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Factors of Self-Esteem Contributing to Academic Performance in Adolescents

Megha Pushkarna

Abstract

The focus of the present study was to find out the possible influences of self-esteem and its factors on the academic performance of adolescent students. A total sample of 266 students was taken from Classes VII-VIII and amongst these two sections of class VII 65 students were retested in a gap of a month to calculate test-retest reliability which came out to be 0.64 (Pearson's Correlation). The tools and instruments used in this research were Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI), Socio-Demographic Inventory and Academic Performance scores. Data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation, T-test, F-test, Regression Analysis and ANOVA. Self-esteem as a whole and its 4 sub factors correlated significantly with academic performance. Higher the self-esteem, higher was the academic performance. Of the four sub-factors, the school self-esteem factor appeared to have the highest correlation with academic performance. Significant differences were also seen in the academic performance of students in terms of their birth order.

Keywords: Academic performance, adolescents, self-esteem.

Introduction

Self-esteem appears to have a considerable influence on the adolescent's understanding of themselves as competent individuals. As has been demonstrated in a number of studies, good scholastic achievement supports adolescent's self-esteem, enhances problem solving skills, offers instructions about social behaviors, teaches self management strategies and encourages adolescent's self-selected interests.

In addition, the students are constantly evaluated on academics and co-curricular activities by teachers and parents which in turn lead to the youngsters developing a tendency to self evaluate their successes and failure and thereby develop self-esteem that may be positive and healthy. Contrariwise, they may develop negative or unhealthy opinion of themselves leading to low or negative self-esteem.

More specifically, academics and self-esteem are somewhat interrelated with one influencing the other. Students whose self-esteem is low due to low self opinion, those who lack peer group interaction, or have poor home environment are thought to have relatively lower motivation to perform well academically. In order to ascertain if such a relationship exists between self-esteem and academic performance and also to find out if self-esteem influences higher levels of academic performance, an attempt has been made in this research to scientifically study the above aspect.

The study of self-esteem became an official discipline by Cooley (1902) who contributed the theory of the "looking glass self," which stated that people see themselves through the eyes of others. Lecky (1945) was one of the first to point out that students level of achievement might be related to the perceptions students have of themselves as learners. A history of success in the academics correlating with self-esteem in an educational setting was found by Rosenberg (1965) who explained the four major social antecedents of self-esteem. Also the scale developed by Coopersmith (1967) was part of an extensive study of self-esteem in children. The major basis for the study was the widely held belief that self-esteem is significantly associated with personal satisfaction and effective functioning. Findings demonstrated that there exists a significant relationship between academic achievement and personal satisfaction in school and adult life, and this finding was also accepted by many personality theorists and clinical and social psychologists (Coopersmith, 1967, 1981).

Theorists like Erickson specifically identified academic achievement as a vital component in forming a healthy self-image. Academic self-esteem was operationally defined by him as the evaluative appraisal of the experience of being capable of meeting academic challenges and being worthy of happiness.

Harter (1985) identified self-perceived competence in scholastics as one of the five major dimensions that individuals used for evaluating themselves. Wiggins, Shatz, and West (1994) found that self-esteem and academic achievement were positively correlated as students who gained fifteen or more points on a self-esteem inventory during the first year of the study raised their grade point averages substantially in the second year.

Kohn (1994) and Steele (1997) explained the link between self-esteem and student achievement by showing that students who were not confident in their academic abilities did also poorly in academics, probably they had convinced themselves that they could not achieve academically.

Orth (2010) studied the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement from therapeutic point of view and was able to demonstrate that the cognitive and behavioral engagements of students in the school, influenced their school outcomes, viz., grades, skills, adjustment, attitudes and beliefs about themselves (which were all considered powerful determinants of school success). Vishalakshi (2012) also studied self-esteem in adolescents and explained that there exists a positive relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement. Thus, as in previous research findings, this study also showed a close positive correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement.

However, quite a few research findings which negated a positive correlation between the two, for example, West (1980) tried to connect concepts of self with academic ability and researched on general self-concept, self-concept of academic ability and school achievement. He explained that the primary contributing factors to self-concept of academic ability were individual's actual achievement or ability. Similarly, Holly (1987) compiled a summary of about 50 studies and indicated that most supported the idea that self-esteem was the result than the cause of academic achievement.

