UNDERSTANDING OUR STUDENTS: DOES HIGH SELF-ESTEEM PRODUCE GOOD ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG UNDERGRADUATE

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ABSTRACT

Self-esteem is one of the important elements for undergraduates to acquire. Educators have also long sought to build upon student's self-esteem and in doing so may subsequently give them good examination scores. Students with high self-esteem have also been strongly associated in obtaining good results. This study investigates the student's self-esteem across three undergraduate subjects and whether it has any effect on their examination scores. The present investigation revealed that across the three undergraduate subjects, high examination scoring students did not have a strong majority of high self-esteem students. Low examination scoring students also did not have a strong majority of low self-esteem students. The group of students with the high self-esteem across the three subjects did not produce high examination scores as was expected, and some of the students in the group with low self-esteem did produce high examination scores. Given these findings, educators may probe other areas that may be strongly related to examination performance.

KEYWORDS: Self-Esteem, Academic Achievement

INTRODUCTION

What

Self-esteem is an important element of every undergraduate in their quest to attain academic completion and performance. Self-esteem is thus, proven to be profoundly related to student's academic achievement (Whitesell, N.R, Mitchell, C.M., Spicer, P., and The Voices of Indian Teens Project Team, 2009). This is a vital human characteristic among the education community and this study will investigate its relevance in this new millennia among undergraduate students. The present study will also yield information as to whether students still need self-esteem to perform and get better grades or has it phased out in this times of modern digital age living. Information regarding self-esteem and academic achievement will be delved on and provided by this study. Self-esteem has been consistently investigated upon in literatures such as the study of Eidelman, S. & Biernat, M. (2007) where its relationship with raising examination standards was highlighted. This component was also examined by Bong, M., Cho, C., Hyun, S.A. & Hye, J.K (2012) where they studied the relationship student's self-esteem, among others, and its relationship with academic achievement. Students having self-esteem is very important for them to gain positivism, and maintain the idea that they are capable of pursuing difficulties in education. This concept does not segregate across countries or culture, rather it is a universal human element where positive self-esteem were found present among the often opposite traditions and lifestyle of the east and west pupils (Yamaguchi, S., Greenwalk, A.G., Banaji, M.R., Murakami, F., Chen, D., Shiomura, K., Kobayashi, Cai, H. & Krendl, A. 2007). By adhering to this findings, this human characteristic must be practice and nurtured upon students through praises, encouragements and motivations.

Even attaining multiculturalism which is a strong adolescent development, self-esteem is still singled out as an important factor for students in their academic achievement (Rust, J.P, Jackson, M.A., Ponterotto, J.G. & Blumber, F.C., 2011). Having higher self-esteem was also reported in a study of adaptive perfectionist students to score higher in their Grade Point Average (Elion, A.A., Slaney, R.B., Wang, K.T. & French, B.H., 2012). Students although not directly having high self esteem, but rather through another factor do seem to produce better academic achievement. Self esteem garnered through practices of another adaptive behaviour was shown to aid in their examination grading. This notion was investigated in a study by Ivcevic, Z., Pillemer, D.B. & Brackett, M.A. (2010) where student's self-esteem and academic function was paired with the assessment of their social behaviours. Self-esteem throughout the literature, have been strongly investigated either directly or indirectly towards academic achievement.

Self-esteem is a powerful element as demonstrated in one study among adolescents, their academic achievement was reported to be positively related to the growth rate of self-esteem, indicating that as their performance in education grew, as did their self-esteem (Lee, J., 2012). Another investigation conducted by Shi, Q. (2012) also managed to prove these self-esteem and its relation to student's examination scores where it was found that after participation in a group model to promote self-esteem, a majority of the participants reported a modest improvement in their GPA scores. A modest and significant correlation was also found between self-esteem and academic achievement in a study by Seabi, J. (2011). A positive relationship was discovered in this research among self-esteem and all the variables of academic achievement.

