Relationship between Self-Esteem and Academic Achievements of Students: A Case of Government Secondary Schools in District Swabi, KPK, Pakistan

By

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Abstract

Self-esteem is an important academic construct in the process of education. It is recognized as one of the major factors in learning outcomes of students. Research has established that there is close relationship between self-esteem and academic achievements of students. This study also investigates government secondary school teachers' perceptions of the relationship between self-esteem and students' academic achievements. To collect data, a questionnaire, based on five point likert scale was designed and administered to 200 teachers. The selected teachers were randomly sampled from 30 government secondary schools in Swabi District. Data were collected, tabulated, analyzed and interpreted in simple percentage. The results demonstrated that students with positive self-esteem have high academic performance. Hence, it is inferred from the result of this study that there is a significantly high relationship between self-esteem and academic achievements of students. On the basis of this study it is recommended that teachers should encourage, respect and care their students in the process of schooling.

Keywords: self-esteem, teachers' perception, academic achievements of students

1. Introduction

Students with high self-esteem participate enthusiastically in the learning process. Such students are more confident, active and motivated towards learning. Students with high self-esteem perform better in examination as compared to those students who have low self-esteem (Jordon and Kelly (1990). Wood et al (1994) found that there is close relationship between self-esteem and high rate of academic achievement. Students with low self-esteem do not participate actively in the teaching and learning process. They remain silent, passive and have a withdrawal attitude towards learning activities. Similarly Tootoonchi (1993) highlights that students with low self-esteem do not expose their skills or willingness to take part in the learning process actively. They also try to hide their unfavorable characteristics which according to them are not liked by others. According to Gaus et al. (1994) students with poor self-esteem avoid anything that may put them in a risk of exposing their flaws to others. Due to this reason they do not show much interest in the activities which may bring them fame and name in the class.

Students with low self-esteem do not take challenges that could also bring rewards, laurels to them such as furtherance of their education and bringing them good name in their social circles both in school and at home (Wood et al, 1994). In another study Murayama et al. (1981) have examined the relationship between student's self-esteem, their achievements and classroom participation. The rate of academic achievements of students with high self-esteem was found to be highly significant. Owens (1992) looked at the effects of self-esteem of students in a post-high school context in Indiana State through a longitudinal study. The students were placed in three categories for investigation. These three categories of students consisted of students who joined various services after completion of their high school education. Data collected from this study showed that the students who had high level of self-esteem were

much happy and were enjoying their services. Studies conducted by Tootoonchi (1993) on prison inmates to see their level of self-esteem. The study revealed that majority of them did not have positive self-concept about their own selves. They had less confidence to share their views with others during their school days. They shirked participating in activities with their classmates. After this study the same prisoners were provided training on developing positive self-esteem. The post training interviews, and showed that this training had increased their self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-esteem.

McCaul el al (1992) found that individual with high self-esteem did not drop out from school. The greatest number dropout occurred in schools where the students had low self-esteem. Kelly and Jordan (1990) have concluded that self-esteem of gifted students (those with high degree of academic achievements) was much higher than those with low degree of academic achievements. Gifted students have thus more positive self-image and self-concept. According to Wiggins (1987) there are other variables which contribute towards self-esteem and increased rate of participation in learning activities by students such as, quality of family life, appreciation from teachers and parents, participation in co-curricular activities and positive peer relationships. This study was conducted in District Swabi to know the perceptions of teachers in government secondary schools as what did they think about the relationship between self esteem and students' academic achievement, because, it is observed that very few studies are available on this issue in Pakistani public schools. Although there are a few case studies which cannot be generalized due to the nature of the study and its limitations. Therefore, this quantitative study was conducted to investigate the perception of teachers in government schools about the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievements of students.

Statement of the problem
Self-esteem positively co-relates with increased academic performance of students. Research studies show a highly close relationship between academic achievements of students and their self-esteem. Most studies have concluded that students with high level of self-esteem have high level of academic achievements (Owen, 1992). However, in Pakistan, most of the studies have been conducted as case studies which could hardly be generalized. This study, hence, is important for two reasons. First, that it is conducted at secondary school level which is a crucial terminal point in students' schooling process and second, that it is a quantitative study which can be generalized to a larger population and is conducted in Swabi (one of the most populated district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan). The study specifically investigates teachers' perception of relationship between self-esteem and academic achievements of government secondary school students.

