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Self-Esteem and Academic Achievement among Educational Management and Mathematics Students at Baghlan University, Afghanistan

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement through a descriptive-inferential research design. The study population included all undergraduate students (first to fourth year) from the Educational Management and Mathematics departments of the Faculty of Education at Baghlan University. Due to the manageable size and full accessibility of the population, a census sampling method was applied.

Data were gathered using a researcher-developed, closed-ended questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS and Microsoft Excel. Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed to assess the relationship between self-esteem encompassing social, academic, physical, and family dimensions and academic achievement. The results demonstrated a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement ($r = .86$, $p = .001$).

Keywords: Self-esteem, academic achievement, educational success, healthy self-esteem, unhealthy self-esteem

Introduction

Self-esteem, commonly defined as an individual's overall evaluation of self-worth, is a central construct in educational psychology due to its influence on motivation, emotional regulation, and academic behavior. From early development through adulthood, individuals continuously assess their abilities and value, shaping how they engage with learning tasks and respond to academic challenges. Although self-esteem is an internal psychological experience, it plays a critical role in observable academic behaviors such as persistence, effort, and achievement.

Academic achievement has long been recognized as a multidimensional outcome influenced not only by cognitive ability but also by affective and motivational factors. Recent empirical research consistently demonstrates a positive association between self-esteem and academic performance across educational levels and cultural contexts. Studies conducted among university and secondary school students indicate that higher levels of self-esteem are linked to increased academic engagement, self-regulated learning, and academic success. Longitudinal evidence further suggests a reciprocal relationship, whereby self-esteem predicts later academic achievement, while academic success reinforces students' self-perceptions.

Despite extensive research, findings remain inconsistent regarding the strength and direction of this relationship, particularly across different dimensions of self-esteem. Scholars have emphasized the importance of examining multidimensional self-esteem including academic, social, physical, and family-related domains to better understand its role in educational outcomes. Such distinctions are especially relevant in higher education contexts, where students' self-evaluations are shaped by academic demands, peer interactions, and family expectations.

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in William James's self-discrepancy framework, which conceptualizes self-esteem as the perceived congruence between the "real self" and the "ideal self." According to this model, smaller discrepancies result in higher

self-esteem, while larger discrepancies contribute to lower self-worth and reduced motivation (James, 1890). Within academic settings, this framework suggests that students' self-evaluations interact dynamically with academic experiences, influencing both psychological development and achievement outcomes.

Given the limited empirical evidence examining the multidimensional nature of self-esteem in Afghan higher education contexts, the present study seeks to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement among university students.

Research Objectives

Research is commonly defined as a systematic and scientific effort to investigate problems and generate new knowledge. Clear research objectives provide direction and focus to such investigations. Accordingly, the present study outlines its objectives as follows:

Primary Objective

To investigate the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement among students of the Educational Management and Mathematics Departments of the Faculty of Education at Baghlan University.

Secondary Objectives

The secondary objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the relationship between the social dimension of self-esteem and academic achievement among students of the Educational Management and Mathematics Departments.
2. To examine the relationship between the academic dimension of self-esteem and academic achievement among these students.
3. To examine the relationship between the physical dimension of self-esteem and academic achievement among these students.
4. To examine the relationship between the family dimension of self-esteem and academic achievement among these students.

Research Questions

In line with the stated objectives, the following research questions were formulated. These include one main research question and four sub-questions.

Main Research Question

Is there a significant relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement among students of the Educational Management and Mathematics Departments of the Faculty of Education at Baghlan University?

Sub-Questions

1. Is there a significant relationship between the social dimension of self-esteem and academic achievement among these students?
2. Is there a significant relationship between the academic dimension of self-esteem and academic achievement among these students?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the physical dimension of self-esteem and academic achievement among these students?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the family dimension of self-esteem and academic achievement

among these students?

1. Research Hypotheses

Based on the research objectives and questions, the following null (H_0) and alternative (H_1) hypotheses are formulated:

Main Hypothesis

- **H_{01} :** There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement among students of the Educational Management and Mathematics Departments of the Faculty of Education at Baghlan University.
- **H_{11} :** There is a significant relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement among students of the Educational Management and Mathematics Departments of the Faculty of Education at Baghlan University.