Does low self-esteem causes low academic achievement, or is it firstly low academic achievement that causes low self-esteem in students. These two confounding principles can be somewhat tightly related, such as the study of Gibson, S. & Kendall, L. (2010) where it was found that low self-esteem is firstly reported, then the subsequent low academic achievement. However, the reported study focused on students suffering from dyslexia, a developmental reading complication, which may have in essence created the low self-esteem among the investigated students. Nonetheless, this present study pursued the investigation towards a general admitted undergraduate student group, with or without any learning disability, and to determine the level of self-esteem firstly before they undertake their final examinations. There are also studies that explored the effects of self-esteem as a consequence of obtaining poor examination achievement such as in the research of Zimmermann, F., Schutte, K., Taskinen, P. & Koller, O. (2013).

This exploration probed on the outcome of low academic achievement among students and its correlative contribution towards a lowly self-esteem. In the education world, academic achievement is still the singular main criterion for evaluating students. Thus, it is important to understand the impact and relationship between adolescent's school performance and how it relates to their self esteem as was investigated in one study by Zhang B., Wang, M., Li, J., Yu., G. & Bi. Y.L. (2011). Self-esteem was also found to be volatile, and changes in systematic ways over a period of time (Chung, J.M et al, 2013). Its ever changing nature was thus investigated in this study to determine whether it has an effect prior to taking their final examination. Facing an examination can be a daunting task for adolescent, where threats are sometimes experienced towards their self-esteem. Schwinger, M., Wirthwein, L., Lemmer, G., & Steinmayr, R. (2014). These threats may form around the notion and fear of failing in upcoming examination, and it is important to learn more about the factor of maintaining good self-esteem before sitting for an exam.

This present study therefore strives to provide knowledge that having high self-esteem have its relationship with their achievements in university examinations.

METHODS

Participants

Participants were 71 students from subject 1, 142 students from subject 2 and 145 students from subject 3. Total students investigated for this study were 358 students. All participants were selected from 3 undergraduate subject at a public university in Malaysia.

Instrument

Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1989). The Rosenberg scale is probably the most widely used self-esteem measure in the psychological literature (Topham, P. & Moller, N., 2011). It consists of 10 items scored on a four-point Likert scale from 'Strongly disagree' (1) to 'Strongly agree' (4), giving a range of 10 (low self-esteem) to 40 (high self-esteem). Extensive and acceptable reliability and validity information exists for the scale (c.f. Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). In the current study, a Cronbach's alpha of .828 was found for the RSE, indicating acceptable internal reliability.

RESULTS

This investigation of undergraduate's self-esteem and their academic achievement were obtained from three separate subject. Results from each subject were categorized under four areas of top tier scoring students, bottom tier scoring students, top tier self-esteem students and bottom tier self-esteem students.

The first subject and its top tier scoring students category results indicated that the top fifteen students has a self-esteem score that ranged from 14 to 24. The number of high self-esteem scores students (score 20 and above in the Rosernberg Self-Esteem Scale) were five students. Ten respondents of the top tier scoring students were in the score range of 19 to 14. This indicated that a majority of the high scoring students had a modest level of self-esteem. The top three students had a score of 18, 19 and 17 respectively. The highest level of the Rosernberg Self-Esteem Scale score was 24 and this respondent was placed fourth in the overall standing.

The first subject also provided results of its bottom tier scoring students and its Rosernberg Self-esteem scores. In this category there were also five respondents with high Rosernberg Self-esteem scores of 20 and above. The rest of the bottom 10 out of 15 students had a score of 15 to 19. The highest score in this bottom tier scoring category is at 22. The lowest scoring student in this category has the lowest Rosernberg Self-esteem score of 15 among the bottom group of students. This bottom group of 15 also had 3 students have the same score of 18, 3 students having the same score of 19 and 3 students having the same score of 15.

In this first subject, students were also grouped amongst the highest in the Rosernberg Self-Esteem Scale score and their examination marks were recorded. The Rosernberg Top Tier Student Group had a group of 15 students with a score of 23 and above. In this top tier category, they examination marks ranged from 64 to 80. Only 2 students in this Rosernberg Top Tier Student Group scored 80. A total of 9 students in this group of 15 students scored in the ranged of 70 to 76. 4 students with high Rosernberg Self-esteem scores had a examination mark in the range of 62 to 68.

The first subject also provided result of students with the lowest Rosernberg Self-Esteem score. The lowest scores were in the range of 15 to 10 amongst the group of students in this subject. A total of 13 students belonged to this Rosernberg Bottom Tier Student Group. Their examinations marks however were also in the ranged of 55 to 80.

