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Self-Esteem, Academic Achievement, Field of Study and Gender Differences: The Case of the Students at the Lebanese University, Lebanon

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Abstract:
This research aimed to study the correlation between self-esteem, on one hand, and academic achievement, field of study and gender on the other hand.
The population of our study comprised 35 high-achieving and 313 normally achieving students at the Lebanese University. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was used to assess the participants' levels of self-esteem.
*The results showed that the mean scores of self-esteem in high-achieving and normally achieving students did not statistically differ (*p = .075 > .05*). Likewise, the correlation between self-esteem and gender difference did not reveal any significant difference (*p = .902 > .05*). Nevertheless, basic sciences' students scored significantly higher on self-esteem scale compared to educational sciences students (*p =.038 < .05*).*

Keywords: Self-Esteem, Lebanese university, academic achievement, gender, field of study

1. Introduction

Students' academic achievement has always been of great importance to the students themselves, to their parents, and also to education professionals. Literature draws attention to many influential factors on academic performance and achievement. Among these factors we are interested in *Self-esteem*. The attention given to the subject of "self-esteem" has aroused great interest among psychologists, educators, and even widely in society. This interest is the result of a consistent pattern of studies disclosing the relationship that seems to exist between a low self-esteem and a large number of academic and even social problems facing the youth of today. Yet, we all see self-esteem as an important ingredient of success: too little self-esteem can leave people feeling down or even depressed. On the other hand, too much self-esteem can also be damaging; so the ideal is to be somewhere in the middle.

Commonly, self-esteem is considered as a bunch of beliefs and attitudes about ourselves, but this concept is much wider and more complex in psychology. Since the era of William James to these days, the study of self-esteem has spawned massive research literature. In the present study, we will content with few of them. In his monumental textbook: "The principles of psychology" (1890), William James, one of the pioneer scholars who dealt with this topic, postulated that "our self-feeling in this world depends entirely on what we *back* ourselves to be and do. It is determined by the ratio of our actualities to our supposed potentialities; a fraction of which our pretensions are the denominator and the numerator our success: thus, Self-esteem = Success / Pretensions" (pp.170-171).

By following this logic, we can suppose that a student with a high self-esteem would perceive himself as competent because he has attained his objectives. To the contrary, a student with low self-esteem would perceive himself as non-competent. Thus, self-esteem would depend on the importance that a student grants to his success in his field of study.

This theory was adopted and reproduced later by many researchers and psychologists. Around the end of the first half of the twentieth century, Maslow (1943) stated that self-esteem results from the feeling of being useful and valuable.

A few years later, Erik Erikson (1950) established, within his *psychosocial development* theory, a more comprehensive view of the origins of self-esteem. He stated that the incapacity to survive developmental stages crises leads to lack of self-esteem.

Lately, Bandura (1997) say self-esteem closely attached to one's believes in his capacities and aptitudes.

According to Glaus (1999), high self-esteem is often associated with high-level psychological health and functioning.

As for Hewit (2009), self-esteem as a reflection of the individual's overall subjective emotional evaluation of his or her own worth. Hence, self-esteem becomes one's judgment of himself and consequently becomes an attitude toward his entity.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Self-esteem and Academic Achievement
Research is not very conclusive about the influence of self-esteem over academic performance and findings are still not consistent across studies. For instance, Baumeister (2003), stated that efforts to boost the self-esteem of pupils have not been shown to improve academic performance and may sometimes be counterproductive. He even went further by saying there was no evidence that boosting

self-esteem caused benefits. Other studies failed to find it within particular populations. For instance, Vialle, Heaven & Ciarrochi (2005) couldn't find any correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement for the gifted group in their study; same results were noted by Alves-Martin and his colleagues (2002) among a population af American ninth-grade students.

However, others declare that high self-esteem can lead to high academic achievement (Dale et al., 2013; Marsh et al., 1999). Furthermore, the results of Aryana's study (2010) revealed a significant positive relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement among 100 students in Qaemshahr schools. He also concluded that high self-esteem was important factor and strengthen the prediction of academic achievement in students.

Moreover, Lane and his colleagues found, in 2004, a significant relationship between self-esteem and self-efficacy, and declared that self-efficacy seemed to mediate the relationship between performance accomplishments and academic performance.

2.2. Self-esteem and Gender
The topic of self-esteem and gender also remains debatable and unsettled (Rosli *et al.*, 2012), nevertheless, Baumeister (1993) adolescent females, on average, have a lower sense of self-esteem than adolescent males.

