



Learner Social Self-Concept and Academic Achievement

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Abstract:

Literature has documented the importance of social self-concept for academic achievement. The study investigated the relationship between learner social self-concept and academic achievement in secondary schools in Gujarat, and also compared social self-concepts and academic achievements on the basis of gender, age, school location. Data was collected from 1000 adolescent learners in urban and rural schools using questionnaires. Results confirm positive and reciprocal relationship between academic achievement and learner social self-concept. Gender stereotyping appeared to influence subject choice and performance. All the independent variables correlated positively and significantly with academic achievement and social self-concept. Results appear to emphasize the need to pay attention to social relationships when trying to improve the learner's academic achievement.

Keywords: *Academic achievement, Social self-concept, Learner, Literature*

1. Introduction

High failure rate has aroused concern among parents, educationists, policy makers and the learners. Low pass rates have been attributed to poor human and material resources. The quest for a solution to the problem of underachievement is therefore imperative. Previous research focused on global issues such as resources, school factors, educator quality, family background and the school environment (Nyagura 1991, Nyagura and Reece, 1990, Nyagura and Riddell, 1991; Dambudzo, 1998; Gordon, 1995). A qualitative study by Gordon (1995) referred to the self-concept as one of the causes of underachievement by girls in Zimbabwean secondary schools. Furthermore, there is an increasing awareness that individual differences in intelligence alone can no longer account for all or even the majority of differences in learner's scholastic achievement (Myburgh, Grobler and Niehaus, 1999). There is a dearth of research on social self-concept and academic achievement in Africa. It was the intention of the current study to investigate the relationship between social self-concept and academic achievement in order to obtain more information to explain underachievement by secondary school learners in Zimbabwe.

According to Hay et al., (1998); Wiest, Wong and Kreil, (1998); Mboya (1989); Mwamwenda (1995); Howcroft (1996); Hamachek (1995) and Trusty et al., (1996), the social environment is a significant agent that influences the self-concept and academic achievement. For example, learners who became discouraged in the face of social challenges had low expectations of future success as well as self-worth. According to Myburgh et al., (1999) a positive social self-concept was associated with a higher level of academic achievement. In other words, learners who deemed themselves to be effective, were accepted, respected and appreciated by others in a social context experienced a high standard of academic achievement at school. In addition the National Education Service of the United States of America (2001:02) reiterated the point when they stated that all human beings especially young people had strong needs for achievement and approval. Consequently educators who showed interest in the learners and appreciated their effort and performance were likely to encourage positive behaviour and enhanced their abilities and performance while detachment and lack of interest weakened social and personal bonds

leading to poor academic performance. Furthermore the support and feedback for ones academic accomplishments by parents, educators and friends were regarded as the primary determinants of positive academic self-concept that led to greater motivation. Similarly, the value placed by parents on academic achievement by parents, and positive relations correlated significantly with children's perception of their competencies and academic achievement (Biehler and Snowman, 1997; Buhs and Ladd, 2001; Pettit, 1996; Wiest et al., 1998). Supportive parents, who were involved in school activities, set reasonable and achievable expectations developed positive social self-concepts in their children leading to better academic performance than those whose parents were less involved and supportive. Involvement and supportive behaviour were proxies for acceptance while less involvement and support are symbolic of rejection. These sentiments underlined the importance of parents in both self-concept development and academic achievement. Educators also have a crucial role to play as illustrated in the section that follows. (Babd, 1995; Gordon, 1995, Kaur J; Rona, JS; and Kaur, 2009). In view of the above background, rationale and literature the researcher sought to investigate the problem: Is there a significant relationship between learner social self-concept and academic achievement in secondary schools?

2. Hypotheses

- Ho₁:** There is no significant correlation between the social self-concepts and academic achievement of learners in secondary schools.
- Ho₂:** There is no significant correlation between the social self-concept and academic achievement of both genders separately.
- Ho₃:** There is no correlation between the social self-concept and academic achievement of urban and rural learners.
- Ho₄:** There is no significant correlation between the social self-concept and academic achievement of learners of different age.
- Ho₅:** There is no significant difference between the academic achievement and social self-concepts of male and female learners.
- Ho₆:** There is no significant difference between the academic achievement and the social self-concepts of urban and rural learners.
- Ho₇:** There is no significant difference between the academic achievement and social self-concepts of learners of different age.

