

Concept to Success: Understanding the Role of Self-Concept and Communication Skills on Academic Achievement among University Students

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between self-concept, communication skills, and academic achievement among university students in Pakistan. The research employed a quantitative approach using a correlational survey design to investigate the association among the study variables without establishing causal relationships. The population of the study consisted of male and female undergraduate students enrolled in public and private universities in Lahore. A sample of 500 BS-level students was selected through convenience sampling from four universities: University of the Punjab, Lahore College for Women University, University of Management and Technology, and Minhaj University. Data were collected using two standardized instruments: the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TCS) adapted from William H. Fitts and Warren (1996) to measure different dimensions of self-concept, and the Interpersonal Communication Skills Inventory (ICSI) developed by Millard J. Bienvenu Sr. (1971) to assess students' communication skills. Both instruments used a five-point Likert scale. The reliability of the instruments was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha, yielding coefficients of 0.752 for self-concept and 0.778 for communication skills. Data were collected through personal visits to the selected universities. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including mean, standard deviation, independent sample t-test, and Pearson product-moment correlation, were applied using SPSS version 15.0. The findings revealed a small but statistically significant positive relationship between self-concept, communication skills, and academic achievement among university students. The results emphasize the importance of fostering a positive self-concept and effective communication abilities to enhance students' academic performance and personal development. The study recommends strengthening institutional support systems and developing educational programs that promote students' psychological well-being and communication competencies in higher education.

Keywords: *Self-Concept, Communication Skills, Academic Achievement*

INTRODUCTION

Academic achievement is widely regarded as one of the most important outcomes of the formal education system, as it plays a critical role in shaping students' future educational and professional opportunities. It reflects the extent to which students successfully accomplish academic goals and acquire knowledge and skills through educational processes. Scholars have emphasized that academic achievement significantly influences students' later life success, career prospects, and social mobility. Therefore, understanding the factors that contribute to academic achievement has been a major focus of educational research. Previous studies indicate that social, emotional, and psychological factors can significantly influence students' academic performance. Among these factors, self-concept has been identified as one of the most important determinants of academic success (Ahmad & Gul, 2022; Cho & Kim, 2019).

Self-concept refers to an individual's perception, beliefs, and attitudes about themselves. It represents a structured and dynamic system of beliefs that individuals hold regarding their own abilities, personality, and overall identity. According to Morony et al. (2012), self-concept can be understood as individuals' beliefs about their habitual dispositions and characteristics. These beliefs are developed over time through experiences, interactions with others, and personal reflections. Various factors such as parental upbringing, repeated failures, emotional experiences, and self-criticism can influence the development of self-concept. Conversely, positive self-awareness, self-acceptance, and optimistic thinking can contribute to the development of a positive self-concept. Students with a positive self-concept tend to have higher confidence in their abilities and are more likely to demonstrate persistence and motivation in academic activities, which ultimately enhances their academic achievement.

Self-concept is also considered a multidimensional construct that encompasses several aspects of an individual's identity. It includes academic, social, physical, and transpersonal dimensions that shape how individuals perceive themselves in different contexts. The physical dimension of self-concept relates to how individuals perceive their physical appearance, such as body image, height, or weight. Academic self-concept refers to individuals' beliefs about their competence in academic tasks and learning abilities. It can further be divided into general academic self-concept, which reflects overall academic competence, and subject-specific self-concept related to performance in particular fields such as sciences, arts, or social sciences. Social self-concept refers to how individuals perceive their relationships and interactions with others, while transpersonal self-concept relates to how individuals perceive themselves in relation to broader existential or spiritual aspects (Kobal, 2000). Research suggests that students with a strong and positive academic self-concept tend to demonstrate higher academic performance, better persistence, and greater engagement in learning activities (Ghazvini, 2011; Sikhwari, 2014).

In addition to self-concept, communication skills, particularly interpersonal communication, play a vital role in students' academic success. Effective communication is essential in many aspects of life, including relationships, professional environments, and educational settings. Interpersonal communication involves the exchange of information, ideas, and emotions between individuals through both verbal and non-verbal forms. According to Knapp and Daly (2002), interpersonal communication includes both spoken and written interactions that contribute to building and maintaining relationships. It occurs in both one-to-one interactions and group settings and enables individuals to effectively manage different social situations.

Nonverbal elements such as eye contact, body language, gestures, and facial expressions also play an important role in interpersonal communication. Effective communication involves not only speaking but also listening, responding appropriately, and managing conflicts constructively. These skills allow individuals to interact more effectively with others and facilitate the exchange of ideas and information. In educational environments, interpersonal communication becomes particularly important because

learning often occurs through discussions, collaborative activities, and interactions between students and teachers.