Kendler, Gardner and Prescott (1998) suggested that individual differences in self-esteem in both men and women were best explained by genetic and individual-specific environment factors.

Two analyses were conducted in the United States to examine gender differences in global self-esteem provided evidence that males score higher on standard measures of global self-esteem than females, though the difference was small (Kling etal. 1999).

Yet, Baldwin and Hoffmann (2002) found gender effects are stronger among younger adolescents rather than older ones.

Joshi & Srivastava (2009) reported that male adolescents scored significantly higher in global self-esteem than females. Many studies reported the same results stating that girls experience lower self-esteem as compared to boys (Carlson, Uppal & Prosser 2000; DuBois et al., 2002).

Moksnes and Espnes (2013) studied gender differences on life satisfaction and self-esteem as well as the association between self-esteem and life satisfaction in Norwegian adolescents. The results indicated that males had higher scores on self-esteem. Similar results were noted by Arshad and his colleagues (2015) in a study conducted in Pakistan comprised a total number of 80 students from G.C University Faisalabad.

Sadaat, Ghasemzadeh & Soleimani (2012), conducted a research, which aimed to study self-esteem and its relationship with academic achievement of Iranian university students. The results showed a significant difference in self-esteem among male and female students. Nevertheless, male students for family self-esteem received higher scores than female students.

On the other hand, a study conducted on Iranian undergraduates in Malaysian universities using revealed no significant gender difference in self-esteem (Naderi et al. 2009).Likewise proved to be the results collected by Aryana (2010). Similar results were yielded by Teoh and Nur Afiqah (2010) who found that no association between the gender and self-esteem amongst young Malaysian adults.

2.3. Self-esteem and Field of Study
The lack of researches regarding the relationship between self-esteem and the field of study made us content with the results we were going to find.

3. Research Question and Hypotheses
Given the variable results obtained from previous studies and the lack of similar ones conducted in Lebanon, the purpose of our study was to determine the levels of self-esteem of the students at the Lebanese University, and assess the relationship between self-esteem and the academic achievement (high/normal achievement), the field of study (basic sciences at the faculty of sciences/ educational sciences at the faculty of pedagogy) and the gender differences among the population of this study.

3.1. Research Questions
This study was attempting to answer the following question:
1.   Is there any relationship between self-esteem and levels of academic achievement?
2.   Is self-esteem influenced by the choices they took regarding their fields of study?
3.   Does self-esteem vary according to gender differences?

3.2. Hypotheses
As potential answers to the above formulated questions, the following null hypotheses were set up for this study:
1.   There is no significant difference in the mean of self-esteem scores of highly achieving university students and the normally achieving ones.
2.   There is no significant difference in the mean of self-esteem scores of basic sciences students and educational sciences ones.
3.   There is no significant difference in the mean of self-esteem scores of males and females.

4. Method

4.1. Participants

Participants of this study consisted 400 students attending the public Lebanese University in Lebanon, among them 50 *high-achievers*, were randomly assigned to receive an email message enclosing a link to an electronic version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES).

When missing data was taken into account, our sample comprised 35 *high-achiev*ing students (13 educational sciences and 22 basic sciences) and 313 *normally achieving ones* (179 basic sciences and 134 educational sciences). A total of 181 males and 167 females were investigated for this study, where 60.3% of the participants were aged between 18 and 21 years old, 37.4% aged between 22 and 25, and only 2.3% were older than 26 years.

4.2. Instrument of Data Collection

All participants completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), a self-report tool widely used by psychologists and sociologists for assessing global self-esteem. The RSES consists of 10 statements, designed to measure the degree of self-worth and self-acceptance, scored on a four-point Likert scale from where items are scored 'Strongly disagree' (0) to 'Strongly agree' (3). Items with a negative valence are reverse coded so that higher values reflect more positive self-appraisals. Scores across items should be averaged, giving a range of zero (low self-esteem) to 30 (high self-esteem). Moreover, scores between 15 and 25 are within normal range; scores below 15 suggest low self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1989).

In this present study, the reliability of the RSES was determined through Cronbach alpha where .79 was found, indicating acceptable internal reliability.

4.3. Procedures and Tools of Data Analysis

Prior to data collection, we explained to the participants about the nature of our study, and informed them that their names would remain anonymous. After obtaining their verbal concession, we administered coded questionnaires.

The SPSS for Windows (version 20) was used for statistical analysis of the quantitative data. Moreover, to examine self-esteem differences regarding academic achievement (highly achieving/normally achieving), field of study (math, physics and chemistry at the faculty of sciences/ preschool and primary education at the faculty of pedagogy) and gender differences (male/female), *Independent Samples T-Tests* were performed.