3. Method

The traditional quantitative method of measuring the relationships by means of statistical correlation research design was used for the study.

4. Sampling

A total of 1000 secondary school male (50%) and female (50.0%) learners participated in the study from all over the Gujarat. The average age of the respondents was about 14.5 years, with the youngest being 13 years and the oldest 16 years plus. Participants were drawn from ten purposely-selected schools to represent the wide range of secondary schools. Responses were used to answer research questions/problems and to test hypotheses 1 to 7 of the current study presented in the sections that follow. School mid-year examination results in compulsory subjects (English, math, science and history) were used as measures of academic achievement.

5. Instrument

5.1 Self-Description Instrument (SDI)/ Questionnaire

The SDI was divided into two sections. The first section comprises (1-6) questions on biographical data (moderator variables), second twenty-five questions each for the *social* self-concept (1-31). There are 31 questions. For ease of response, the questions on the biographical data were coded as follows; gender: male (1), female (2), school location: urban (1), rural (2),

For the rest of the questionnaire, responses on the five-point Likert scale applied: *strongly agree*=5, *strongly disagree*=1. For questions stated in the negative, scoring was reversed such that *strongly agree* was scored as (1) to *strongly disagree* (5). The distribution and examples of the questions are presented below.

5.2 Social Self-Concept (SSC)

Questions sought information on the learner's relationships with parents, educators and peers. For example, "I have a good relationship with my parents," "I often quarrel with my parents." "Educators like me," "I am very popular with members of the opposite sex." "My peers reject me."

6. Procedure

The individual respondents were told that participation was optional. The purpose of the study was explained and each participant was asked to indicate the response to each question by writing down a number in the box corresponding to the chosen response to every question, on the answer sheet. Questionnaires were self-administered and took between 5 to 10 minutes to complete. All questionnaires and answer sheets were collected soon after completion.

7. Results and Discussion

In order to test the hypotheses, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was computed to determine the direction of correlations between the learner's social self-concepts and academic achievement. Separate t-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were also carried out to determine (a) the significance of the relationship between the learner's social self-concepts and academic achievements, (b) whether gender, age, school location, school type, standard (grade/form) and type of attendance (boarder/day) accounted for any significant differences in the social self-concepts and academic achievements.

7.1 Social Self-Concepts and Academic Achievement

Results showed that the social self-concept was significantly and positively correlated with the academic achievement of adolescent learners considered in the study. The null-hypothesis was therefore, rejected on the 1%-level of significance. Correlation was however, low ($r=0.204$, $p<0.01$) suggesting that social self-concept may have some influence on the overall academic achievement of learners in secondary schools.

7.2 Social Self-Concept and Academic Achievement of both Genders Separately

The social self-concept of male and female learners correlated positively and significantly with their academic achievement. The null-hypothesis was therefore, rejected on the 1%-level of significance. The correlation was low for both (male: $r = 0.233$, $p<0.01$; female: $r= 0.182$, $p<0.01$) though marginally higher for males. The results suggested a weak overall influence of gender on social self-concept and academic achievement of learners considered in the study.

7.3 Social Self-Concept and Academic Achievement of Urban and Rural Learners

Higher for rural learners (rural: $r= 0.304$, $p<0.01$; urban: $r=0.111$, $p<0.01$) suggesting a possible and more significant influence of the rural school location on the learners social self-concept and academic achievement. The null-hypothesis was rejected on the 1%-level of significance for both the urban and the rural learners. Overall academic achievement was similar for both locations.