Research Objectives
1. Explore the perceptions of teachers regarding the relationship between self-esteem and students' academic achievements.
2. Discover the impact of self-esteem upon the academic achievements of students.
3. Extensively review previous studies on the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievements of students.
4. Find out the benefits of self-esteem for students in the process of education.
5. Suggest ways and means to improve self-esteem of students

Research questions
This research study attempts to answer the following questions;
1. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the relationship of self-esteem with academic achievements of students?
2. How self-esteem impacts academic achievements of students?
3. What are the previous studies about the relationship of self-esteem and students' academic achievements?
4. What are the benefits of high self-esteem for students?
5. How self-esteem of students could be improved?

Hypotheses

This study was directed by the following main hypotheses

1. There will be no significant difference between the perceptions of teachers in government secondary schools in district Swabi students regarding the effects of self-esteem on students' annual examination results.
2. There will be no significant difference between the perceptions of teachers in government secondary schools in district Swabi students regarding the effects of self-esteem on students' classroom participation.
3. There will be no significant difference between the perceptions of teachers in government secondary schools in district Swabi students regarding the effects of self-esteem on students' learning.

2. Literature Review

Self-esteem and academic achievement have close relationship and have a lasting impact each other. High self-esteem plays a highly important role not only in academic achievements of students but also in social and personal development as well (Pullmann and Allik, 2008). According to Galbraith et al. (2011) self-esteem is a feeling that guides individuals' behavior. It is a driving force behind motivation. In the words of Wiggins (1987) self-esteem is the ability of an individual to deal with different challenges of life. It is the feeling of being worthy to do something extra ordinary, to enjoy the right and the ability to do hard work. Amini (2004) explains that self-esteem is the overall self-evaluation in a positive way. It is the belief that one has to be competent and worthy enough to achieve something in life. Simply speaking, it is a feeling of self-competence and self-worth. According to Woolfolk (2005) self-esteem is the worth or value that individuals attach to their self-assessments.

Anthony et al. (2007) argue that students with high self-esteem have comparatively high academic achievements than students with low self-esteem. Self-esteem affects all aspects of the life of an individual, such as, job success, school achievement, social development and professional development. However, there is a close relationship between self-esteem and level of educational attainment of learners (Wiggin et al 1994). For .example, in one their studies Maruyama et al (2008) have found that students who generally feel confident show better performance in all areas of their studies and those who demonstrate less confidence show low performance.

According to Miraei (2005) students who feel inadequate or shy cannot participate in the learning activities more actively. Such students often remain hesitant and dejected which ultimately lowers their level of self-esteem. This lowered self-esteem does not allow them to excel in life (Baumeister et al. 2003). Students with low self-esteem not only feel dejected or discouraged, rather such students cannot solve their problems at school whenever they face it, whether it is academic or social (Zeinvand, 2006). On the other hand, Pullmann and Allik (2008) explain that a positively high self-esteem among students leads to success academically and socially. Because, according to Beane and Lipka (1986) self-esteem is a highly deciding factor in the overall developmental process of a child. This factor can potentially harm or help a student in his/her social life. For example, students with low self-esteem may have complicated relationship with peers or teachers. Even such students create problems for parents at home.

The degree of relationship of the students is conditioned by the level of self-esteem either positively or negatively. Positive high self-esteem enables students to develop positive relationship with peers, teachers and even with a common man. Low self-self-esteem breeds in students feelings of deficiency and inability. Such students feel rejected which dangerously affects the performance of the students in the process of education (Supple, 2000). High level of self-esteem facilitates the students to achieve the goals of life whatever, because it develops in an individual coping skills, confident and feelings of worthiness. Similarly, Grantham and Ford (2003) elaborate that students with high self-esteem set higher goals in life and strive to achieve them with determination, commitment and steadfastness. Such students do not lose

hope even in the face of failures. Because, such students have never ceasing belief and the will to attain the goal and they achieve it ultimately.