5. Results

Although the highly achieving students (N = 35) exhibited higher mean score of self-esteem (M = 23.6, SD = 3.72) than to the normally achieving students (N = *315*, M = 22.12, SD = 4.753) (See Table 1), these score remain within the normal boundaries (15-25) (Rosenberg, 1989).

Self-esteem			N	Mean	Std. Deviation
	Academic Achievement	Highly Achieving	35	23.60	3.720
		Normally Achieving	313	22.12	4.753
	Field of study	Basic Sciences	201	22.71	4.660
		Educational Sciences	147	21.66	4.646
	Gender	Male	181	22.24	4.842
		Female	167	22.30	4.504

Table 1: Means and standard deviations for the RSES used among the study participants

To test the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in the mean of self-esteem scores of highly achieving university students and the normally achieving ones, an independent samples *t*-tests was conducted. This test did not reach statistical significance, $t (346) = 1.783$, $p = .075 > .05$ (See Table 2); d= .347. The effect size for this analysis (d = .347) was found to be medium based on benchmarks suggested by Cohen (1988). Consequently, we accept the null hypothesis

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Self-esteem	Equal variances assumed	3.191	.075	1.783	346	.075	1.482	.831
	Equal variances not assumed			2.167	47.378	.035	1.482	.684

Table 2: Independent Samples T-Test for the RSES according to the academic achievement

On the other hand, basic sciences' students (N = 201) presented higher self-esteem (M = 22.71, SD = 4.66) than the educational sciences students (N = 147, M = 21.66, SD = 4.646) (See Table 1). To test the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in the mean of self-esteem scores these two groups, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted. This test was found to be

statistically significant. $t(346) = 2.082$, $p = .038 < .05$ (See Table 3); d= .225. The effect size for this analysis (d = .225) was found to be small based on Cohen's convention. Consequently, we reject the null hypothesis.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Self-esteem	Equal variances assumed	.05	.822	2.082	346	.038	1.052	.505
	Equal variances not assumed			2.083	315.300	.038	1.052	.505

Table 3: Independent Samples T-Test for the RSES according to the field of study

However, although females (N = 167) scored slightly higher self-esteem (M = 22.30, SD = 4.504) than males (N = 181, M = 22.24, SD = 4.842) (See Table 1), no significant difference was reported by an independent samples t-test, $t(346) = -.123$, $p = .902 > .05$ (See Table 4); d= -.013. The effect size for this analysis (d = -.013) was found to be small based on Cohen's convention. Consequently, we accept the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in the mean of self-esteem scores of males and females.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Self-esteem	Equal variances assumed	.505	.478	-.123-	346	.902	-.062-	.502
	Equal variances not assumed			-.123-	345.977	.902	-.062-	.501

Table 4: Independent Samples T-Test for the RSES according to the gender

6. Discussion
Regardless the quality of the academic achievement, whether it is high or normal, the mean scores, of the participants in the present study, on the RSES revealed a normal self-esteem. Moreover, Highly Achieving students yielded moderately higher scores than their Normally Achieving colleagues. Nevertheless, the data in this investigation indicated that there was no significant correlation between self-esteem and the academic achievement differences of the undergraduates of the Lebanese University. This finding concurs to the results of Baumeister (2003), Vialle, Heaven and Ciarrochi (2005).

In addition, no significant difference was found in between gender and self-esteem. These results concur to previous researches (Naderi et al., 2009; Teoh & Nur Afiqah, 2010; Aryana, 2010). Thus, the lack of self-esteem differences between genders can be associated with other factors such as socio-cultural and cognitive biological.

Next, this study, also revealed, a significant difference in the self-esteem of the students with respect to the field of study. In general, Lebanese people consider that majoring in basic sciences fields reflects higher cognitive abilities, while less fortunate one's study human sciences and literature. Hence, Students at the faculty of sciences exhibited higher self-esteem than the students of the faculty of pedagogy. Unfortunately, no researches were undertaken to explain or clarify this fact.

7. Conclusion
From the above results, we can conclude that self-esteem is highly correlated to socio-cultural factors, such the choice of the field of study which is considered in Lebanon as a mirror of intellectual and cognitive abilities. As proven in many researches, gender is not really correlated to self-esteem, nor does academic achievement of undergraduate students at the Lebanese University, especially that most of them have regular jobs to cover their tuition expenses. So striving to get their degrees is more important than the grades they get.

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