Sub-Hypotheses (Dimension-wise)

1. Social Self-Esteem

- a) **H_{02} :** There is no significant relationship between the social dimension of self-esteem and academic achievement among the students.
- b) **H_{12} :** There is a significant relationship between the social dimension of self-esteem and academic achievement among the students.

2. Academic Self-Esteem

- a) **H_{03} :** There is no significant relationship between the academic dimension of self-esteem and academic achievement among the students.
- b) **H_{13} :** There is a significant relationship between the academic dimension of self-esteem and academic achievement among the students.

3. Physical Self-Esteem

- a) **H_{04} :** There is no significant relationship between the physical dimension of self-esteem and academic achievement among the students.
- b) **H_{14} :** There is a significant relationship between the physical dimension of self-esteem and academic achievement among the students.

4. Family Self-Esteem

- a) **H_{05} :** There is no significant relationship between the family dimension of self-esteem and academic achievement among the students.
- b) **H_{15} :** There is a significant relationship between the family dimension of self-esteem and academic achievement among the students.

2. Conceptual Framework (Narrative Form)

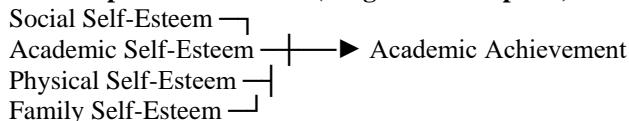
The conceptual framework of the present study is grounded in psychological and educational theories that emphasize the role of self-perception in academic performance. Self-esteem is treated as the independent variable, conceptualized as a multidimensional construct comprising social, academic, physical, and family dimensions. Academic achievement is treated as the dependent variable, typically measured through students' academic scores or GPA. The framework assumes that higher levels of self-esteem—across its various dimensions—positively influence students' motivation, confidence, classroom engagement, and persistence, which in turn enhance academic achievement. Each dimension of self-esteem is hypothesized to exert a direct and measurable effect on academic outcomes.

Variable Structure**Independent Variable****Self-esteem**

- a) Social self-esteem
- b) Academic self-esteem
- c) Physical self-esteem
- d) Family self-esteem

Dependent Variable

Academic achievement

3. Conceptual Framework (Diagram Description)**Table 1:** Methodological Alignment (Reviewer-Friendly)

Element	Description
Research Design	Quantitative, correlational
Independent Variable	Self-esteem (4 dimensions)
Dependent Variable	Academic achievement
Population	Students of Educational Management and Mathematics Departments
Data Analysis	Pearson correlation / regression analysis
Hypothesis Testing	$\alpha = 0.05$ significance level

Significance and Necessity of the Study

Human beings uniquely develop self-confidence and belief in their abilities as they experience success across various aspects of life. In this study, self-confidence refers to a realistic belief in one's actual capabilities not imaginary or exaggerated perceptions that lack grounding in reality. Such accurate self-belief can meaningfully shape an individual's life path. For students, in particular, healthy self-esteem and genuine confidence hold special value within the field of education.

Self-esteem forms the foundation of students' interpretations of their life experiences. The emotional, social, and academic competencies that stem from a positive self-concept can serve as powerful protective factors, helping students navigate future challenges more effectively.

Educational institutions and programs are designed with the fundamental goal of guiding students toward academic success. Recognition of the importance of self-esteem in the teaching learning process arises from this goal.

Self-esteem is a critical aspect of an individual's overall functioning and motivational drive, and it appears to interact with other areas such as mental health and academic performance. In this sense, self-esteem may act both as a cause and an outcome of performance in domains that hold significant personal and societal value (Sadeghi, 1988) [4].

Rogers emphasized that self-esteem results from a person's continuous evaluation of their own worth (Shamloo, 1993, p. 348) [18]. Similarly, Rosenberg, a prominent psychologist, argued that every individual possesses self-knowledge, and the evaluative aspect of this self-knowledge constitutes self-esteem. Robinson defined self-esteem as a sense of satisfaction and self-acceptance, arising from one's evaluation of personal worth, value, attractiveness, competence, capability, and ability to meet personal needs and desires (Ganji, 2013, p. 253) [20].

Statement of the Problem

Recognition and social validation of individual behavior are fundamental to the development of self-esteem and, by extension, personal well-being. Self-esteem represents the subjective value and emotional worth individuals perceive in themselves within a social context. Among personality-related difficulties, the inferiority complex is particularly damaging; students who view themselves as academically inadequate frequently demonstrate diminished motivation and reduced persistence, which negatively affects their academic trajectories.

