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**The Role of Self-Concept in Students' Academic Achievement in English  
Language**

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**BY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper investigated the role of self-concept in students' academic achievement in the English Language. The paper revealed that self-concept is the personal knowledge of who we are, encompassing all of our thoughts and feelings about ourselves physically, personally, and socially, as well as the cognitive assessment of one's own abilities and weaknesses. And that self-concept plays an integral role in academic achievement. However, several scholarly literature on self-concept in academic achievement were also reviewed. The paper also reviewed influences that impact a strong sense of self-concept and it was noted that many attributes (both internal and external views of self) impact self-concept or confidence and affect the maintenance of a strong "sense of self-concept" in changing environments. Thus, it was concluded that developing a positive self-concept is not only an important outcome variable in itself, it also plays a central role in affecting other desirable educational outcomes. Thus, one of the recommendations made in this paper was that government, non-governmental organizations, and school management should design an orientation exercise in the form of a paper presentation, seminar, or symposium in order to sensitize and enlighten students about the benefits of developing a high self-concept which can attract better academic achievement.*

**KEYWORDS: Role of Self-Concept, Academic Achievement and English  
Language**

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**Introduction**

Self-concept has been widely conceptualized as multidimensional. Self-concept is a cognitive assessment of one's own abilities and weaknesses (Minkley, Westerholt & Kirchner, 2014) and plays an important role in academic achievement. Low levels of self-concept are a risk factor for poor academic achievement. High levels of self-concept are considered to be a protective factor that promotes academic achievement (Gilman & Huebner, 2006). However, Harter (1993) in Ke, Yang, Yang, et al. (2020) proposed a multidimensional model of self-concept from the perspective of developmental psychology and believed that adolescence was a critical period for the

development of self-concept. Therefore, a large number of researches (Hay, et. al., 2007; Marsh, et. al., 2009; Nunez, et al. 2008) have suggested the relationship between academic achievement and self-concept of early adolescent boys and girls. Calsyn and Kenny (2007) showed that self-concept is a determinant of academic achievement whereas academic self-concept is a consequence of academic achievement. Osborne and LeGette (2002) found that boys had significantly higher domain specific self-concept of physical appearance than the girls. But girls had better self-concept in behavioral social domains than the boys. Mboya (2004) observed higher self-concept of boys than girls in the domains of family, physical ability, physical appearance, musical ability and health but girls had higher self-concept in general school and emotional stability domains. Again, boys expressed higher levels of global self-concept than girls.

Furthermore, Wigfield, et. al. (2007) offered a developmental perspective on the relationship between self-concept and academic achievement. This developmental perspective has focused on the correlational and causal aspects of the relationship between self-concept and academic achievement. In another study, Boulter (2002) used self-concept as a predictor of academic achievement. Moreover, age emerged as an important variable and supported the idea that total self-concept may predict academic performance, but non-academic self-concept was negatively related to school achievement. Above all, academic self-concept is found to be strongly and positively related to general achievement as well as English language, arts, mathematics, etc. (Enam, Islam & Kayesh 2011).

## **Conceptual Review**

### **Concept of Self-Concept**

Self-concept refers to our personal knowledge of who we are, encompassing all of our thoughts and feelings about ourselves physically, personally, and socially. Self-concept also includes our knowledge of how we behave, our capabilities, and our individual characteristics. Our self-concept develops most rapidly during early childhood and adolescence, but our self-concept continues to form and change over time as we learn more about ourselves (Vinney, 2018). A self-concept is an idea of the self-constructed from the beliefs one holds about oneself and the responses of others. The self-concept is largely a reflection of the reactions of others towards the individual (Lexico, 2021). Self-concept refers to how people perceive their behavior, abilities, and unique characteristics (Bailey, 2003). For example, beliefs such as "I am a good friend" or "I am a kind person" are part of an overall self-concept. Self-concept is the idea or mental image one has of oneself and one's strengths, weaknesses, and status. Self-concept is an overarching idea we have about who we are, physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and in terms of any other aspects that make up who we are (Neill, 2005). We form and regulate our self-concept as we grow, based on the knowledge we have about ourselves. Self-concept is an important term for both social and humanistic psychology. Self-concept is a general term used to refer to how someone thinks about, evaluates, or perceives themselves (McLeod, 2008). Self-

concept is the cognitive aspect of self and generally refers to 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 (Kumari & Chamundeswari, 2013).

