

# Self-Esteem and its Correlates to Academic Performance Among University Freshmen Students

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## ABSTRACT

Self-esteem is a personal opinion of an individual about herself/himself and the appreciation of his/her worth. It refers to an accurate, justified, balanced appreciation of one's worth as a person. However, it can also refer to inflated, grandiose, unwarranted sense of conceited superiority over others. Although it is assumed that self-esteem is a trait that is innate and stable across time within a person, studies have shown that it may not be the case sometimes. Some experts argued that this trait can be influenced by some factors such as family, peers, environment and school. Likewise, self-esteem is believed to have a relationship with the socioeconomic status, health and health related behavior, and self-efficacy.

Reports and studies have implicated the significance of self-esteem to academic performance or achievement. Hence, the present undertaking was conducted to determine this line of argument. The result of the study indicated that both male (Mean=2.745) and female (Mean=3.3) students showed positive perception of their self-esteem. When the perceived self-esteem of the male was compared with the female counterpart, using the Pearson Product Moment, the obtained value of  $r$  at  $p \leq 0.05$  is 0.948. The research showed a very high correlation based on Munro's strength of correlation coefficients. However, the perceived self-esteem of both, male and female respondents showed a low correlation with their academic performance ( $r=0.42$ ).

**Keywords:** *self-esteem, self-concept, self-image, efficacy, self-worth, academic performance*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Self-esteem is literally defined by how much value people place on themselves; it is the evaluative component of self-knowledge. High self-esteem refers to a highly favorable global evaluation of self, while low self-esteem refers to unfavorable definition of the self. Self-esteem may refer to an accurate, justified, balanced appreciation of one's worth as a person and one's successes and competencies, but it can also refer to an inflated, arrogant, grandiose, unwarranted sense of conceited superiority over others. Whereas, low self-esteem can be an accurate, well-founded understanding of one's shortcomings as a person or a distorted, even pathological sense of insecurity and inferiority.

Self-esteem is the personal opinion of a person about himself or herself and appreciation of his/her worth. An individual with high self-esteem has many positive effects and benefits. Students who feel positive about themselves have fewer sleepless nights, succumb less easily to pressure of conformity by peers, and are less likely to use drugs and alcohol; more persistent at difficult tasks, happier and more sociable, and most importantly, tend to perform better academically.

There are individuals who have low self-esteem; apparently, this is due to poor self-image which might have been brought about by their negative attitude. These people may feel inferior and not able to face obstacles that confront them. They are submissive to the will of others and would commit what others would want them to do, which in the end, they lose self-respect and confidence. However, there are some who have high self-esteem, as such, they are: confident and lack anxiety, highly motivated, able to face and tackle problems, and happy with their situation. The family plays a vital role in the development of an individual's self-esteem. The synergistic events and the consequent behavior of each member of the family contribute to each one's unique individuality. Hence, a parent with high self-esteem would most likely influence the personality and well-being of the child. Likewise, the school may also play an important role in the development and creation of positive self-esteem among the students, particularly in the early years of their studies. Somehow, it is believed that those people with high self-esteem have low self-destructive tendencies.

Conrath (1986) argued that the best way for a child to sustain a sense of confidence is to acquire and demonstrate competence. Consequently,

self-confidence will be revealed with success in skill development and learning. In addition, academic achievement is influenced by perceived competence, autonomy, and motivation (Weist et al., 1998).

Accordingly, “we develop and maintain our self-concept through the process of taking action and then reflecting on what we have done and what others tell us what we have done. We reflect on what we have done and can do in comparison to our expectations and the expectations of others and to the characteristics and accomplishments of others” (Brigham, 1986). Indeed, self-concept is not innate; it is developed or learned in the course of individual interaction with the environment and reflecting on the interaction.

This dynamic aspect of self-concept (self-esteem) is essential in the sense that it can possibly be modified or changed. Franken (1994) stated that “there is a growing body of research which indicates that it is possible to change the self-concept. Self-change is not something that people can will but rather depends on the process of self-reflection. Through self-reflection, people often come to view themselves in a new, more powerful way, and it is through this new, more powerful way of viewing the self that people can develop possible selves”.