7.4 Social Self-Concept and Academic Achievement of Learners of Different Age

Results showed that correlation between social self-concept and academic achievement was not consistent for all age groups. For example, the social self-concept was significantly and

positively correlated with the academic achievement of the learners aged (13: $r=.332$, $p<.01$); (14: $r=.301$, $p<.01$); (15: $r=.121$, $p<.05$); and (16: $r=.173$, $p<.01$); but not for those aged over 16 years ($r: .043$). The null-hypothesis was therefore, rejected on the 1%-level of significance for the learners aged 13, 14 and 16, and on the 5%-level of significance for the 15 year olds. The null-hypothesis could not be rejected for the learners aged above 16. Further investigations may be necessary for this age group. Results also showed a general decline in social self-concept with age. Once the significance of the relationship between social self-concept and academic achievement had been described, it was also the objective of the study to find out if there were significant differences between average achievement and social self-concept of the learners with regard to moderator variables (gender, grade/form, school location and type, type of attendance and age). For this purpose, a two-tailed test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) of unrelated groups were computed. The results are shown in tables 1 to 6.

7.5 Academic Achievement and Social Self-Concepts of Male and Female Learners

Table 1
Significance of differences of average achievements and social self- concepts of males and females (N=1280)

Factors	N	Mean	t-value	Df	Significance
Achievement					
Male	500	56.43	0.096	1278	p>0.05
Female	500	56.34			
Social self concept					
Male	500	3.65	-1.99	1278	P>0.05
Female	500	3.68			

According to the results in table 1, there were no significant gender differences in average academic achievement and the social self-concepts of adolescent learners. The mean marks for males (56.43) and females (56.34) also confirmed the result. The same trend was observed for the mean scores for social self-concepts. The null-hypothesis could not be rejected on the 5%-level of significance.

7.6 Academic Achievement and the Social Self-Concepts of Urban and Rural Learners

Table 2
Significance of differences of average academic achievements and Self-concepts of urban and rural learners

Factors	N	Mean	t-value	Df	Significance
Achievement					
Urban	470	56.40	-0.11	1266	p>0.05
Rural	530	56.51			
Social self concept					
Urban	470	3.74	6.42	1266	P>0.05
Rural	530	3.56			

Two-tailed *t-test* was used to analyze the responses from urban and rural learners. According to table 2 there was no significant difference between the academic achievement and social self-concepts of urban and rural learners. Overall urban and rural learners were similar in their academic performance and social self-concepts and the null-hypothesis could not be rejected on the 1%-or 5% level of significance for the social self-concept and academic achievement respectively. Better social self-concepts for urban learners did not however, translate into

significantly better test scores suggesting little influence of school location on the learner's social self-concepts or academic achievements.

7.7 Academic Achievement and Social Self-Concepts of Learners of different Age

Table 3
Significance of differences of average achievements and social Self- concepts of learners of different age (N=1281)

Factors	N	Mean	t-value	Df	Significance
Achievement					
13	200	59.60	3.07	4	p>0.05
14	200	57.87			
15	200	55.16			
16	200	55.60			
16+	200	54.13			
Social self concept					
13	200	3.72	0.94	4	p>0.05
14	200	3.66			
15	200	3.65			
16	200	3.65			
16+	200	3.63			

ANOVA for learners of different age was carried out and results are shown in table 3. Table 3 also shows significant differences in the academic achievements of adolescent learners of different age in this sample. However, there were no significant differences in social self-concepts for the adolescent learners of different age in this sample. The null-hypothesis could not be rejected on the 5% level of significance for the social self-concepts but rejected for the academic achievement on the 5%-level of significance. The results seemed to suggest that age may influence the academic achievement of adolescent learners and that the young and mature adolescents had similar perceptions about the importance of social relations in their academic performance. ANOVA demonstrated significant differences between the average academic achievements but not social self-concepts of adolescent learners of different age. Bonferroni post hoc tests carried out to determine exactly where the significant differences were revealed no significant differences in social self-concepts among learners of different age.