Healthy personality development requires both self-awareness and sustained self-acceptance. Prior scholarship has identified significant associations among self-knowledge, psychological adjustment, and adaptive development. Consequently, self-esteem—both as a core dimension of personality and a predictor of academic outcomes—warrants systematic investigation, particularly among students in the Educational Management and Mathematics Departments of the Faculty of Education.

The present study examines the contribution of self-esteem to academic progress in these two departments. Self-esteem is defined as an individual's genuine belief in their abilities and capacities, examined here within the context of teaching and learning. Given its relevance to achievement and personal development, this study underscores the importance of fostering self-esteem among university students.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, applied research design using a correlational survey approach to examine the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement among university students. Data were collected in a field setting, and no experimental manipulation was involved.

1. Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of all students enrolled in the Educational Management and Mathematics Departments of the Faculty of Education at Baghlan University, Afghanistan, during the 1404 academic year (equivalent to 2025). The total population included 85 students, comprising 48 students from the Mathematics Department (Years 1-4) and 37 students from the Educational Management Department (Years 1-2). Given the relatively small and fully accessible population, a census sampling technique was employed, and all eligible students were included in the study.

2. Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured, closed-ended questionnaire. The self-esteem scale consisted of four dimensions: social, academic, physical, and family self-esteem. Academic achievement was measured using a seven-item self-report scale designed to capture students perceived academic performance. The use of self-reported academic achievement was deemed appropriate due to limited access to official academic records.

To ensure contextual relevance, the instrument was adapted to the sociocultural and geographic context of Afghanistan.

3. Validity and Reliability

Content and face validity of the instrument were established through expert review by specialists in education and

psychology. A pilot study was conducted with 25 students who were not included in the final sample to assess reliability. The internal consistency of the instrument was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.83, which indicates good reliability.

4. Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS (Version 26) at a 0.05 level of significance. The following statistical techniques were employed:

Descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, and standard deviation) were used to describe demographic characteristics and overall levels of self-esteem and academic achievement.

Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient (r) was used to examine the relationship between:

overall self-esteem and academic achievement, and each dimension of self-esteem (social, academic, physical, and family) and academic achievement.

Where appropriate, simple linear regression analysis was conducted to assess the predictive contribution of self-esteem dimensions to academic achievement.

Assumptions of normality and linearity were examined prior to inferential analysis

5. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected during regular class hours with the cooperation of department instructors. Questionnaires were administered in person and collected on the same day to ensure a high response rate. Clear instructions were provided, and participants were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire.

Literature Review

The literature informing this study consists of two principal components: theoretical foundations, which outline key concepts and frameworks relevant to self-esteem and academic achievement, and empirical research, which examines how these constructs have been investigated and validated across different contexts. Strengthening the coherence between these sections allows for a more integrated understanding of how theoretical constructs translate into observable academic outcomes.

Theoretical Foundations

Definitions of Self-Esteem

Self-esteem has been widely conceptualized in psychological literature. Rogers defines it as an individual's continuous evaluation of their self-worth (Shamlou, 1989). Rosenberg similarly views self-esteem as the evaluative dimension of one's self-knowledge, while Robinson describes it as a feeling of satisfaction and self-acceptance derived from one's judgment of personal value, competence, and effectiveness. Collectively, these perspectives emphasize self-esteem as a multi-dimensional construct that influences behavior, motivation, and adaptation.

Academic Achievement

While a universal definition of academic achievement has not been established, educational theorists consistently link it to the attainment of instructional goals. Saif (2012)^[16] defines the assessment of academic achievement as a systematic process for determining the extent to which learning objectives have been achieved. This perspective

positions academic achievement as an outcome shaped by cognitive, emotional, and motivational factors including self-esteem.

Components and Dimensions of Self-Esteem

Self-esteem comprises several core components security, self-acceptance, connectedness, commitment, and competence which collectively influence behavioral and emotional functioning. These components operate across multiple dimensions:

- **Social Dimension:** Quality of interpersonal relationships and social support.
- **Academic Dimension:** Perceptions of success or failure in educational tasks.
- **Physical Dimension:** Self-evaluation of physical appearance and abilities.
- **Family Dimension:** Sense of value and respect within the family unit.