However, it has been discovered by Chiu (1990) that students with low self-esteem usually lose hope and confidence in the face of failures, criticism and rejection. Such students suffer from anxiety or depression which finally results in the withdrawal from the attempt or efforts to achieve the goal. Dawes (1998) elaborates students with low self-esteem do not always seem active or diligent enough to use variety of strategies or solutions when it comes to challenging tasks. Therefore, Delacourt (1997) argues that self-esteem is one of the essential catalysts of education to enable learners to reach the highest potential of development in all spheres of life, be it social, intellectual, moral and physical. Hence, self-esteem is positively correlated with academic outcomes.

3. Research Methodology

This is a descriptive research design which uses a close-ended questionnaire to collect data from a random sample of 350 teachers from 30 government secondary schools in district Swabi. According to Oyinloye (2010) descriptive method helps researchers to identify what is happening in order to predict the future. The ages of the sample varied from 25 to 45. The average ages of the sample teachers were 30.

Population and sampling
The population of the study was all the teachers in government secondary schools in district Swabi district. However, for this study randomly 350 teachers were sampled from 30 secondary government teachers in the district Swabi. Schools were selected from both rural and urban areas in terms of location.

Research tools /Instruments
The researcher designed and administered a questionnaire which contained 20 items based on Five Point Likert Scale to rate the level of self-esteem and its effects on academic achievements of students at secondary level. The study investigated the perceptions of teachers about relationship between self-esteem and academic achievements of students in the following areas.
i. Annual examination marks
ii. Classroom participation
iii. Students learning

Validation of the research instrument
To ensure the content validity of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted in five schools. 25 teachers were selected and the questionnaires were distributed. The schools and the teachers sampled for the pilot study were later excluded from the major research subjects. As a result of the pilot study, the questionnaire was refined and also shown to two PhD qualified university teachers. In the light of the suggestions given by experts and the results of the pilot study the questionnaire was reviewed and revised and finally administered to the selected sample by post. Prior to sending the questionnaire, consent letters were sent to every teacher along with a letter of permission from the Executive district education officer to get approval. Thus, the questionnaires were sent to teachers in the 30 selected sample schools. All the 350 administered questionnaires were received and thus the percentage of the return was 100%.

4. Analysis of the data

Results and findings

The scores from the questionnaires were collected, organized, collated and presented in percentage statistics. The analysis of the data is given in the below tables.