### **Concept of Academic Achievement**

Academic achievement describes academic outcomes that indicate the extent to which a student has achieved their learning goals. Academic achievement may refer to completing educational benchmarks such as a bachelor's degree. Academic achievement is often measured through examinations or continuous assessments (Glossary2020). Academic achievement is the extent to which a student or institution has achieved either short or long term educational goals. Academic achievement may be measured through students' grade point average, whereas for institutions, achievement may be measured through graduation rates. Completion of educational benchmarks such as secondary school diplomas and bachelor's degrees represent academic achievement (Wikipedia, 2021). Academic achievement refers to what the student has learned or what skills the student has learned and is usually measured through assessments like standardized tests, performance assessments and portfolio assessments. Academic achievement is often linked with successful student's individual capacities and abilities and is defined by Rodrigues (2001) as "the student's school results, i.e., a student who being in the school system, public or private, with the convenient age, finishes a high school degree or equivalent, successfully, without neither interruptions nor failings".

Academic achievement is often referred and debated in educational policies and discourses. Carter (1959) cited by Bhat, &Bhardwaj, (2014) stated that academic Achievement as the knowledge attained or skills developed in the school subjects, usually determined by test scores or marks assigned by teachers. Academic achievement as specified level of attainment or proficiency in academic work as evaluated by the teachers, by standardized tests or by a combination of both. Steinmayr, Meißner, Weidinger, & Wirthwein, (2014) stated that academic achievement represents performance outcomes that indicate the extent to which a person has accomplished specific goals that were the focus of activities in instructional environments, specifically in school, college, and university. Academic achievement is the amount of knowledge derived from learning. The child gains knowledge by instructions he/ she receives at school and are organized around a set of core activities in which a teacher assigns tasks to pupils and evaluates and compares the quality of their work. The school provides a wide variety of academic achievement experiences than does the family. Academic achievement is based on the number of factors, such as children's attitudes, interest, personality characteristics and social class in addition to learning. Academic achievement also indicates the knowledge attained and skill developed in the school subject, generally designated by test scores.

### **Concept of English Language**

English Language is a system of production of meaning for the expression of living by English people who were originally from German, but the language has spread to many parts of the world where it is used as a second, third and foreign language (SANUVICKYBLESS, 2021). The term "English" is derived from Anglisc, the speech of the Angles—one of the three Germanic tribes that invaded England during the fifth century. English language being a West Germanic language originally spoken by the inhabitants of early medieval England (Wardhaugh, 2010). It is also the Indo-European language belonging to the West Germanic branch which is the official language of Britain, United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and most of the commonwealth countries. English language is also the second language in a number of multilingual countries, including India, Singapore, Philippines, and many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria (Nordquist, 2020). English is the first choice of foreign language in most other countries of the world, and it has been given a position in the global lingua franca. However, English language has been noted with a wide concept and this has attracted definitions of various scholars. Crystal, (2003) defined English Language as a system of communication consisting of sounds, words, and grammar that can be understood. Ethnologue (2010) sees English Language as the largest language by number of speakers, and the third most-spoken native language in the world. It is the most widely learned second language and is either the official language or one of the official languages. Crystal and Potter, (2019) estimated that about a third of the world's population, some two billion persons, now use English.

According to Araromi (2005), English Language is an important spoken language that promotes people learning at the formal and informal settings. He also noted that English language is one of the most used language in communication. According to Tannenbaum and Berkovich (2005), English language is important to all manners of transmission of knowledge, values and socialization processes. According to Ejieh's (2004) viewpoint, English language is an indispensable tool in the education life of any individual. English language is central to learning which develops the ability of reading, writing and communication.

### **The Concept of Self-Concept and Academic Achievement**

Scholars have suggested that many internal barriers such as personal attributes, esteem, and confidence as well as external barriers such as gender bias, cultural bias, and societal expectations prevent individuals from attaining their self-goals (Powell, 2009). Self-confidence pertains to a perceptive consciousness of one's power and ability to succeed, and self-evaluation is inherent in the ongoing process of who we feel we are (Woolfolk, 2004). Theorists such as Santrock (2008) point out that the concept of self has variations; however, many people use them intermittently and do not distinguish any differences or subtle aspects of self. A positive self-concept is valued as a desirable outcome in many disciplines of psychology as well as an important mediator to other outcomes. According to the research and a comprehensive meta-analysis conducted by Marsh and Martin (2011), self-concept has a direct and indirect effect on subsequent achievement. Not only is self-concept an important outcome variable in itself, it also plays a central role in affecting other desirable

educational outcomes. The studies reviewed pertaining to self-concept and academic achievement are compiled and presented hereunder. Punithavathi (2011) conducted a research to investigate self-concept and academic achievement of students at the secondary level. The results of the analysis revealed a significant correlation between self-concept and academic achievement. Further a significant difference in self-concept and academic achievement was observed among students in different categories of school, name, state, matriculation and central board schools.