These dimensions reflect the broad, systemic influence of self-esteem, suggesting that disruptions in any domain may undermine academic functioning.

The Need for Esteem and Its Behavioral Indicators

Following Maslow's hierarchy, esteem needs emerge after the satisfaction of basic physiological, safety, and belongingness needs. Individuals with unmet esteem needs often seek external validation and display heightened sensitivity to criticism (Bakhshi, 2004)^[17]. By contrast, individuals with healthy self-esteem demonstrate self-reliance, resilience, and balanced self-evaluation characteristics that are closely aligned with effective learning behaviors.

Self-Esteem, Academic Self-Concept, and Achievement
Self-esteem plays a central role in shaping academic self-concept. Repeated patterns of success or failure influence whether learners internalize positive or negative beliefs about themselves as students (Saif, 1984)^[15]. Academic self-esteem affects persistence, engagement, and willingness to tackle challenging tasks—factors strongly tied to academic success. Thus, self-esteem operates not merely as an emotional variable but as a critical determinant of learning behavior.

Self-Confidence and Academic Performance

Recent scholarship highlights the importance of self-confidence a construct closely associated with self-esteem in predicting academic performance. Students with strong self-belief tend to demonstrate higher motivation, greater resilience, and better outcomes across academic levels. Educational strategies that cultivate belongingness, role modeling, curiosity, responsibility, and progressive autonomy have been shown to strengthen learners' confidence and academic engagement (Salehshour, 2000)^[17].

Empirical Research

The theoretical frameworks described above are strongly supported by empirical findings across diverse educational contexts. A consistent body of research confirms the positive relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement, aligning with theoretical expectations about the role of motivation, self-perception, and psychosocial

functioning in learning.

Agrawal (2020) [2] reported significant positive correlations among self-esteem, psychological well-being, and academic performance, reinforcing the theoretical link between emotional stability and academic success.

Abozar & Parvandari found that increases in self-esteem directly enhance academic outcomes, echoing theoretical claims regarding the motivational role of self-belief.

Karimi *et al.* (2022) [11] demonstrated an inverse relationship between self-esteem and academic stress, supporting the theory that higher self-esteem improves emotional regulation and academic resilience.

Anjali, Lakshmi, & Karan observed that undergraduate students with higher self-esteem consistently performed better academically, reflecting the self-concept mechanisms described in theoretical models.

Golzadeh, Mirzaei, & Mirzaei (2024) [9] emphasized through a meta-analysis that learner self-esteem is a pivotal element in educational success, further validating the theoretical emphasis on the educational value of self-esteem.

Sandgol identified significant associations between life skills, self-esteem, and academic achievement, complementing theories that highlight the broader socio-emotional context of learning.

Khanzadeh (2023) [12] found that students with lower vitality exhibit a significant relationship between self-confidence and academic performance, supporting the link between psychological well-being and academic outcomes.

Bakhshayesh (2011) [5] concluded that all components of self-esteem and trust in God significantly predict academic achievement, illustrating the interaction of personal and

spiritual dimensions in educational success.

Tamnayi Far *et al.* (2010) [23] reported no significant relationship among emotional intelligence, self-concept, self-esteem, and academic achievement—serving as an important counterpoint that highlights the complexity of these constructs.

Najmi & Faizi (2011) [21] demonstrated a significant relationship between family functioning, self-esteem, and academic achievement, consistent with theoretical claims about the family dimension of self-esteem.

Hossaini *et al.* (2007) [10] found that students with higher self-esteem achieve more favorable academic outcomes, further supporting the theoretical and empirical consensus.

Research Findings

In accordance with the research design, methodology, and data collection procedures, appropriate statistical techniques were employed for data analysis. The study examined two categories of variables: demographic variables (age, academic year, and department), which were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and the primary study variables, which were examined using inferential statistical methods. Inferential analyses were conducted to assess relationships among the main variables and to test the study hypotheses. The following section presents the statistical results along with their interpretation.

Demographic Variables

The demographic variables provide essential contextual information for the study and serve as background data for interpreting the main results. To maintain confidentiality, the identities of participating groups are kept anonymous.