8. Discussion

8.1 Social Self-Concept and Academic Achievement

Quantitative results of this study have demonstrated a significant and meaningful relationship between social self-concept and academic achievement of adolescent learners in secondary schools in the study. Support and encouragement received from parents, educators and peers have been described as significant and that in their absence performance would decline. Support and encouragement were regarded as motivational. The relationship was also reciprocal. Lack of collaboration with peers in the classroom has been described as having a negative effect on learning and overall academic performance. Results supported earlier research which emphasized the significant role of social relationships and the social environment as a whole in influencing the social concept and academic achievement (Biehler and Snowman, 1997; Myburgh et al., 1999; Babad, 1995; Trusty et al., 1996; Hamacheck, 1995; National Education Service, 2001; Howcroft, 1991; Mboya, 1989; Mwamwenda, 1995). Results however, appeared to contradict research findings by Marsh (1992:35) who reported that non-academic self-concepts which include the social self-concept were not related to academic achievement. The role of moderator variables: gender, grade/form, school location, school type and type of

attendance were also discussed in relation to the social self-concept and academic achievement in the following paragraphs.

8.2 Self-Concepts, Academic Achievement and Gender

Overall the results did not show statistically significant gender differences between the academic performance and social self-concepts of adolescent learners considered in the current study. Similarity in overall academic performance for both genders is a possible reflection of the apparent success of affirmative action introduced in all spheres of life at independence in 1980 in favour of girls. The relationship between social self-concept and academic achievement was positive and weak. The results supported an earlier study that reported a weak, positive and significant relationship between gender and scholastic achievement among African adolescents (Mboya (1999). Male and female learners relations with significant others and belief in academic competence appeared to influence their academic achievement. This is in agreement with literature (Myburgh et al., 1999; Park, 1998; Buhs and Ladd, 2001; Huitt, 1998).

8.3 Self-Concepts, Academic Achievement of Urban and Rural Learners

Results have shown positive and significant relationship between the social self-concepts and academic achievement of urban and rural learners. The results were in agreement with earlier literature (Dembo 1994:461, Mwamwenda 1995:68, Hamachek, 1995:420 and Mboya, 1996:388). This is one of the most significant results of this study because no previous studies had compared urban and rural learners in terms of social self-concept and academic achievement in Gujarat. Thus, satisfaction with social relations and academic competence may have a significant influence on the academic achievement of learners in both urban and rural areas. However, it should be pointed out that the inclusion of some high performing selective schools in both rural and urban samples may have been responsible for similar scores. In addition learners at boarding schools located in rural areas with an urban background may have been responsible for similar social self-concepts. Future studies may need to include questions on place of normal residence. Regardless of where one is attending school, it would appear that relations with significant others were regarded as beneficial to the learners academic achievement.

8.4 Social Self-Concept, Academic Achievement and Learners of Different Age

According to Mboya, (1999); Dembo, (1994); Huitt, (1998); Craven, Marsh and Print, (2000) the relationship between social self-concept and academic achievement declined with age so did the current study. Better academic scores and social self-concepts for young adolescents confirmed the general decline of self-concepts with age. Once again results seemed to suggest that relations with significant others and belief in academic competence may have a significant influence on learners academic achievement. Correlations between social self-concepts and academic achievement did not reach statistical significance for the over 16 year olds and further research with a larger sample may be required. The results also showed that age accounted for significant differences in the academic achievement of adolescent learners considered in this study. Similarity in social self-concepts implied similarity in the way young and more mature adolescents felt about their relations with significant others in academic situations. Overall the study appeared to show that while age may have some influence on the social self-concept and academic achievement, the evidence is rather weak. Results are in accordance with findings by Mboya (1999:388) who reported a weak but significant relationship between age and scholastic achievement.

9. Conclusion

The current study supported Gordon (1995) and other research that the social self-concept may play a significant role in the academic achievement of adolescent learners in secondary schools.

Supportive role of parents, educators and peers and success in social relations at home and school appeared to motivate and improve the learner's confidence leading to better academic achievement. Improved academic achievement at school may improve relations with significant others leading to even higher achievements. In addition, it has emerged that learners in the current study equally valued the role of significant others for their success in school. It is incumbent upon all educators therefore, to ensure that learners experienced success more often than not in order to enhance acceptance of learners by both parents and educators leading to better social self-concepts and even better academic achievement. Educators should cultivate cooperation and learning environments that are free from disruptive behaviour for better results. Conclusions were also made with regard to the relationship of social self-concept, achievement and moderator variables: gender, school location, type of age.

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