Table 1. Respondents' views on the relationship between self-esteem and annual examination results
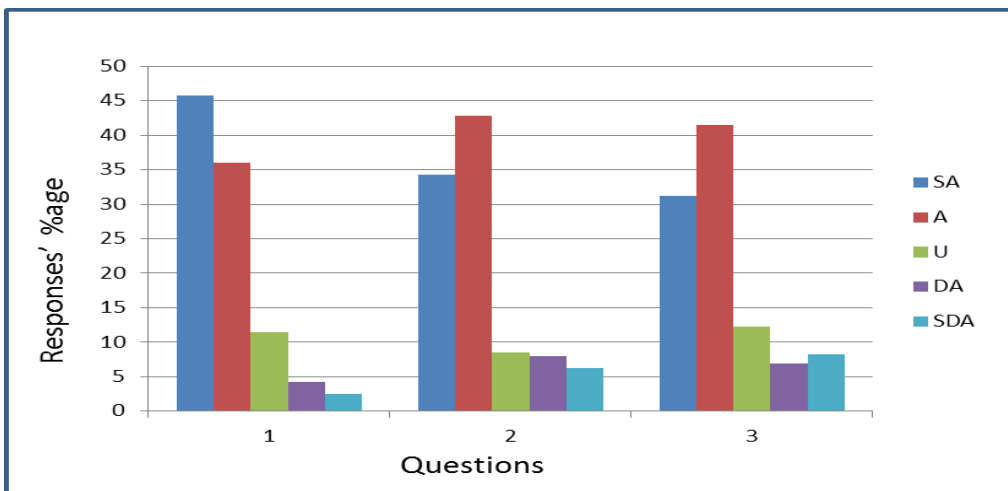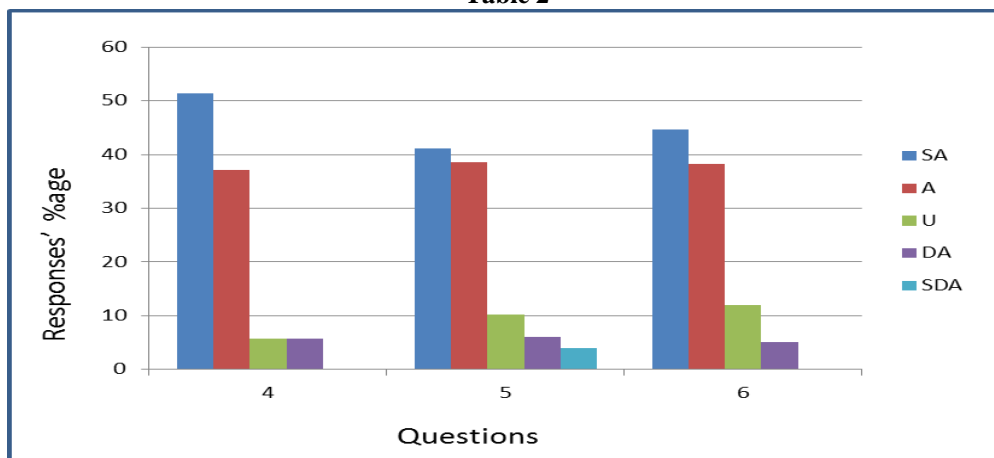

Table 2

The results presented in table 1 and 2 shows that majority of the teachers (45%) strongly agree that student with high self-esteem manage their examination time more effectively. Similarly, 42% were of the opinion that students who have high self-esteem can ask for clarifications for teachers with confident. Coincidently, 41% of the teachers also believe that students with high self-esteem make preparations for their examination well in time. At the same time, 44% teachers strongly disagreed to the statement that those students who have high self-esteem feel shy to ask questions from their teachers in classroom. Majority of the teachers, 51% strongly agreed to the statement that students with high self-esteem have the ability to express their ideas clearly on the examination answer sheets. Similarly, 41% agreed that students with high self-esteem have clear and legible writing which others can understand easily. 44% of the teachers strongly agreed to the statement that students with high self-esteem are able to understand questions asked in the examination without any difficulty.