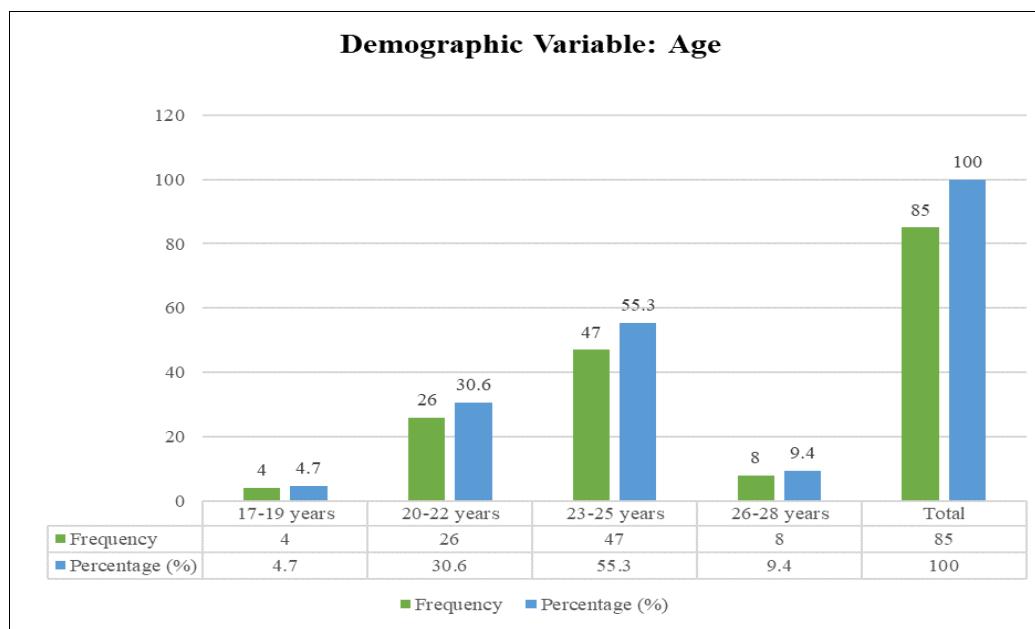


Fig1: Description and Visualization of the Demographic Variable - Age

Interpretation of Results:

As shown in figure 1, among the total of 85 participating students (100%), 4 students (4.7%) were aged 17-19 years,

26 students (30.6%) were aged 20-22 years, 47 students (55.3%) were aged 23-25 years, and 8 students (9.4%) were aged 26-28 years.

Description and Explanation of the Demographic Variable: Class-Level

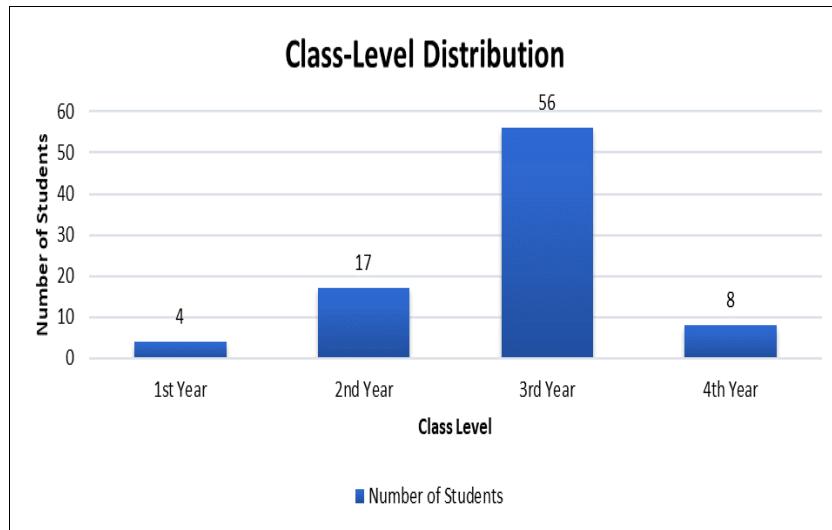


Fig 2: Distribution of Students by Class-Level

Interpretation of the Data Analysis:

As shown in the figure above, a total of 85 students from the Educational Management Department (1st- and 2nd-year classes) and the Mathematics Department (1st-, 2nd-, 3rd-,

and 4th-year classes) participated in this study, representing 100% of the sample.

