

SELF-ESTEEM AND ITS IMPACT ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Self-esteem is an important psychological concept in understanding how an individual evaluates their personal worth and self-value. In the context of university students, the level of self-esteem plays a crucial role in academic achievement. Low self-esteem among university students can negatively affect their motivation, emotional well-being, and academic achievement. This study was conducted to explore how the level of self-esteem impacts the academic performance of university students. A qualitative case study design was employed, involving three university students as participants through semi-structured interviews. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that self-esteem influences aspects such as learning motivation, stress management, goal setting, and social interaction among university students. Those with high self-esteem were more likely to achieve strong academic performance, while those with low self-esteem tended to give up easily and were more emotionally affected. This study highlights the need for psychosocial support programmes to strengthen university students' self-esteem in a holistic manner.

Keywords: self-esteem; academic performance; university students

1. INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem is an important psychological concept in understanding how an individual evaluates their personal worth and self-value. According to Rosenberg (1965), self-esteem refers to a person's overall sense of self-worth, including how they assess their abilities, characteristics, roles, and significance within a social context. Among youth, particularly university students, the level of self-esteem not only impacts emotional well-being but also plays a vital role in the adoption of noble values such as peace, tolerance, and social cohesion.

Previous studies have shown that students with high self-esteem tend to be more confident, open-minded, and emotionally resilient (Iswandi et al., 2022). These abilities are especially crucial in the digital era, which often challenges the emotional and social balance of youth, particularly when confronted with issues such as cyberbullying, social media pressure, and the spread of toxic and provocative content. In this context, strong self-esteem helps youth evaluate themselves more realistically, resist external pressures, and remain grounded in values of peace and harmony.

Furthermore, a culture of peace among youth cannot be cultivated solely through policies or campaigns. It must be rooted in the internal development of the individual, including how they perceive and appreciate themselves. The study by Hilwa and Asyirah (2019) found that university students with low levels of social support also exhibited low self-esteem scores, which were closely linked to increased symptoms of depression and a decline in academic performance. Furthermore, in the study by Azlina et al. (2020), students in the low self-esteem category were found to have a lower average CGPA compared to their peers with moderate to high levels of self-esteem.

The digital era undoubtedly offers many opportunities for youth to build social networks, express opinions, and participate more widely in community activities. However, without a solid foundation of self-esteem, youth may be vulnerable to identity loss, negative influences, and broader social conflicts in the online space. Therefore, the cultivation of a culture of peace among youth must be supported by self-development interventions, including mental health education, counseling support, and programs that instill positive values in young individuals.

Accordingly, this study focuses on how university students understand the concept of self-esteem and its relationship with academic performance as well as their ability to serve as peace agents in today's digital society. By listening directly to the voices of students, this study hopes to open avenues for more effective strategies in shaping youth who are emotionally, intellectually, and socially balanced in facing the challenges of the digital world.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design in the form of a case study. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a case study is appropriate when researchers aim to gain an in-depth understanding of complex issues within a real-world context. The population of this study consists of undergraduate students from the Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah International Islamic University (UniSHAMS). The sample comprised students from various kulliyah or faculties at UniSHAMS, selected randomly. A total of three participants were interviewed. The selection of three participants aligns with the views of Yin (2018) and Creswell (2013), who emphasized that in case study research, a small sample size is acceptable as long as the data collected is rich and obtained from multiple sources. This is further supported by Stake (1995), who stated that the main focus in case study research is a comprehensive understanding of the case, rather than the number of participants alone.

2.1 Research Instrument

In this study, the main instrument used was a semi-structured interview. Through this type of interview, the researcher can prepare flexible guiding questions that allow the conversation to flow naturally while still focusing on the objectives of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The questions used during the interview with respondents were:

1. *"Boleh terangkan apa yang anda faham tentang penghargaan sendiri?"*
(Can you explain what you understand about self-esteem?)
2. *"Sejauh mana penghargaan sendiri memberi kesan terhadap kehidupan harian anda sebagai mahasiswa?"*
(How far does self-esteem affect your daily life as a university student?)
3. *"Adakah anda merasakan tahap penghargaan sendiri mempengaruhi prestasi akademik anda?"*
(Do you feel that your level of self-esteem affects your academic performance?)
4. *"Pernahkah anda mengalami situasi di mana penghargaan sendiri rendah menjejaskan prestasi akademik anda? Boleh kongsi pengalaman tersebut?"*
(Have you ever experienced a situation where low self-esteem affected your academic performance? Could you share that experience?)