There seems to have been an agreement between self-esteem and academic achievement. It has been argued that students, to be able to perform well academically, should have positive self-esteem. In fact, it was reported that when the level of self-esteem is enhanced, there is a corresponding increase in academic performance, whereas, the academic performance declines when there is a decrease in self-esteem (Covington, 1989). This contention is tantamount to saying that as the level of self-esteem increases, there is a corresponding achievement score, and as self-esteem decreases, achievement also decreases. It appears that self-esteem could have been most likely the result rather the cause of academic performance (Holly, 1987).

Thus, self-esteem is a perception rather than a reality. For example, it may refer to a person’s belief about whether he or she is intelligent and attractive, but it does not necessarily say anything about whether the person is actually intelligent and attractive.

Then, to show that self-esteem is itself important, research would have to demonstrate that their beliefs about themselves have an important consequence regardless of what the underlying realities are.

Henceforth, in view of the above premise, the present study was undertaken to evaluate the self-esteem of freshman students enrolled in the degree Bachelor of Science in Biology major in Biotechnology, Rizal Technological University, Mandaluyong City. Specifically, the study endeavored to answer the following questions:

1. What is the perception of the students in regards to their self-esteem?
2. Would there be a relationship between the self-esteem of the male and female students?
3. Would there be a relationship between the perceived self-esteem and the academic performance of the respondents? The profile of the respondents was also taken, specifically: a. Sex and b. Age

## METHODOLOGY

### A. Participants-Respondents

The data were collected from thirty-three (33) B.S. Biology major in Biotechnology freshmen of the College of Arts and Sciences, Rizal Technological University, Mandaluyong City, Philippines School Year 2011-2012.

### B. Data gathering Procedure

A self-administered survey that rates the level of self-esteem using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Test (Rosenberg, 1985) was used. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale Test was used because it is being referred to as generally the standard tool against which other measures of self-esteem are compared. It is composed of ten (10) questions and scored using the four-point response scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Blascovitch and Tanaka (1991) reported that the items included in

the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Test are face valid, scale is short and easy. In addition, the tool has the extensive and accepted reliability and validity information.

A higher score in the scale indicates high self-esteem, whereas lower score in the scale indicates weak or low self-esteem. The grade weighted average (GWA) of the students from the previous semester was computed and reflected by the respondents on the survey instrument.

### **C. Statistical Tool**

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to determine the level of significance of the following:

- a. Relationship between the perceived self-esteem between the male and female respondents.
- b. Relationship between the perceived self-esteem of the male and female respondents against their GWA. The GWA was used as a measure of their academic achievement.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Reports and studies have implicated the significance of self-esteem to academic performance or achievement which are presented in the succeeding discussion.

There were 33 freshman students enrolled in the bachelor's degree in biology program and the respondents of the study. From the total population, 11 were male students which composed the 33.33% of the overall respondents, whereas, 22 students were female which composed the 66.67%.

The ages of the respondents who participated in the study were as follows: There were 16 students or 48.486% of the total respondents under the 16 and below age bracket. This was followed by 14 students or 44.424% under the 17-19 age bracket; and three (3) students or (9.091%) under the 20 to 23 age bracket.

**Table 1**  
The Perceived Self-Esteem of the Student Respondents

Respondents	Over all Mean	Adjectival Interpretation
Male	2.745	A
Female	3.300	SA

Legend: A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree

The over-all mean perception of the male student respondents in regards to their self-esteem based on the result of the self-accomplished survey is 2.745, with an adjectival interpretation as agree. While, the female student respondents arrived at a mean of 3.300 which is interpreted as strongly agree.

From the result, it could be inferred that the student respondents have a positive outlook of themselves.

As a whole, the male student respondents are satisfied with their “self and are also aware of their good qualities which showed a mean of 3.090, respectively. The respondents perceived strongly of their worth as individuals and apparently are at par with other people that surround them (Mean 3.090). But most of all, they recognized their positive attitude towards their “self” (Mean -3.272).

The perception of the female student respondents in regards to their self-esteem based from the result of the self-accomplished survey form is reflected in Table 2.