2. Respondents' views on the relationship between high self-esteem and classroom participation of students
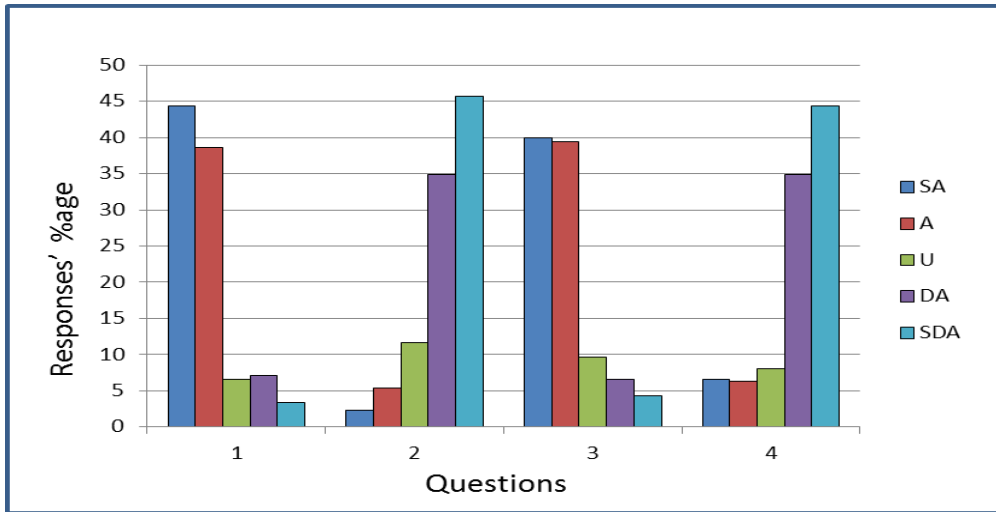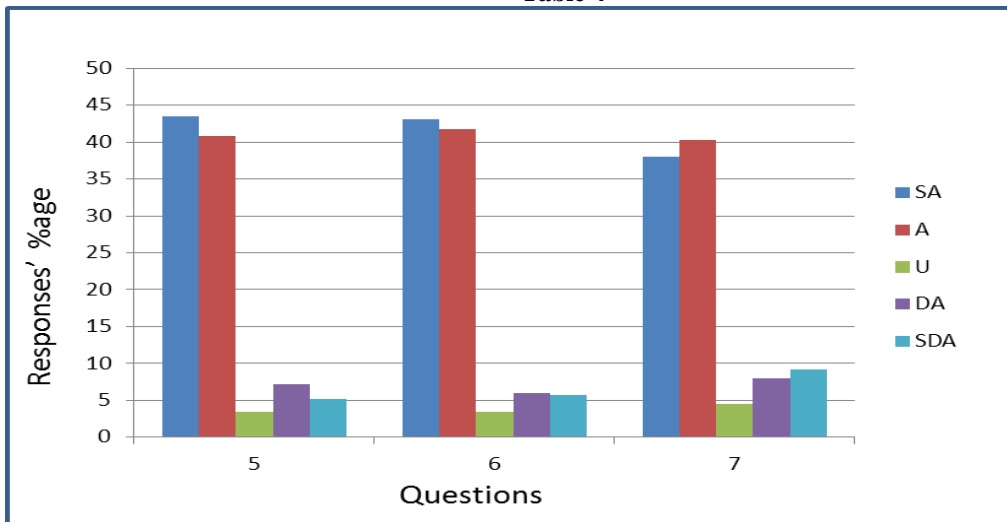
Table 3

Table 4

Results presented in Table 3 and 4 show that 44% of the teachers strongly agree that students with high self-esteem have positive attitude towards their class mates. More than 45% strongly disagree that students with high self-esteem share views in the classroom without any confident. 40% of the teachers strongly agree that students with high self-esteem take part in classroom activities without any hesitation. Similarly, 44% were strongly of the view that students with high self-esteem feel shy to ask questions from teachers in the classroom. More than 43% teachers also strongly agreed that students with high self-esteem show leadership in classroom activities during teaching and learning. Similarly, 43% were of the view that students with high self-esteem show high interest in classroom activities.

Moreover, more than 40% were strongly of the view that students with high self-esteem cooperate and collaborate with their classmates during the teaching and learning process.

3. Respondents' views on the relationship between students' learning and self-esteem
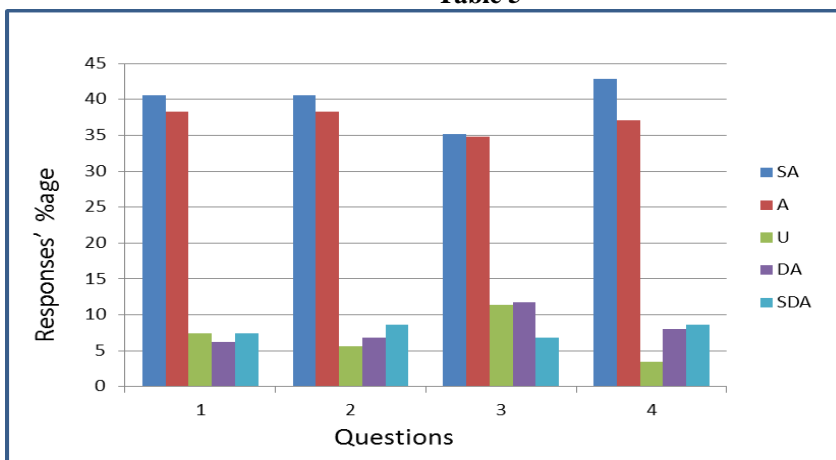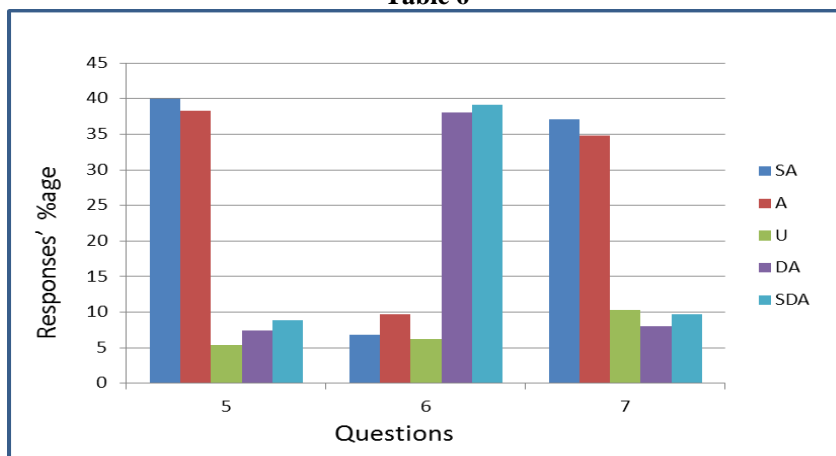
Table 5