Description and Explanation of the Demographic Variable: Department

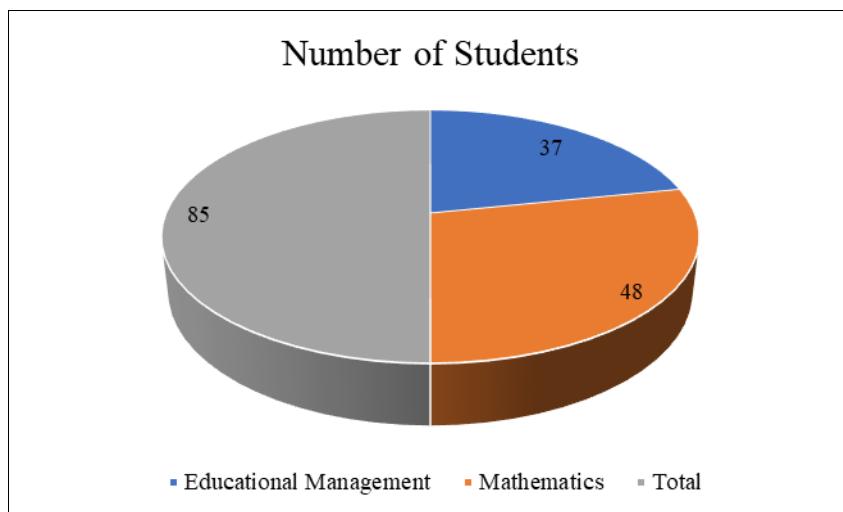


Fig 3: Distribution by Department

Main Variable and Its Components

Examining the relationship between the social dimension of the self-esteem variable and the academic progress variable

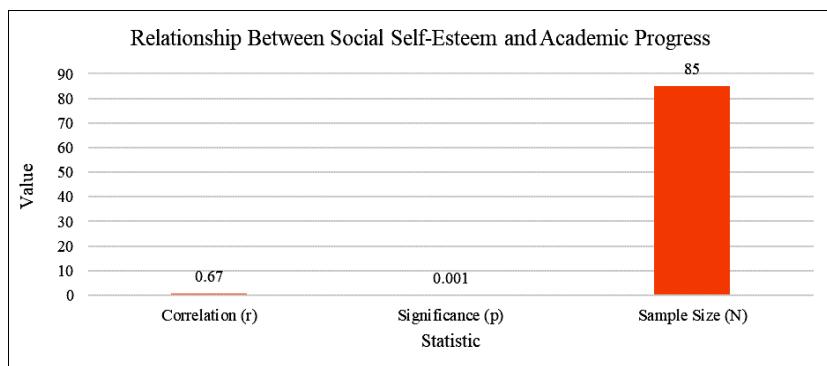


Fig 4: Relationship between the Social Dimension of Self-Esteem and Academic Progress

Interpretation of the Data Analysis:

As shown in the figure above, the correlation test indicates that there is a strong positive relationship between the social dimension of the self-esteem variable and the academic

progress variable, with $r = 0.67$ and a significance level of $sig = 0.001$, which shows the relationship is statistically significant.

Examining the relationship between the academic dimension of the self-esteem variable and the academic progress variable

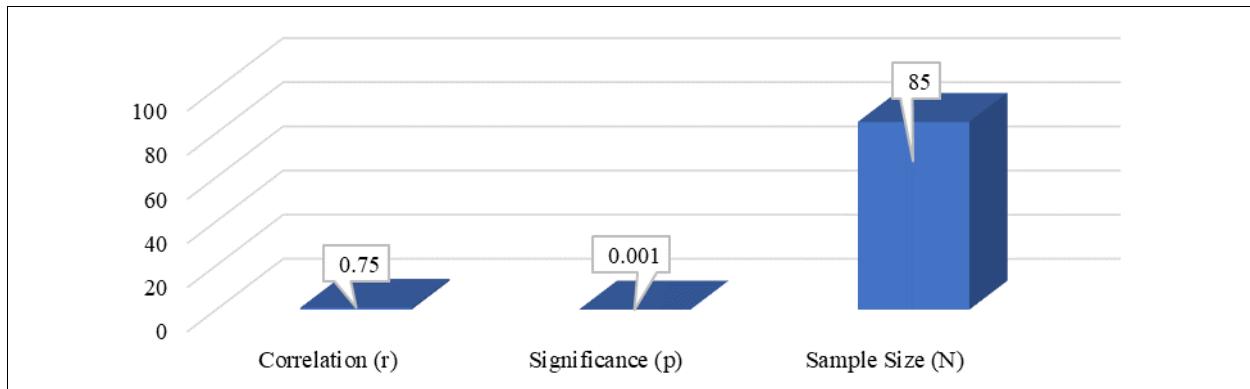


Fig 5: Relationship between the Academic Dimension of Self-Esteem and Academic Progress