As shown, the female students showed similar perceived self-esteem as compared to the male respondents. However, it is very evident that the female students have a higher regard on themselves as shown by the perceived over all mean of 3.300 which is interpreted as strongly agree. Likewise, the female students perceived highly of their self-satisfaction as indicated by the mean score of 3.954, which means strongly agree. In addition, they strongly agree that they have good qualities (Mean 3.500), and can perform tasks comparable to other people (Mean 3.636). The female respondents strongly agree that they are persons of worth and could translate equally with other people (Mean: 3.909).

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**Table 2**  
Perceived Positive Self-Esteem Score by Both Male and Female  
Student Respondents

Items	Male		Female	
	Mean	Adjectival Interpretation	Mean	Adjectival Interpretation
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	3.090	SA	3.954	SA
I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	3.090	SA	3.500	SA
I am able to do things as well as most other people.	3.272	SA	3.636	SA
I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal lane with others.	3.090	SA	3.909	SA
I take a positive attitude toward myself.	3.272	SA	3.818	SA

Legend: \*SA=strongly agree

Somehow, the male respondents agree that they feel that sometimes they are not good at all (Mean 2.727). However, in consideration to their positive outlook in life, they strongly disagree that they have the least qualities to be proud of (Mean 2.181), useless at times (Mean 2.000), and above all they strongly disagree that as a whole they are inclined to feel useless and a failure (Mean 1.545).

In spite of some good perceived behavior, however, the female student respondents strongly feel that they are useless sometimes (Mean 3.409). Similarly, they disagree that they do not have good qualities to be proud of (Mean -2.409), at times, feel useless (Mean 2.454). Likewise, the female respondents do not agree that they are inclined to feel that their lives are a failure (Mean -2.272).

**Table 3**  
Pearson Moment Product Correlation ( r )

Group	Over all Mean	GWA	r
Male	2.745	1.97	(b) 0.42
Female	3.818	1.95	( c ) 0.29
(a) r	0.948116		

**Note:**

- a. Perceived Self-esteem Between Male and Female
- b. Perceived Self-esteem of the Male and GWA
- c. Perceived Self-esteem of the Female and GWA

Table 3 reflects the Pearson Moment Product Correlation. As shown, when the perceived self-esteem of the male student respondents was compared to that of the female counterpart, using the Pearson Moment Product Correlation, the obtained  $r$  at  $p \leq 0.05$  is 0.948116. This value showed a very high correlation based from the Munro's descriptive term for the strength of correlation coefficients (Kerlinger, 1986).

When the perceived self-esteem of the male student respondents was compared to their grade weighted average (GWA), using the Pearson Moment Product Correlation, the obtained  $r$  at  $p \leq 0.05$  is 0.42. Likewise, based from Munro's descriptive term for the strength of correlation coefficients, the obtained  $r$  has an interpretation of low correlation.

Lastly, when the perceived self-esteem of the female student respondents was compared to their grade weighted average (GWA), using the Pearson Moment Product Correlation, the obtained  $r$  at  $p \leq 0.05$  is 0.29 and is interpreted as with low correlation based from the Munro's descriptive term for the strength of correlation.

### **Adolescents With High Self-Esteem and Other Related Factors**

Generally, in psychology the word "self" connotes conscious reflection of his/her "being" or identity as an object apart from other or from the environment. Furthermore, "self" can be viewed in two ways: self-concept (cognitive) and self-esteem (affective). Self-concept is being referred to as "the totality of a complex, organized, and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence" (Purkey, 1988). Whereas, self-esteem generally refers to how one feels and how one values oneself or one's self-worth. Franken (1994) demonstrated that self-concept is related to self-esteem and wrote "people who have good self-esteem have a clearly differentiated self-concept and when people know themselves they can maximize outcomes because they know what they can and cannot do. Self-concept has been defined as how a person perceives himself or herself



which is formed through exposure and experiences with the environment, influenced by environmental reinforcements and significant others (Shavelson et al., 1976).