Muijs (1997) felt that as academic achievement was causally predominant over academic self-concept, global self-esteem did not appear to be a significant predictor of achievement. The significant contribution of parental SES to achievement suggested that self-esteem enhancement in itself cannot be a solution to the problem of academic failure.

A longitudinal study by Hair (2003) on self-esteem, personality and achievement in high school found that Big-Five dimensions of personality were more stable than self-esteem across this transition period. Her research was different from her contemporaries in that she included personality aspects into understanding academic achievement and focused on personality traits rather than only self-esteem for predicting future success in adolescent students.

Ciarrochi (2007) studied the role of cognition and its effects on adolescent's school grades. He examined the distinctiveness of three ''positive thinking'' variables (self-esteem, trait hope, and positive attributional style) in predicting (i) future high school grades (ii) teacher-rated adjustment and (iii) students' reports of their affective states. He concluded that while 'Hope' was a predictor of positive affect and the best predictor of grades, low self-esteem was one of the best predictors of increase in sadness.

Akomolafe (2011) investigated the impact of family type on secondary school students' academic performance and the results showed that family type significantly influenced academic performance of secondary school students.

Farooq (2011) pointed towards socio-economic status of family as one of the important factors affecting students' achievements. His findings were supported by Chand's work (2012) who studied factors affecting academic performance of students at senior secondary level. Amongst the socio-economic factors, mother's education, working mothers, family income and higher social group emerged as significant predictors of academic performance.

Popular theory of birth order by Adler (1964) was tested by Kumar (2011) who studied the relationship between birth order theory and past academic performance of students. Contrary to Adler's theory, scores indicated that second born students achieved significantly better results than other birth order category students. Kumar suggested that cultural differences in birth order of children must also be taken into consideration.

Lastly, Azhar (2013) studied parental education and socio-economic status as independent variables and student's achievement as dependent variable. Analysis of data indicated that students belonging to strong financial status performed better than those who faced problems in finances. Similarly, parental education boosted their children's performance.

Objectives :

The specific objectives of this research were:

1. To find out the relationship between self-esteem and academic performance of adolescent students.

2. To find out if different factors of self-esteem relate significantly to academic performance.
3. To ascertain if self esteem differs in terms of
   i. Age and gender;
   ii. Type of family to which one belongs;
   iii. Birth order in the family; and
   iv. Parent/s working outside home.
4. To ascertain if there is a difference in academic performance in terms of
   i. Age and gender
   ii. Type of family to which they belong
   iii. Their birth order in the family
   iv. Their parent/s working outside home

Hypotheses

For the present study following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There will be a significant relationship between self-esteem and academic performance of adolescent students.

H2: The different factors of self-esteem (general, social, home, and school) will correlate significantly with academic performance.

H3: Self-esteem scores of students will vary significantly in terms of their
   (a_1) Age and (a_2)Gender
   (b) Family type/structure
   (c) Birth order
   (d) Parental occupation

H4: Academic performance of students will vary significantly in terms of their
   (a_1) Age and (a_2) Gender
   (b) Family type/structure
   (c) Birth order
   (d) Parental occupation

Method

To measure and understand self-esteem the present research has used a well known scale, that is, Coopersmith Scale for Self-Esteem (CSEI). The academic performance of the students was taken from the marks obtained in the aggregate in their final examination in their previous academic year. Finally, Socio-demographic Information of students was collected by a proforma attached to the scale designed by the researcher.

Result and Discussion

The analysis was done in two parts.

(i) Self-esteem scores affecting the academic performance

(ii) Socio-demographic variables related to self-esteem and academic performance

H1 was tested by Product Moment Coefficient of Correlation to understand the relationship between self-esteem and academic performance (marks) of students. Results are presented in the table as follows.

Table 1 : Correlation between Self-esteem and Academic Performance of students

	Total Self-Esteem Scores	Academic Performance
Academic Performance (Last year's %)		1
Pearson's Correlation	.241**	
Sig. (2-tailed)		
N	266	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Above correlation coefficient between SEI and Academic Performance shows a statistically significant positive correlation (0.24). In other words, it can be said that higher the self-esteem, higher the academic performance and vice versa. Thus, hypothesis 1 is validated which states that there will be significant relationship between self-esteem and academic performance.