In this low self-esteem category, 2 students obtained a high examination mark of 80. 9 students in this group had a average to middle average mark of 55 to 65, which formed the majority of amongst the group of students with the lowest Rosernberg Self-Esteem scores.

The second subject also yielded information in regard to the four category of Top Tier Scoring Students, Bottom Tier Scoring Students, Rosernberg Top Tier Student Group and Rosernberg Bottom Tier Student Group. In the first category for this second subject, a group of 14 students were found to be the highest group in terms of their subject examination marks. Their scores ranged from 73 to 87. In their Rosernberg Self-Esteem Scale score, only four were found to have a score of 20 and above. Among this top scoring students, a singular respondent was found to have a very low Rosernberg Self-Esteem score of only 11. A total of 9 students in this top scoring group had a Rosernberg Self-Esteem score between 14 and 19.

A Bottom Tier Scoring Student group was also revealed for this second subject. A group of 14 students were found to have scores between 50 and 58 and was thus placed at t he bottom of the group for this subject. In this bottom group of examination score, 3 students were reported to have a high Rosernberg Self-Esteem score of 20 and above. A singular student in this group had a very low Rosernberg Self-Esteem score of 11. A total of 10 students in this group of low examination marks had a Rosernberg Self-Esteem score between 13 to 19.

The second subject in this investigation also produced a group of students with relatively high Rosernberg Self-Esteem scores. A total of 14 students were found to have a score of 21 and above in the Rosernberg Self-Esteem Scale. In this group of high Rosernberg Self-Esteem score, none of them managed a high examination score of 80 and above. The highest examination score in this high Rosernberg Self-Esteem group was 79. A majority of the students in this group had a score of 65 and 70 this representing a middle high score in this subject. A total of 5 students obtained the examination mark of 65 and a further 5 garnered the examination mark of 70.

Further investigation also reported a Bottom Rosernberg Tier Student Group for the second subject. Among the group of students taking this second subject, a total of 8 students were found to have a relative low Rosernberg Self-Esteem score of 14 to 12. In this lowest Rosernberg Self-Esteem score group, a singular student produced a high score of 80 during the subject's examination. A total of 4 students achieved a middle high examination score of 70 while the remaining 3 students had a average high examination score between 62 and 65.

A final third subject was also investigated for its student's self-esteem and their academic achievements. In this third subject, a group of 12 students formed the top tier of the subject by scoring in between 79 and 87. Their self-esteem was also recorded according to the Rosernberg's Self-Esteem Scale. In this third subject's Top Tier Scoring Student s group, only 4 students was found to have a high Rosernberg Self-Esteem score of 20 and above. A single student in this top scoring group had a very high Rosernberg Self-Esteem score of 24. 8 students from this high scoring group only had a mid ranged self-esteem by scoring between 16 to 19 in the Rosernberg Self-Esteem scale. A single student among this high examination mark group also had a relatively low Rosernberg Self-Esteem score of 13.

The Bottom Tier Scoring Group for this third subject had 14 students whom scored between 50 and 42. Their Rosernberg Self-Esteem score were also investigated. It is revealed also in this third subject that among the low scoring student group, 3 student had a relatively high Rosernberg Self-Esteem score of 20 and above. 11 of the students in this group had a middle high Rosernberg Self-Esteem score of 14 to 19. 4 of the students had a similar score of 18 in the

Rosernberg Self-Esteem scale, making them the largest number of students with the same Rosernberg Self-Esteem score. There were no relatively low Rosernberg Self-Esteem score in this low examination score group for the third subject.

A group of student with high Rosernberg Self-Esteem score were also grouped to form the Rosernberg Top Tier Student group. A total number of 15 people were found to have relatively high Rosernberg Self-Esteem score. Thier examination marks were also retrieved. In this group of high Rosernberg Self-Esteem score group, only 2 students had a high examination score of 82 and 83. A total of 8 students in this high Rosernberg Self-Esteem group had a middle high examination mark of 70 to 79. The remaining 4 students in this group of high Rosernberg Self-Esteem had a average examination score of 61 to 65.