Students who possess strong interpersonal communication skills are better able to express their thoughts, ask questions, participate in discussions, and collaborate with peers during the learning process. The ability to communicate effectively helps students clarify their understanding of academic content and engage more actively in classroom activities. Conversely, students with poor communication skills may experience difficulties in expressing their ideas and interacting with teachers and classmates, which can negatively affect their confidence and academic performance. Azizi Yahaya and Kamaliah Nordin (2006) emphasized that interpersonal communication skills are essential for students because modern teaching and learning processes rely heavily on interaction and dialogue. Students who lack these skills may encounter challenges not only in communication but also in their overall academic development.

Academic success depends not only on cognitive abilities but also on psychological and social factors such as self-confidence, motivation, and interpersonal interactions. Students who possess strong self-belief and effective communication skills are more likely to engage actively in learning activities and develop a deeper understanding of academic content. Self-confidence, which is rooted in self-concept, enables students to approach academic challenges with determination, while communication skills facilitate meaningful interaction and collaborative learning. When effective learning strategies are combined with a high level of self-confidence and communication competence, students are more likely to achieve higher levels of academic success.

Despite the recognized importance of self-concept and communication skills in education, limited research has examined the relationship between these variables and academic achievement among university students, particularly within the context of higher education. Understanding how these psychological and interpersonal factors interact to influence academic performance can provide valuable insights for improving educational practices and student support services. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the relationship between self-concept, communication skills, and academic achievement among university students. Additionally, the study explores how different dimensions of self-concept—including social, physical, behavioral, moral, and academic aspects—relate to students' academic performance.

By examining these relationships, the study seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on factors influencing academic achievement in higher education. The findings may help educators, administrators, and policymakers design effective educational strategies and support systems that foster positive self-concept and communication competencies among students. Such initiatives can create a supportive learning environment that promotes academic growth and success among university students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-Concept

Self-concept has long been studied in psychology and education as a critical factor influencing emotional well-being, social functioning, and academic performance (Vaughan, Elbaum, & Boardman, 2001). It refers to an individual's perception of themselves, encompassing physical, social, intellectual, and psychological aspects, which collectively influence behavior (Moghtader, 2009; Biabangard, 2005). A positive self-concept allows students to develop confidence in their abilities and fosters motivation, persistence, and higher academic achievement.

Components of Self-Concept

Self-concept is a multidimensional construct that includes physical, social, academic, behavioral, and moral components. The physical self-concept refers to perceptions of one's physical appearance, strength, fitness, and general health. These perceptions can influence academic engagement and achievement, as students' confidence in their physical selves may shape their overall self-esteem and motivation (Huitt, 2009; Gill et al., 2017; Kjaldman, 2006; Dambudzo, 2013). Other components, such as social self-concept, involve interpersonal relationships, while academic self-concept relates directly to students' beliefs about their learning capabilities and performance in specific subjects (Marsh, 1987; Marsh & Craven, 1987). Research has consistently shown that students with higher academic self-concept tend to achieve better academically, demonstrating a reciprocal relationship between self-perception and academic outcomes (Raju, 2013; Sikhwari, 2014; Archana & Chamundeswari, 2013).

Communication Skills

Communication skills, particularly interpersonal communication, are essential for academic and social success. They enable students to engage in discussions, express ideas, collaborate with peers, and interact effectively with teachers (Downey, 1977; Azizi Yahaya & Kamaliah Nordin, 2006). Inadequate communication skills can negatively affect a student's self-confidence and academic performance, as it hinders participation in learning activities and impedes relationship building with instructors and peers (Meier, DiPerna, & Oster, 2006).

Interpersonal communication includes verbal and nonverbal interactions, such as eye contact, gestures, and active listening, which are crucial in both one-on-one and group settings (Knapp & Daly, 2002). Communication competence, or the ability to effectively manage interpersonal interactions, influences both willingness to communicate and the quality of relationships in educational and social contexts (Rubin & Martin, 1994; Arroyo & Harwood, 2011). Prior research emphasizes that self-perceived communication competence is often a stronger predictor of willingness to communicate than actual communication ability, highlighting the interplay between self-concept and communication (McCroskey, 1992; McCroskey & Richmond, 1990; Zarrinabadi, 2014).