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study identified four main themes based on semi-structured interviews with three respondents. Each theme has been analyzed and elaborated through sub-themes derived from the responses given.

Theme 1: Understanding of Self-Esteem

Sub-theme 1.1: Definition of Self-Esteem Based on Individual Understanding

Respondent 1 stated that self-esteem means one must appreciate oneself first before being able to appreciate others. This reflects a fundamental understanding of the importance of respecting oneself as a foundation for social interaction. Respondent 2 perceived self-esteem as the way an individual shows appreciation for themselves, indicating a general understanding that is still tied to an inner awareness of personal value. Meanwhile, Respondent 3 interpreted self-esteem as a form of self-protection and self-love, highlighting a focus on emotional care and personal security.

Sub-theme 1.2: Initial Awareness of Self-Esteem

All three respondents (respondents 1, 2, and 3) admitted that they had previously heard about the concept of self-esteem. Although they had different definitions, this shows that basic awareness of the concept already exists among university students.

Theme 2: The Impact of Self-Esteem in Daily Life

Sub-theme 2.1: Mental and Emotional Well-being

Respondent 1 explained that self-esteem is closely related to mental and emotional health, which plays a vital role in living a balanced daily life. Respondent 2 emphasized that the absence of self-esteem may lead an individual to lose their life purpose and hope, potentially causing negative psychological effects such as a sense of meaninglessness.

Sub-theme 2.2: Positive Attitude and Self-Love

Respondent 3 expressed that self-esteem helps maintain a positive mindset. Furthermore, the respondent emphasized that self-love is fundamental to receiving love from others, demonstrating a belief that emotional well-being begins from within.

Theme 3: Relationship Between Self-Esteem and Academic Performance

Sub-theme 3.1: Positive Influence on Academic Performance

Respondent 1 stated that self-esteem affects almost all aspects of life, including academics, indicating that self-confidence forms the basis of excellent performance. Respondent 2 expressed that without self-esteem in the context of education, a person may lack a clear sense of purpose in learning. Respondent 3 also agreed that self-esteem plays an important role in determining one's academic success.

Sub-theme 3.2: The Impact of Low Self-Esteem

Respondent 2 shared a personal experience of striving for a high CGPA but being plagued by feelings of unworthiness, which ultimately affected their emotions. In contrast, Respondents 1 and 3 reported that they had never directly experienced the negative effects of low self-esteem.

Sub-theme 3.3: The Impact of High Self-Esteem

Respondent 1 stated that when they felt motivated and confident, they were more enthusiastic about sitting for exams. Respondent 3 explained that although they had high hopes regarding academic

performance, failure to achieve the expected results led to stress and disappointment. This highlights the importance of balancing high self-esteem to avoid excessive pressure.

Theme 4: Reflection and Self-Awareness

Sub-theme 4.1: Regret and Late Realization

Respondent 2 mentioned that they only realized the importance of academic merit at a later stage, leading to feelings of regret for not taking advantage of earlier opportunities. This demonstrates a delayed self-awareness in appreciating academic potential.

Sub-theme 4.2: Moderate Expectations

Respondent 3 emphasized that they set expectations for themselves at a moderate level, not too high. This approach reflects a balanced and rational attitude toward self-management and goal-setting, which helps avoid disappointment and excessive stress.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study confirm previous research indicating that self-esteem plays a crucial role in shaping academic behavior and emotional well-being among youth. As highlighted by Iswandi et al. (2022), individuals with high self-esteem are more prepared to face challenges and are likely to adopt proactive problem-solving strategies. This was also evident among the respondents in this study, who demonstrated confidence, willingness to express their opinions, and active academic engagement.

The key contribution of this study lies in emphasizing how self-esteem serves as a foundation for cultivating a culture of peace among youth. Youth with strong self-esteem are more inclined to engage in positive interactions, avoid internal conflict, and adapt more effectively to academic and social pressures, especially in a digital age filled with social comparisons and external validation.

As an intervention recommendation, higher education institutions are encouraged to design holistic self-development programs rooted in peaceful values. These may include self-awareness workshops, youth leadership camps, and ongoing counseling support. Such initiatives are essential in helping youth build a balanced identity and avoid being overwhelmed by the competitive pressures of the digital world.

Finally, future research is encouraged to expand the sample to include non-campus-based youth or those actively engaged on digital platforms. A mixed-method or longitudinal approach is also recommended to explore the dynamic relationship between self-esteem, peace culture, and the influence of social media more comprehensively within the context of today's digital-native youth.

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