberg theory. Self-determination theory as proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985) posited that people are motivated to grow and change by three innate and universal psychological needs namely competence, connection and autonomy. According to this theory, people tend to be driven by a need to grow and gain fulfilment hence the need for growth drives behaviour therefore gaining mastery over challenges and taking in new experiences are essential for developing a cohesive sense of self (Kendra Cherry, 2021).

Furthermore, while students are motivated to act through external rewards such as money and prices, internal motivation helps students gain knowledge and independence. For example, when a student fails to complete an academic task, if he/she has high self-esteem, he/she will easily admits to the fault, believe in the ability to solve the academic problem and subsequently solve it. This theory is important in this research because self-determination can only be as a result of a student ability to believe in him/herself which subsequently translates to believe in self and ability to solve academic problems.

Rosenberg theory as posited by Rosenberg (1965) also opined that self-esteem is an awareness of one's value system and emotional evaluation of self-worth. According to this theory, it also indicates high level of social adjustment thus critical in personal well-being of a student since it has a relationship with student's psychological health, social adjustment and quality of life. This theory is related to this research because when students are aware of the importance of education, it will help them become more determined to perform better academically.

Statement of problem

Self-esteem is an important construct and variable in psychology as well as teaching and learning. This is because the way and manner a student views his/her worth, abilities, capabilities, intellect and confidence will affect his/her perseverance and intrinsic motivation hence the ability to succeed or fail in academics.

Therefore the reason a student failed/passed might be attributed to his/her low/high self-esteem about him/herself which as well translates to more failures or success.

Research Question

- 1) What is the extent of relationship between the mean scores of self-esteem and academic performance among secondary school students in Enugu state?

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis guided the study at $P < 0.05$

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between the mean scores of self-esteem and academic performance among secondary school students in Enugu state.

Method of Research

The study design was correlation survey. Nworgu (2015) noted that this type of study seeks to establish what relationship exists between two or more variables. Thus the study was to explore the relationship between self-esteem and academic performance of secondary school students in Enugu state. The area of the study was Enugu state made up of six Educational zones of Awgu, Enugu, Obollo, Udi, Agbani and Nsukka respectively.

The study was delimited to senior secondary school 2 because of their adolescent age characterized by role confusion and geographically to Agbani zone because its schools are found in urban, rural and semi-urban areas hence the researcher seeks to analyze responses from student of different locations and background with a sample size of 600 students selected through stratified random sampling based on local government (Nkanu-west, Nkanu-East and Enugu South) representing urban, semi-urban and rural schools. It was further stratified under section (senior and junior) and gender (boys and girls) giving rise to six schools with 100 students respectively.

Research instrument was Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) which consists of 10 items structured in order to elicit relevant information on behavioural and emotional response of students to self-esteem while total marks obtained by a particular student in examination were taken as academic performance of student. The instrument has a four point likert scale of very high extent (VHE), high extent (HE), Low extent (LE) and very low extent (VLE). The instrument was face validated by three experts from Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation in Enugu State University of Science and Technology. Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach alpha with overall reliability co-efficient of 0.73.

Two trained assistants (classroom teachers) were engaged for data collection with 99% instrument returned and used for further analysis. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research question while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used in testing the null hypothesis. Thus any item with a mean score of 3.0-above =VHE, 2.5-above=HE, 2.0-above=LE and 1.5-above=VLE. Also when the cal (r) is greater than or equal to the crit (r), the relationship is significant and vice versa.

Results

Table 1a. Descriptive statistics on the level of relationship between self-esteem and academic performance of secondary school students in Enugu State.

Range of scores	Extent of relationship between self-esteem and academic performance	Percentage (%)
3.0-above	Very high extent	29%
2.5-above	High extent	21%
2.0-above	Low extent	28%
1.5-above	Very low extent	22%
Total		100%

Data on Table 1a showed the results of the first research question analyzed. The values indicated that 29% of student believes self-esteem affects academic performance at a very high extent, 21% students at low extent, 28% students at low extent while 22% at very low extent.

Table 1b. Descriptive statistics on self-esteem and on student's academic performance among secondary school students in Enugu state.