The final category in this research was the third subject's Rosernberg Bottom Tier Students. Students with the lowest Rosernberg Self-Esteem score were grouped and numbered at 12 students. Their examination mark were also recorded for these students. Among the students with the lowest Rosernberg Self-Esteem score, 1 student scored a very high examination mark of 86. A further 3 students in this group had a examination mark of 70 to 75. 6 students in this group had an examination mark of 60 to 65, making them the majority of having average examination mark among the low Rosernberg Self-Esteem student group. Only 1 student in this Rosernberg Bottom Tier Student group had a low passing mark of 51.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The data in this investigation revealed that self-esteem did not have any significant effect on the student's academic achievement. The study conducted by Peterson, V.M. (2009) also revealed similar result where self-esteem showed no significant relationship to academic success. As apparent from this study, the top scoring students from all three subjects did not show any significant amount of students with high self-esteem. In the first subject, among the top scoring group of students, only 5 students were reported to show high self-esteem. The second subject's top scoring students also showed that 4 student having high self-esteem scores of 20 and above in the Rosernberg Self-Esteem Scale. Again, at the third subject, only 4 students were found to have high self-esteem across the top scoring group in all three subjects, students with high self-esteem numbered at a similar 4 or 5 student in a total group of 12 to 15 students. This result among the top students did not show any majority of having high self esteem before undertaking their examination and scoring high marks.

This research work also delved into the group of students whom scored the lowest in all three subjects. It was expected that low scoring students will have a majority of low self-esteem students. In the first subject's group of 15 lowest scoring students, the lowest Rosernberg Self-Esteem score was at 15, indicating a average self-esteem and not low self-esteem. 3 students obtained this Rosernberg Self-Esteem score of 15. Among this group of low scoring student in the first subject, 5 students were found to have high self-esteem with Rosernberg Self-Esteem score of 20 and above. The second subject group of 14 lowest scoring students, also produced 3 students that had high self-esteem with Rosernberg Self-Esteem score of 20,21 and 23. Only a single student did obtain a very Rosernberg Self-Esteem score of 11 among this group of lowest scoring students. Across the three groups of lowest scoring student, there were no majority of students with low self-esteem.

The third category in this study investigated students with high self-esteem and their examination marks. In the first subject, a total of 15 students were found to have the highest Rosernberg Self-Esteem score from the total group

of students taking this first subject. In this high Rosernberg Self-Esteem group, 9 students whom formed the majority scored in the tier of average high marks of 70 to 79. Only 2 students obtained high examination marks of 80 and above. The second subject's high self-esteem group of students did not produce any high examination scoring students.

Out of the 14 group of high Rosernberg Self-Esteem score students, half of them managed a average to high examination mark of 70 to 79. The third subject has a similar result as the first subject where only 2 students were found to have high examination mark of 80 and above in relation to them already having high self-esteem. 8 out of 14 students in this third subject with high self-esteem had a average high mark of 70 to 79.

The final fourth category of the study investigated students with low self-esteem. It is expected that low self-esteem students will product low examination marks. The first subject revealed that 13 of the students with the lowest Rosernberg Self-Esteem scores had a examination score range from 55 to 80. There were no average to low examination scorers. In this group, 2 students obtained high examination score of 80. 9 of them belonged to the examination score range of 55 to 65. In the second subject, a total of 13 students were found to have the lowest Rosernberg Self-Esteem score of 11 to 14. In this group, 9 of them had middle high examination marks of 62 to 73. A single student from this lowest Rosernberg Self-Esteem group scored a high examination mark of 80. The third subject also revealed a similar pattern where out of the 12 students with the lowest Rosernberg Self-Esteem score, 9 of them scored average high examination marks of 60 to 75. A single student with one of the lowest Rosernberg Self-Esteem scores managed a very high examination mark of 86.

Contrary to the common practice of bolstering student's self-esteem and in doing so, may improve their examination grades, this study has revealed that student's high self esteem did not relate to getting high examination marks. This form of self-esteem intervention was also reported to have backfired in another research where low examination students got worst as a result of self-esteem bolstering exercise (Forsyth D. R., Lawrence, N.K., Burnette, J.L. & Baumiester, R.F. 2007). Other elements may be examined in future research in the quest to improve student's condition in relation to their examination performance.

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