Interpretation of the Data Analysis:

As shown in the figure above, the results of the correlation test indicate that there is a strong positive relationship between the academic dimension of the self-esteem variable

and the academic progress variable, with $r = 0.75$, and a significance level of $sig = 0.001$, indicating that the relationship is statistically significant.

Relationship between the Physical Dimension of Self-Esteem and Academic Achievement

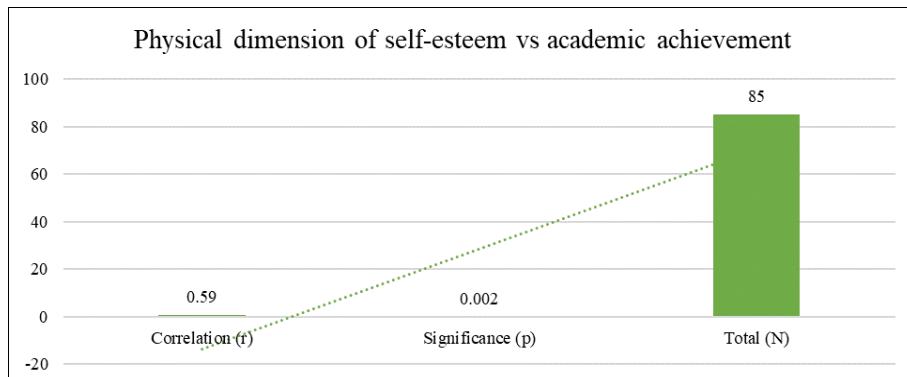


Fig 6: Relationship between the Physical Dimension of Self-Esteem and Academic Achievement

Interpretation of Data Analysis Results

As clearly shown in the figure above, considering the results of the correlation test between the physical dimension of

self-esteem and academic achievement, there is a fairly strong relationship ($r = 0.59$) with significant meaning ($sig = 0.002$).

Relationship between the Family Dimension of Self-Esteem and Academic Achievement

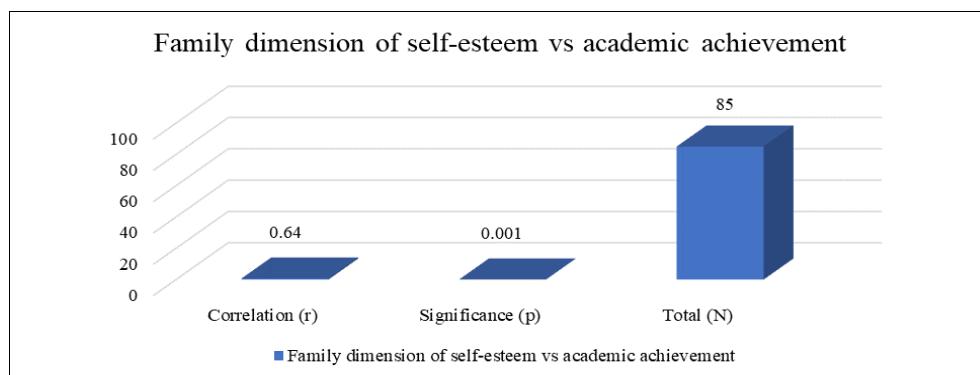


Fig 7: Relationship between the Family Dimension of Self-Esteem and Academic Achievement

Interpretation of Data Analysis Results:

As shown in the figure above, after conducting the correlation test on the data, we found a fairly strong

relationship between the family dimension of self-esteem and academic achievement ($r = 0.64$) with statistical significance ($sig = 0.001$).