S/N	Rosenberg-self-esteem scale	VHE 4	HE 3	LE 2	VLE 1	FX	Mean X	SD	Decision
1	I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others	200	150	110	90	1560	2.8	0.3	HE
2	I feel that I have a number of good qualities	230	170	80	60	1660	3.0	0.4	VHE
3	All in all, I am inclined to feel that i am a failure	90	110	200	150	1240	2.3	0.2	LE
4	I am able to do things as well as most other people	65	85	190	210	1085	2.0	0.1	VLE
5	I feel I do not have much to be proud of	80	70	170	230	1100	2.0	0.1	VLE
6	I take a positive attitude towards myself	190	85	210	65	1500	2.8	0.3	HE
7	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	230	170	80	70	1660	3.0	0.4	VHE
8	I wish I could have more respect for myself	210	190	85	65	1645	3.0	0.4	VHE
9	I certainly feel useless at times	90	80	230	150	1210	2.2	0.1	VLE
10	At times, I think I am no longer good at all	200	70	170	90	1440	2.6	0.3	HE

Table 1b showed the results of the first research question analyzed. It revealed the values of mean, standard deviation and decisions of the respondents. The values indicated the various relationship self-esteem have on student's academic performance. Thus students believe generally that the relationship is on high extent.

Table 2. Pearson Product Moment Correlation between self-esteem and academic performance among secondary school students in Enugu state.

Variable	X	SD	N	r _{cal}	r _{crit}
Self-esteem	25.70	5.20			
Academic performance	19.64	4.10	600	-0.25	0.062

Table 2 showed results of the null hypothesis analyzed. The values appeared in negative figures and indicated relationship between academic performance of students and self-esteem. The null hypothesis was rejected and its alternative accepted at $p < 0.05$.

Discussion of Findings

Table 1 showed that self-esteem is an important factor in academic performance. This is in line with the work of Aryana (2020). She opined that self-esteem has a positive relationship with academic performance making it a major predictor of academic performance in students. This implies that self-esteem have severe impact on academic performance of secondary students thus should be taken seriously if academic performance of student will be improved.

Table 2 showed the correlation coefficient of the relationship between self-esteem and academic of secondary school students in Enugu state. This is evident as the cal (r) was -0.25 while the crit (r)

was 0.0062. This implies that there was a significant relationship though negatively skewed. This implies that what affects one leads to a downward slope of the other hence low self-esteem leads to low academic performance and vice versa. This is in line with the findings of Bhajat (2016) who posited that self-esteem has a significant relationship with academic performance of secondary school students.

Conclusion

Self-esteem is the panacea of modern life. This is because it affect the totality of man hence its widespread appeal attests to its importance especially in relation to academic performances of secondary school student. This is because secondary school age is characterized by adrenaline upsurge which often confuses students psychologically and otherwise. Therefore self-esteem as a predictor of academic performance should be treated with utmost importance as its lowest ebb can lead to suicide, drug abuse, increase in school drop-out, cultism and other related vices. Teachers, parents and society can help students by encouraging them to see themselves as people with worth and value.

Recommendation

The following recommendation were made from the findings:

- 1) Parents should learn to accept their kids for who they are. Students should be valued at home irrespective of their abilities and intellect. This is because judging students and expecting perfection from them at home puts them on on-due pressure to succeed hence they begin to see weaknesses instead of strength.
- 2) Teachers who are supposed to be positive models for students should live up to their calling. Acceptance and encouragement should be their watchword. Teachers should guide students according to their personality and intellectual prowess instead of generalization of abilities. This will help students to accept who they are while improving on them with the understanding they are never judged.
- 3) Curriculum planners should imbibe different educational plans for students. This will help in solving the problem of individual differences and inferiority complex amongst them.
- 4) Society should learn to accept each other especially in the spirit of co-operative efforts instead of bringing down. Over certification should be discouraged as well and acceptance of abilities irrespective of extent embraced. This will help student to develop healthy and high self-esteem.
- 5) Psychotherapy and adequate counselling should be initiated in secondary schools in Enugu state in order to address self-esteem especially among adolescents.

Conflict of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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