Ishak, Jamaluddin and Chew (2010) examined the students' self-concept among 16- and 17- year- old adolescents in Malaysian secondary schools. A total of 1168 students participated in the survey. This study utilized the CoPs (UM) instrument to measure self-concept. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) revealed three factors: academic self-concept, physical self-concept and social self-concept. This study confirmed that students perceived certain internal context factors, and revealed that external context factor also have an impact on their self-concept which in turn influenced positively their academic performance. Coover and Murphy (2010) conducted a study that examined the relationship between self-identity and academic persistence and achievement in a counter stereotypical domain. The study revealed that the higher the self-concept and self-schema, the more positive the self-descriptions, the better the academic achievement at 18. The study also showed that self-identity improves through social interaction and communication with others, which would enhance achievement.

### **Influences that Impact a Strong Sense of Self-Concept**

During the early part of the twentieth century, some notions of self were viewed as separate from influences of social relationships and not as impacted by one's environment. Two of the early theories that studied and explored personal views or elements of self are: (a) Kohut's (1977) concept of a stable, consistent, and cohesive "self," and (b) Gergen's (1987) concept of a "self" that changes, depending on the social context. These conceptual perspectives have stated that the notion of a "core sense of self" has been a basic self-concept that can be built upon by various personal experiences and accomplishments throughout one's life span. As one develops through many stages, the personal experiences in both work and social arenas, as well as a supportive environment or external surroundings, affect one's internal view or concept of self, esteem, and confidence (Powell, 2009). From a psychoanalytic perspective, Kohut's theory expanded the view of self to include "a stable cohesive center of personality" upon which experiences are built and where the capacity to initiate action or attain coherence is derived. Whereas, from a sociological perspective, Gergen's theory added that the development of "self" was dependent on the social context in which individuals derived their sense of selves from their perceptions of their social or work roles (Kohut, 1977; Gergen, 1987). Gergen (1991) further advanced the concept of self from a more individualistic viewpoint to a more relational perspective that changes, depending on the environment or social contexts and expectations. Changing work situations or environments require individual social skills for success as well as maintenance of a "strong sense of self-concept".

The development of a “sense of self-concept” plays an important role in the maintenance of high or low self-esteem (Bednar & Peterson, 2005). Becoming an individual with a strong sense of self and confidence is important for success. Understanding the value of one’s personal choices, surroundings, and people that influence academic achievement are essential. Gergen’s (1991) theory defined “self” in a social context, and he contended that people could be able to modify their self-concepts through changing not only external surroundings but also internal awareness as well. Maintaining a strong sense of self in changing situations is a challenge, and building self-esteem is inherent in the process. Though, the two conceptual models of Kohut (1977) and Gergen (1987, 1991) have two different perspectives: one of a stable and cohesive “self” initiating action and one of a changing “self” in a particular social or work context; however, they both refer to the attributes of self (self-concept, self-esteem, and self-confidence) which are key elements for academic achievement. A fundamental psychological assumption has been that successful academic and career development depends upon a positive self-concept or self-esteem (Betz & Fitzgerald, 2007). Self-esteem refers to how one regards or judges how one feels about oneself, and self-concept refers to one’s cognitive perceptions about academic or career achievements that change in diverse situations (Woolfolk, 2004). Self-confidence refers to feeling capable or having the ability to complete tasks well, and the key attributes pertaining to self-esteem and self-confidence are found to be important for success. It is known that many attributes (both internal and external views of self) impact self-concept or confidence and affect the maintenance of a strong “sense of self-concept” in changing environments (Powell, 2009).

## **Conclusion**

This paper reviewed the roles of self-concept in academic achievement in English Language, and thus concluded that self-concept is a strong predictor of academic achievement. And that low level of self-concept is a risk factor of poor academic achievement, and high levels of self-concept are considered to be a protective factor that promotes academic achievement. Hence, in developing a positive self-concept is not only important outcome variable in itself, it also plays a central role in affecting other desirable educational outcomes.

## **Recommendation**

Based on the review of this paper, the following recommendations were deemed necessary:

1. Government, non-governmental organization and school management should design an orientation exercise in form of paper presentation, seminar, or symposium in order to sensitize and enlighten students benefit of developing a high self-concept which can attract a better academic achievement.

2. As the field of academic achievement is very wide-ranging and covers a broad variety of educational outcomes, it should be considered as a multifaceted construct that comprises different domains of learning.
3. Parents and guardians should imbibe the culture of encouraging and strengthening the self-concept of their children rather than condemning and criticizing the child with abusive statements that will make them feel inadequate, incompetent, and inferior; this would help in developing positive and high self-concept and academic achievement.
4. In order to enhance academic confidence of students' more opportunities of participation in academic activities may be provided during workshop sessions which in turn may be helpful in increased academic self-concept and also improves the academic achievement of students.

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