Present findings supports Branden's findings (1992), who stated that relationship between self-esteem and academic success is bidirectional; causation flowing in both directions. Also, the self-esteem model of Ross and Broh, (2000), adolescents who feel good about themselves do better in school than do those who have low self-worth, which is also seen in the present research findings. More recently Mankar's findings (2011) showed a consistent and significant association between high self-esteem and good scholastic achievement where lower level of self-esteem was associated with poor achievements amongst adolescents in school. Contrary to research findings is Zhi (2014) study that revealed that students with the high self-esteem did not always produce high examination scores as was expected and students with low self-esteem did produce high examination scores.

H2: Sub factors of self-esteem were related with academic performance, the following picture emerged using Product moment coefficient of Correlation (r) as shown in the table below.

Table II : Correlation between factors of self-esteem and academic performance

Factors of self-esteem	N	Pearson's Correlation	Sig (2-tailed)
General self-esteem	266	.155*	.012
Social self-esteem	266	.204**	.001
Home self-esteem	266	.075	.222
School self-esteem	266	.302**	.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the above analysis it is seen that all factors except home self-esteem correlated significantly with academic performance. And amongst the other three, school factor correlated the most (0.30) with academic performance. School factors like healthy school environment, teacher-student relationship, peer relations enhance school self-esteem. This result partially validates hypothesis 2 which states that there will be significant relationship between self-esteem scores and academic performance.

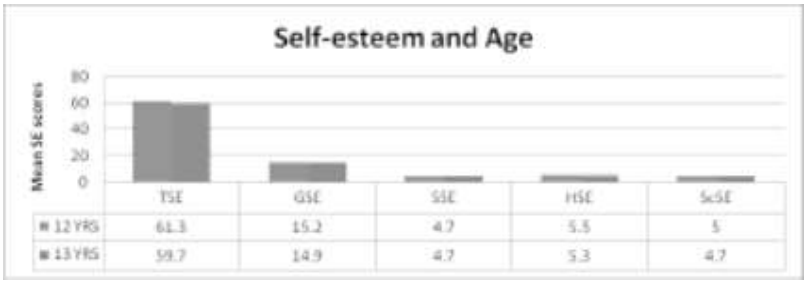
Present research findings are supporting Xiaoru's (1992) findings on the reciprocal relationships between academic achievement and general self-esteem. Present research findings on Social self-esteem and academic performance also supports Friedlander's (2007) findings that explained increased global, academic, and social self-esteem predicting decreased depression, increased academic and social adjustment. Present study also supports Singh's (1995) findings that found a small negative effect of home structure on achievement and no effect of parent–child communication and parental participation in school-related activities. Lastly, present research findings on self-esteem and academic performance supports Martins (2010) findings that showed that there were significant differences between the self-esteem enjoyed by successful and unsuccessful students in the seventh grade and that such differences disappeared in the eighth and ninth grades. Also as per his earlier researches, students with low levels of academic achievement attributed less importance to school-related areas and revealed less favorable attitudes towards school.

While self-esteem has been found to be related significantly to academic performance, it was also thought worthwhile to find out how socio-demographic variables relate to self-esteem.

Socio-Demographic Variables and Self-Esteem

$H3a_1$ Self-esteem and Age: When self-esteem scores were considered in terms of Age 12 years and 13 years, it was found that there was no significant difference with Age (12 years having M=61.3, SD=14.4 and Age 13 having M=59,SD=13.8). The differences were not statistically significant (t=0.93) as shown in the graph.

Figure I : Self-esteem scores and chronological age of students



It was noted that students of both age groups (12 years and 13 years) had scored more or less the same level of self-esteem. This could be due to early adolescent years being compared together, where a student is unaware of self-identity issues. This result rejects *Hypothesis 3(a_1)* which states that there will be significant relationship between self-esteem scores and age of the students.

Present study contradicts Trzesniewski's (2003) work which explains self-esteem stability was low during childhood, increased throughout adolescence and young adulthood, and declined during midlife and old age. But it supports Robins's (2005) review work where he explains that self-esteem continues to decline during adolescence. Researchers have attributed the adolescent decline in body image and other problems associated with puberty, the emerging capacity to think abstractly about one's self and one's future and therefore to acknowledge missed opportunities and failed expectations, and the transition from grade school to the more academically challenging and socially complex context of junior high school.

Research findings also contradicts Erol's (2011) work that showed latent growth curve analyses indicating that self-esteem increases during adolescence and continues to increase more slowly in young adulthood.

H3a_2 Self-esteem and Gender:

When self-esteem scores of male and female were compared, there was significant difference in their mean scores.