Table 6

Results presented in table 5 and 6 shows that majority 40% of the teachers strongly agree students with high self-esteem have motivation for learning. Similarly, 40% strongly agree that such students show creativity in educational performance. A large majority 42% also strongly agree that students with high self-esteem observe social skills in the classroom during teaching and learning process. 42% of the teachers further strongly agree that such students enthusiastically participate in the classroom activities. In the same way, 40% also strongly agree that students with high self-esteem do their class assignments well in time.

More than 39% strongly disagree that student with high self-esteem remain passive most of the time during teaching and learning process. More than 37% of the teachers strongly agree that students with high self-esteem cooperate with their teachers in the process of teaching and learning by performing the assigned duties effectively and efficiently.

5. Conclusion

The above analysis shows that majority of the teachers have strongly agreed to the statements which favor the effects of high self-esteem on student's higher rate of interests in classroom activities, confident, positive attitudes towards classmates, sense of collaboration, motivation for learning and sharing of views

in classroom discussions. Thus it is interesting to find out on the basis of this study that there is a very highly significant co-relation between self-esteem and degree of academic achievements of students in government secondary schools. Finally, on the basis of this study it may be concluded that self-esteem has deeper positive effects upon academic achievements of students at secondary level.

Future research

For deeper understanding the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievements of students, researchers may conduct studies on larger sample size and in varying contexts so that the effects of self-esteem could be studied on much broader level. The gender aspects of self-esteem can also be investigated by obtaining larger sample size for broader understanding of the concept of self-esteem and its effects on academic achievements of students.

Recommendations of the study

This study recommends that teachers should make efforts to enhance and sustain the level of self-esteem of their students. This could be possible when the teachers empower them in the process of teaching and learning. This study further recommends that head teachers of the schools should encourage their staff. The school heads should also celebrate the successes of the students in different fields of the school such as sports gala, festival, annual day celebrations, mother days, teacher days, spring festivals and so on. These steps will surely improve the self-esteem of the students, because, the students will feel proud to be associated with a quality institution where ample opportunities are provided for their development. This feeling will further boost up the confidence of the community from where the students come and parents will own the schools. Building of confidence is the hallmark of positive personality development of the students which is one of the aims of education. On the basis of this study it is recommended for the educational authorities and policy makers of the schools to provide resources to schools such as reading materials, computers, library and physical infrastructure for the development of the school systems. Physical abuse and corporal punishment of the students should be avoided. It shatters the confidence of the students and students feel vulnerable in an atmosphere of fear and torture. The study also strongly recommends that there should be proper provisions for continued professional development of the teachers as well as the head teachers to improve the teaching and learning environment. These efforts will augment the school academic and physical infra-structure of the secondary schools which are vital terminal stages in the lives of the students before entering into colleges and universities.

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