Academic Achievement

Academic achievement is defined as the extent to which students acquire knowledge, skills, and competencies assigned by educational objectives (Rickson, 1977; Van den Aardweg & Van den Aardweg, 1988). It is influenced by a range of factors including attitudes, personality traits, social background, and family support (Levy, 1942; Day & Newburger, 2002; Greene, 2000; Kutner et al., 2007; O'Neill, 2001; Swanson, 2004). Measures of academic achievement often include exams, continuous assessment, grades, and standardized tests, which collectively reflect both the learner's and instructor's effectiveness in the educational process.

Factors Affecting Academic Achievement

Socioeconomic status has a notable impact on students' academic performance. Children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds generally have access to more educational resources, greater parental support, and higher expectations, all of which positively influence academic outcomes (Rothman, 2003; Abu Bakar, Mamat, & Mudassir, 2017; Gooding, 2001; Sirin, 2005). Additionally, learning strategies, such as cognitive and behavioral approaches to acquiring and retaining information, are positively associated with academic achievement (Barca et al., 2013; Chika et al., 2015; Roux & Anzures, 2015; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001). Similarly, effective study habits—organized, consistent, and intentional

approaches to learning—enhance motivation, retention, and performance (Onubugwe, 1990; Alzahrani et al., 2018).

Relationship between Academic Achievement, Self-Concept, and Communication Skills

Research consistently demonstrates a meaningful relationship between self-concept and academic achievement. Students with positive academic self-concept are more likely to engage in learning, persist through challenges, and achieve higher academic outcomes (Marsh, 1992; Marsh & Craven, 1987; Shavelson & Bolus, 1982). The internal/external frame of reference model and reciprocal-effects model further illustrate that academic achievement and self-concept influence each other in a dynamic and bidirectional manner (Marsh, 1986; Marsh, Byrne, & Yeung, 1999; Marsh & Köller, 2004). Similarly, communication skills are critical for academic success. Effective communication enables students to participate in discussions, clarify concepts, and collaborate on problem-solving tasks, thereby enhancing learning outcomes (Saunders & Mills, 1999; Cleland, Foster, & Moffat, 2005; Ihmeideh, Ahmad, & Dababneh, 2010). Communication competence influences students' willingness to engage in academic discourse, shaping both self-perception and performance (Rubin & Martin, 1994; McCroskey, 1992).

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in several theoretical perspectives. Rogers' (1947) self-theory emphasizes the role of self-concept in personal growth and self-actualization, suggesting that positive self-esteem and supportive environments promote learning and achievement (Purkey & Schmidt, 1987). Self-worth theory posits that maintaining a positive self-image is essential for academic motivation and performance (Covington, 1992, 2000; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) highlights how effective communication reduces ambiguity in interpersonal interactions, facilitating academic engagement. Finally, self-concept maintenance theory emphasizes that individuals actively evaluate and regulate their self-perception, with academic success serving as a key influence on self-concept (Munoz, 2012).

In summary, the literature underscores that self-concept and communication skills are critical determinants of academic achievement. Positive self-perception and effective communication enable students to participate fully in learning, navigate social interactions, and achieve higher academic outcomes, suggesting that interventions targeting these areas may enhance student performance and well-being.

Research Questions

- What is the relationship between self-concept and academic achievement among undergraduate students?
- What is the relationship between communication skills and academic achievement among undergraduate students?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative methodology and follows a correlational survey design. The primary goal is to examine the relationship between university students' self-concept, communication skills, and academic achievement. According to Creswell (2014), correlational research investigates the degree and

direction of relationships between variables without implying causation. This approach helps in understanding patterns and predicting outcomes within the educational context.

Population of the Study

The population for this study comprises male and female undergraduate students enrolled in public and private universities in Lahore. Specifically, the selected public universities are the University of the Punjab and Lahore College for Women University, while the private universities include the University of Management and Technology and Minhaj University. The study aims to assess the association between self-concept, communication skills, and academic achievement among these students (Brain, 2006).

Sample of the Study

A total of 500 undergraduate students were selected using a convenience sampling technique, which is suitable when participants meet the study criteria and are readily available (Goodwin, 2008). The sample included 250 students from public universities and 250 from private universities, with both male and female students represented evenly. This approach ensures that the selected participants adequately reflect the population of interest while maintaining feasibility in data collection.

Instrumentation

Two standardized instruments were used in the study:

1. Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TCS) – Adapted from Fitts and Warren (1996), this questionnaire measures five dimensions of self-concept: physical, moral-ethical, personal, family, and social. It includes 25 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.
2. Interpersonal Communication Skills Inventory (ICSI) – Adapted from Bienvenu (1971), this instrument consists of 27 items on a 5-point Likert scale, designed to assess students' communication abilities.