Table 3 shows that boys scored higher than girls in total self-esteem as well as general self-esteem. Besides General self-evaluation, Girls have seemed to score the same. Girls mostly tend to underestimate themselves in teenage years, amounting to reduced self-esteem. This result partially validates *Hypothesis 3(a_2)* which states that there will be significant relationship between self-esteem scores and gender of the students.

Present study supports Bolognini's (1996) whose research showed that girls had poorer self-esteem than boys irrespective of the domains that were taken into consideration. Differences were significant with reference to appearance and athletic performance. But it contradicts Jain's (2014) study that revealed that

there was no significant gender difference in the self-esteem levels of the participants. This finding negated many previous researches that have often found men having higher self-esteem as compared to women.

Table III : Mean, SD and t-test for Factors of Self-esteem and Gender of Adolescents

Factors of self-esteem with Gender	N	Mean SE scores	SD	t-value	Df	Sig (2-tailed)
Total SEI						.
Male	146	62.0	14.2	2.01	264	045 *
Female	120	58.5	13.8			(Sig)
General self-esteem						
Male	146	15.5	4.1	1.9	264	.056 *
Female	120	14.6	3.7			(Sig)
Social self-esteem						
Male	146	4.8	1.8	0.92	264	.358
Female	120	4.6	1.8			(NS)
Home self-esteem						
Male	146	5.5	1.6	0.94	264	.346
Female	120	5.3	1.9			(NS)
School self-esteem						
Male	146	5.0	1.7	1.6	264	.101
Female	120	4.7	1.7			(NS)

* significant at p<0.05 level

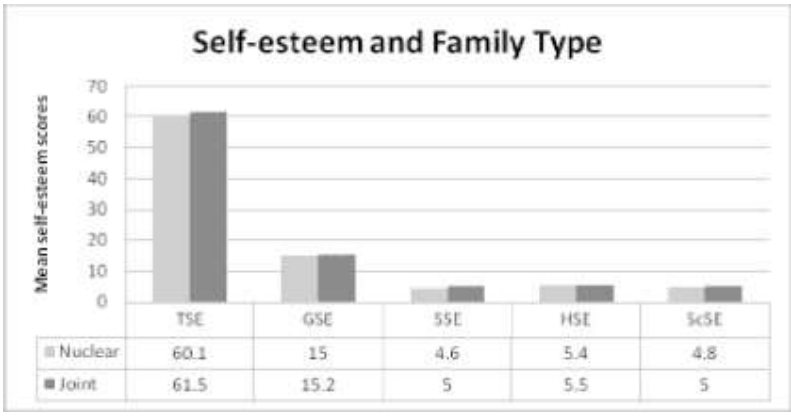
** significant at p<0.01 level

H3b Self-esteem and Type of Family: when scores were analyzed it was observed that even though larger number of students were from nuclear family (N=199,M=60,SD=14) as compared to Joint family (N=67,M=61,SD=12) their level of self-esteem did not differ significantly (t=.70). This result nullifies Hypothesis 3(b) which states that there will be significant relationship between self-esteem scores and type/structure of family the students belong to, which is shown in the graph below.

Graph shows almost similar self-esteem scores of children coming from different structured families, hence it can be said that there is no significance of family type on the self-esteem of the students. This could be due to home environment being similar irrespective of structural differences in the family.

These findings contradict Elder's (1963) results, who discovered that children from larger families could be effected emotionally that is 'paternal involvement and external behavior control would occur more often in large families than in small.

Figure II : Self-esteem and Family Type



It however, supports the opinion of International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family (2003) that there has not been much research on the effects of these family structural variations on children's self-esteem. What research there is does not report much variation. It's the structural variations within families that may affect children's self-esteem, if they have an impact on reflected appraisals, social comparisons, or self-attributions.

Present study contradicts Singh's (2009) findings who assessed the self-efficacy and well-being of adolescents and was of the view that there was a significant effect of type of family on self-efficacy.