Several studies have been reported trying to implicate the influence of the societal stature of parents and children in a family to their self-esteem. When an assessment was made on this premise, Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978) reported no association between social class of parents and the self-esteem among younger children, a modest association among adolescents, and a moderate association among adults based on their own social class.

Self-esteem has been shown to be related with several behavioral and/or psychological factors. Report showed that adolescents with high self-esteem are less depressed, more satisfied and rank lower on psychological, psycho-physiological measures of anxiety, on overt aggression, irritability and anomie (Rosenberg, 1985). It appears that global self-esteem is relatively stable and does not change easily (Bachman & O'Malley, 1986).

In school, the most probable significant others are the teachers and classmates who most likely or unlikely give a significant impact on the student interest in school work. However, literature review showed that the teacher is likely the least effective agent of change (Hattie, 1992).

Furthermore, this was substantiated by a study which demonstrated that in early childhood education, the teacher is most unlikely influential in enhancing academic performance beyond the family (Scarr & Thompson, 1994).

The result of the present study would avouch the above cited argument. After being barely one year in the university, the student's academic performance apparently showed no bearing with the self-esteem of the student respondents. Although they showed positive perception of their self-esteem, it failed to establish possible correlation with their academic performance. Then, it is most likely that the student respondents of the present undertaking have already established and attained directly or indirectly a certain level of self-esteem that could have been influenced by the family, peers and school starting from their elementary grade.

A study among elementary grade students reported a positive correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement (Strassburger

et al., 1990). In addition, other workers reported similar results conducted among high school students (Bayani, 2000; Lee et al., 2001).

Somehow, cultural influence may also be an underlying and contributory variable in shaping the very individuality of a person and may contribute to his/her academic success. It was reported that Hispanics had a significantly lower mean grade-point average compared to the Anglos; however, their mean perceived self-esteem score was found not significant (Strassburger et al., 1990).

In contrast, study showed that honors students demonstrated higher academic self-esteem and competency. Apparently, academic self-esteem became the motivational factor for the direct correlation between academic achievement and self-esteem (Moeller, 1994). Seemingly, it was most likely that students with low levels of academic achievement attribute less importance to school-related areas and reveal less favorable attribute towards school (Alves-Martins et al., 2002). In a similar report, a significant result was obtained when academic achievement was compared with the self-esteem of college students (Bray, 2000).

Marsh (1992) showed that the relationship of self-concept to school achievement is very specific. He asserted that self-concept and non-academic aspects of self-concept are not related to academic work; general academic achievement measures are related moderately to academic success. On the other hand, Hamacheck (1995) asserted that self-concept and school achievement are related.

Now, the major issue is the direction of the relationship: Does self-concept produce achievement or vice versa?

Bridgeman (1986) wrote that evidences have accumulated, to indicate that level of school success over many years predicts level of regard of self and one's own ability; whereas level of self-esteem does not predict level of school achievement.

Then, it is implied that the academic successes and failures of the students depend on their history of success and failure that gives them the information with which to assess themselves (Gage & Berliner, 1992). Henceforth, increasing self-esteem results when success is improved relative to expectations.

## **CONCLUSION**

The present undertaking attempted to evaluate the self-esteem of freshman students enrolled in the degree Bachelor of Science in Biology Major in Biotechnology. Likewise, it attempted to establish possible correlation between their self-esteem and academic performance.

The results of the study established the following:

1. Both the male and female student respondents showed positive perception of their self- esteem.
2. The perceived self-esteem of the male and female respondents showed a very high correlation based from the Munro's Strength of Correlation Coefficients.
3. The self-esteem of the student respondents showed low correlation with their academic performance based from Munro's Strength of Correlation Coefficients.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

In view of the results and findings of the present work, it is hereby recommended that:

1. Further studies be done to integrate some factors that may have an influence on the self-esteem of the students such as, the economic well-being of the students and the parents and other factors that might show relevance in the study.
2. It could be worthwhile to determine the self-esteem of honors students and average students and relate the perceived self-esteem to the academic performance.
3. Whereupon experts are still divided on the issue of relationship between self-esteem and academic performance, it is recommended that both should be considered as integral components of students' learning experience in the institution.

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