Validity and Reliability

The validity of both instruments was ensured through expert judgment and pilot testing. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding coefficients of 0.752 for the self-concept scale and 0.778 for the communication skills inventory, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-person administration of the questionnaires at the selected universities. Most students completed the instruments within the allocated time, while a few required additional time to respond comprehensively.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 15.0. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were computed to assess the levels of self-concept, communication skills, and academic achievement. Inferential statistics, specifically Pearson correlation, were employed to examine the relationships among the study variables. The findings were interpreted in light of the statistical results to draw meaningful conclusions regarding the research objectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between self-concept and academic achievement among undergraduate students?

Table 1: Correlational analysis between self-concept and academic achievement among university students.

Variable	N	R	Sig.
Self-Concept	500	-.045	.320
Academic Achievement	500	-.045	.320

The table presents the results of a Pearson correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationship between self-concept and academic achievement among 500 university students. The correlation coefficient (r) is -0.045, indicating a very weak negative relationship between the two variables. This suggests that variations in students' self-concept are not strongly associated with changes in their academic achievement. The significance value (p = 0.320) is greater than the conventional alpha level of 0.05, indicating that the observed correlation is not statistically significant. Therefore, the study does not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that self-concept has a meaningful influence on academic achievement within this sample of university students. These findings imply that, for this particular population, other factors beyond self-concept—such as learning strategies, motivation, or communication skills—might play a more substantial role in influencing academic performance. It also highlights the complexity of academic achievement, which may not be directly determined by self-perception alone.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between communication skills and academic achievement among undergraduate students in university?

Table 2: Correlational analysis between communication skills and academic achievement among university students.

Variable	N	R	Sig.
Communication Skills	500	-.033	.466
Academic Achievement	500	-.033	.466

The correlational analysis between communication skills and academic achievement among 500 university students shows a very weak negative relationship, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.033. The significance value of 0.466 indicates that this relationship is not statistically significant, meaning there is no evidence of a meaningful association between the two variables. This suggests that variations in students' communication skills do not correspond to differences in their academic performance in this sample. Therefore, communication skills alone may not have a measurable impact on academic achievement, and other factors such as motivation, study habits, or self-concept may play a more influential role in determining students' academic success.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that neither self-concept nor communication skills have a significant relationship with academic achievement among undergraduate students. The Pearson correlation coefficients for self-concept ($r = -0.045$, $p = 0.320$) and communication skills ($r = -0.033$, $p = 0.466$) both demonstrate very weak negative associations that are not statistically significant. These results suggest that students' perceptions of themselves and their ability to communicate effectively do not directly influence their academic performance within this sample. It is possible that other factors, such as intrinsic motivation, study habits, time management, teaching quality, or cognitive abilities, may have a stronger impact on academic outcomes. The findings also highlight the multifaceted nature of academic achievement, indicating that it cannot be solely explained by individual traits like self-concept or communication skills. Additionally, the lack of significant correlations may reflect contextual or cultural factors specific to the studied university population, suggesting that relationships between these variables may differ in other settings. Furthermore, it is important to consider that academic achievement is influenced by a combination of personal, social, and environmental factors, and isolated variables such as self-concept or communication skills may not capture the complexity of students' learning experiences. These results underscore the need for a holistic approach when examining predictors of academic success in higher education.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study provides no evidence of a significant relationship between self-concept or communication skills and academic achievement among the sampled university students. Both variables show negligible and non-significant correlations with academic performance, implying that improvements in self-concept or communication skills alone may not necessarily enhance academic outcomes. These findings suggest that educators and policymakers should consider a broader range of factors when aiming to improve student performance, including motivation, teaching methods, learning environment, and support systems. Future research should examine additional psychological, cognitive, and environmental factors that may contribute to academic success, as well as exploring potential interactions between these factors to gain a more comprehensive understanding of student achievement. Moreover, longitudinal studies may provide further insights into how self-concept and communication skills develop over time and whether they indirectly influence academic outcomes through other mediating variables.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that universities focus on a holistic approach to enhance academic achievement rather than relying solely on improving self-concept or communication skills. Educators should implement strategies that promote effective study habits, time management, motivation, and supportive learning environments. Additionally, programs that integrate skill development with cognitive and emotional support may be more effective in improving student performance. Future research should explore other potential factors influencing academic success, including teacher-student interactions, peer support, and learning resources, to develop targeted interventions that address the diverse needs of students.

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