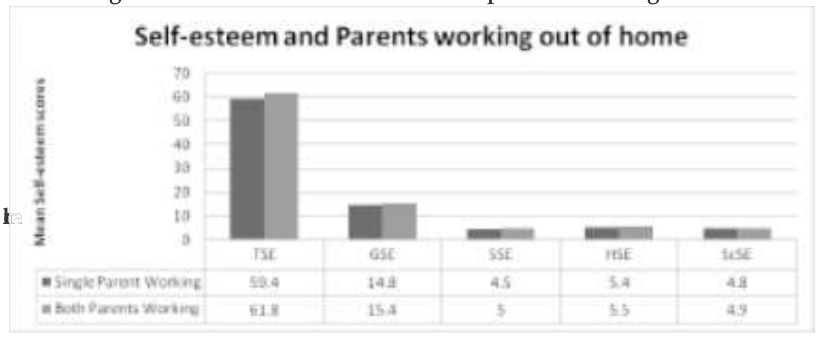
*H3c S*elf-esteem and Birth Order: when scores were analyzed and it was noted that there was not much difference in the self-esteem scores of students, in terms of their birth order (1st Born N=162,M=61,SD=14; 2nd Born N=95,M=59,SD=14, 3rd Born N=9,M=58,SD=14). It can be said that even though self-esteem scores of the first born were higher as compared to others the difference was not statistically significant (F=0.49). This could be attributed to increase in the awareness, on the part of the parents to grow up their children in a non-partial, non-competitive environment at home. This result nullifies Hypothesis 3(c) which states that there will be significant relationship between self-esteem scores and birth order of students.

Present research findings contradict Falbo's (1981) findings that stated that self-esteem was higher among firstborn children than later born children. He also found that firstborn children tend to be more competitive than their younger siblings. It also contradicts Stewart's (2001) research which explains that relative to first and last born children, middle-children are believed to experience less interaction and receive less attention which negatively affects the self-esteem of this child. But findings support Adkins's (2003) research on parental favoritism as well as the effects perceived favoritism had on one's self-esteem and if the effects are based on birth order. Results indicated no statistically significant

main effects or interactions for gender, birth order, or perception of favoritism based on self-esteem.

H3d Self-esteem and Parents working out of home: when scores was analyzed it was noticed that students coming from families where both parents were working showed slightly higher self-esteem as compared to others (Single Parent Working N=149,M=59,SD=13.9; Both Parents Working N=117,M=61,SD=14.3) but these differences were not statistically significant (t=1.3). Only in Social self-esteem difference was noted to be significant (t=1.95, p<0.05 level). Specifically maternal occupation is noted to increase social self-esteem in students. It can be said that when both parents are working, it increases socio-economic status of the family. This result partially validates Hypothesis 3(d) which states that there will be significant relationship between self-esteem scores and parental occupation of students.

Figure III : Factors of self-esteem and parents working out of



Even though the graph shows students coming from both parents working faring better, difference between the two was not statistically significant except social self-esteem.

Present study supports two studies conducted by Rosenberg (1978) which examines the relationship between social class to self-esteem indicating virtually no association in younger children, a modest association in adolescents and a moderate association for adults. Similarly, Hangal's (2007) findings assessed the impact of maternal employment on the self-concept, showing that the adolescent children of homemakers have significantly higher self-concept. It was also noticed that children of employed mothers had higher emotional maturity.

Socio-demographic Variables and Academic Performance

Since academic performance as a variable showed some differences in terms of socio-demographic factors, in the following section.

$H4a_1$ Academic performance and Age: was analyzed and it was noted that there was no statistical difference between (12 years of age N=122,M=82,SD=11; 13 years of age N=144,M=81,SD=13; t=1.12). Hence even if class VII students were doing better than class VIII, statistically it was not significant. This result nullifies

Hypothesis 4(a_1) which states that there will be significant relationship between academic performance and age of students.

Present research findings contradicts Demeis (1992) findings which determined children's chronological age related to academic and social performance in school and results indicated significant effects in that the older students were referred more often for gifted evaluation. But it supports Okoh (2010) study that revealed that there was no significant difference in academic performance based on age, gender and financial status.

H4$a_{2:}$ Academic performance and Gender was analyzed and it was noticed that girls appeared to have scored better than boys academically (Male, N=146,M=81,SD=12; Female, N=120,M=82,SD=13), though statistically the difference was not significant (t-value = .83). Its commonly noted that Boys and Girls, given the same environment are competing with each other more often than thought of. This result nullifies Hypothesis 4(a_2) which states that there will be significant relationship between academic performance and gender of the students.

Present research findings contradicted Tinku and Biswas (1994) findings that girls were more involved in their studies than boys and scored higher than them. Also Gender, ethnicity, and father's occupation were found to be significant contributors to student achievement (McCoy, 2005).

Present findings support Baker and Jones (1993) findings on sex differences in the academic performance with no evidence of a significant gender gap. Likewise, with Stage (1995) who explains that although gender differences in achievement continue to exist on high cognitive level tasks at the high school level, such differences appear to be declining.