Relationship between Self-Esteem and Academic Achievement

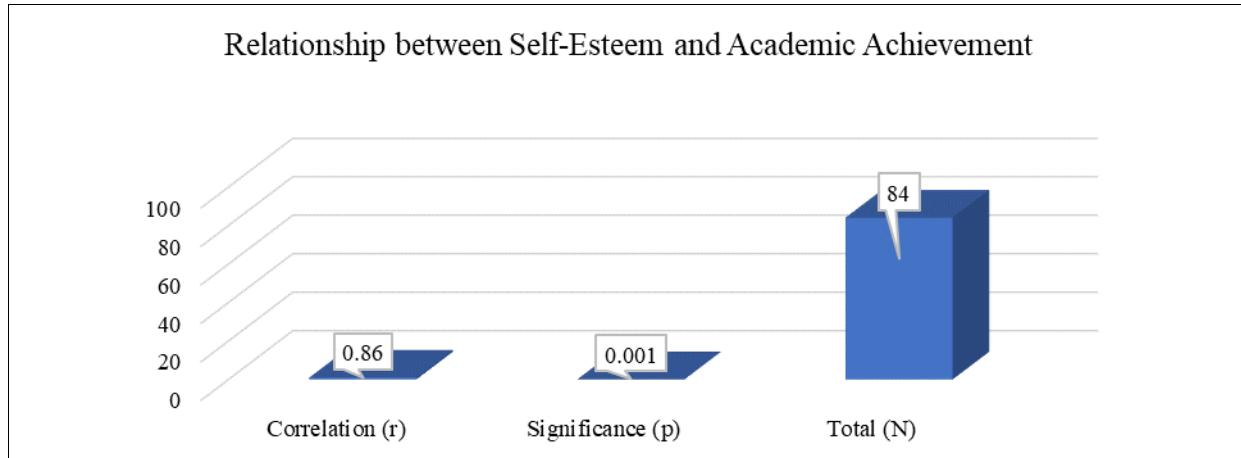


Fig 8: Relationship between Self-Esteem and Academic Achievement

Discussion

Self-esteem is a dynamic psychological construct shaped through continuous interaction with social, familial, and educational environments. Unlike innate traits, self-esteem develops gradually as individuals experience support, recognition, and academic success. Educational institutions and families play a central role in fostering students' confidence, motivation, and self-beliefs, which in turn influence academic behavior and achievement.

Conceptually, self-esteem reflects individuals' evaluations of their own worth and competence and operates across multiple dimensions, including academic, social, physical, and familial domains. These dimensions function interdependently, shaping students' motivation, engagement, and persistence in learning. Supportive educational environments, constructive feedback, family encouragement, and adequate resources contribute to the development of realistic and adaptive self-esteem, which is essential for sustained academic success.

The findings of the present study support the widely accepted view that self-esteem and academic achievement are positively and reciprocally related. Students with higher levels of self-esteem tend to demonstrate greater motivation, resilience, and engagement, which facilitate improved academic outcomes. In turn, academic success reinforces positive self-perceptions, creating a reinforcing cycle between psychological well-being and academic performance.

The results are consistent with prior empirical research. Recent studies have reported that higher self-esteem is associated with better academic performance and lower academic stress (Karimi *et al.*, 2022)^[11]. Similarly, Angeli, Lakshmi, and Kern identified a significant positive relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement among undergraduate students. Additional evidence from Sandgilder (2023)^[14] and Khanzadeh (2023)^[12] further confirms that self-esteem and self-confidence are significant predictors of academic success. Earlier findings by Bakhshayesh (2011)^[5] also highlight the multidimensional nature of self-esteem and its strong association with academic outcomes.

Consistent with these studies, the present research revealed a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement among students of the Educational Management and Mathematics Departments at Baghlan University ($r = .86$, $p = .001$). This result underscores the importance of self-esteem as a key psychological factor influencing academic success within the Afghan higher education context.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that self-esteem plays a vital role in enhancing academic achievement among university students. The strong positive relationship observed suggests that academic success is closely linked to students' self-perceptions across social, academic, physical, and familial dimensions. These results highlight the need for higher education institutions to integrate self-esteem enhancing strategies into academic and support programs. Educational policymakers, university administrators, and instructors are encouraged to promote supportive learning environments, provide constructive feedback, and strengthen family and social support mechanisms to foster students' psychological well-being and academic performance. Future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to examine causal relationships and explore additional psychological and contextual factors that may influence the self-esteem-achievement relationship. Despite its limitations, this study contributes valuable empirical evidence to the literature by highlighting the significance of self-esteem in academic success within Afghanistan's higher education system.

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