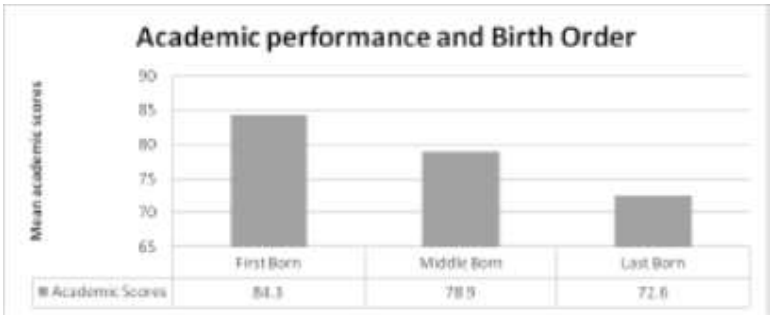
H4b Academic Performance and Type of Family: Even though there appeared to be some difference between students from joint and nuclear families showing differential performance (Nuclear, N=199,M=81,SD=12; Joint, N=67,M=82,SD=11), these differences were not statistically significant (t=0.37). This result nullifies Hypothesis 4(b) which states that there will be significant relationship between academic performance and type of family students belong to. Hence, it can be stated that it is the home environment rather than family structure which affects school performance.

Present findings contradicted Parveen (2007)'s findings that significant effect of family size was found on the achievement of students and students from small families performed better than those who were from large families. But it supports Akhlaq's (2013) findings that explored the impacts and implications of family dynamics on the adolescents' development. They were of the view that family communication supports good family functioning. They correlated family communication and family system as the predictors that can gauge family satisfaction among the adolescents. They found that the family satisfaction increases the chances of academic achievements

H4c Academic performance and Birth order: was assessed and birth orders considered were of three categories, viz., eldest, middle and youngest. The differences

between them in terms of academic performance appeared statistically significant (First Born N=162, M=84.3, SD=10.7; Middle Born N=95, M=78.9,SD=14.2; Last Born N= 9, M= 72.6, SD= 14) as shown in the graph below.

Figure IV : Academic Performance with Birth Order



The differences between the eldest born and the youngest in terms of academic performance is statistically significant (F=8.6, p<.001). This result validates *Hypothesis 4(c)* which states that there will be significant relationship between academic performance and birth order of students.

Present study supports Black, Devereux & Salvanes (2005) findings of large and robust effects of birth order on educational attainment, but contradicts Geil's (2012) findings which states that birth order had no interaction between birth order and GPA scored by the students.

H4d: Academic performance and Parents working out of home was assessed and it showed no significant difference amongst students whose both parents were working out of home (N= 117,M=82,SD=10) and parents of students who were not working out of home (N=149,M=81,SD=14). Students coming from families where both parents were working had a slightly higher academic performance compared to others. However the relation was not statistically significant (t=0.77). This may be attributed to extra tuition classes children are being sent to, when the mothers are away at work when compared to mothers who would like to help their children when at home. This result nullifies Hypothesis 4(d) which states that there will be significant relationship between academic performance and parental occupation of students.

Present study contradicted Azhar's (2013) findings that students belonging to strong financial status performed better than those who face problems in finance and that parental education boosted up their children's performance. But it supported Farooq (2011) view was that parental occupation as compared to their educational level had little effect on the student's academic performance.

Conclusion

1. Self-esteem as a whole and its four sub factors correlate significantly to academic performance. Higher the self-esteem higher was the academic performance.
2. Of the four sub-factors, the school self-esteem factor appeared to have the highest correlation with the academic performance of students even though other sub factors of self-esteem also showed significant correlation with academic performance.
3. When socio-demographic variables were considered and the differences in the academic performance were analyzed, it was seen that only birth order had shown significant differences in the academic performance of the students. That is, the eldest scored higher academic performance than the middle born and the youngest.
4. All other socio demographic factors such as gender, age, parents working out of home etc., did not show any difference in the student's academic performance.
5. Research on self-esteem and academic achievement is performed and practiced so that school counselors can learn how to improve students' performance. It is important to continue studying variables that effect students' learning and achievement in order to increase accountability and to keep schools more informed. Such research work benefits students, their parents and teachers. Lastly, activities performed by school counselors have a positive influence on students giving further purpose behind creating effective guidance curricula and following through on them.

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