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A STUDY ON ACADEMIC SELF-CONCEPT AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

Academic self-concept is an important psychological factor that influences how adolescents think about their academic abilities, learning capacity, classroom performance, and future achievement. It refers to students' perception of themselves as learners. Adolescence is a sensitive stage of development because students experience physical, emotional, social, and educational changes during this period. Their beliefs about their academic ability may affect their motivation, confidence, participation, study habits, and academic achievement. The present descriptive study focuses on academic self-concept among adolescents. It explains the meaning, nature, dimensions, importance, influencing factors, and educational relevance of academic self-concept. The study also highlights the role of family, teachers, peers, school environment, achievement experiences, and comparison with classmates in shaping academic self-concept. A positive academic self-concept helps adolescents become confident, motivated, and active learners, while a negative academic self-concept may lead to fear of failure, low participation, academic stress, and poor performance. Therefore, this study is useful for understanding the academic behaviour of adolescents and for suggesting ways to improve their confidence and learning outcomes.

Keywords

Academic self-concept, adolescents, student learning, academic confidence, motivation, self-perception, academic achievement

1. Introduction

Academic self-concept is an important part of students' academic and personal development. It refers to the way students think and feel about their own academic abilities. In simple words, it means how students judge themselves as learners. Some students believe that they are good in studies, capable of learning difficult topics, and able to perform well in examinations. Such students usually have a positive academic self-concept. On the other hand, some students think that they are weak, slow, or unable to succeed academically. Such students may have a negative academic self-concept. Academic self-concept is important because students' beliefs about themselves influence their learning behaviour, motivation, effort, and academic performance.

Adolescence is a very important stage for the development of academic self-concept. During this stage, students move from childhood to adulthood and experience many physical, emotional, social, and psychological changes. They become more aware of their identity, abilities, weaknesses, and future goals. They also compare themselves with classmates, siblings, and friends. These comparisons may affect how they see themselves academically. If adolescents receive encouragement and success experiences, they may develop confidence. If they face repeated failure, criticism, or comparison, their academic self-concept may become weak.

Academic self-concept is closely related to school learning. It affects how students participate in the classroom, prepare for examinations, complete assignments, and respond to academic challenges. Students with positive academic



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self-concept usually show more interest in learning, accept difficult tasks, and try to improve their performance. Students with low academic self-concept may avoid academic tasks because they fear failure. Marsh and Shavelson explained self-concept as a multidimensional construct, which means that students may have different self-beliefs in different academic areas, such as mathematics, language, science, or general school performance (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985).

Academic self-concept is not formed suddenly. It develops gradually through personal experiences, feedback from teachers, parental support, peer comparison, academic success, and classroom environment. When students receive positive feedback and support, they begin to believe in their academic ability. When they are constantly criticised or compared negatively, they may lose confidence. Therefore, academic self-concept is both personal and social in nature. It is shaped by the student's own experience as well as the educational environment.

The present descriptive study focuses on academic self-concept among adolescents. It attempts to describe the meaning, nature, importance, dimensions, and factors affecting academic self-concept. The study is descriptive because it explains the existing condition and characteristics of academic self-concept rather than testing an experimental treatment. This topic is important because academic self-concept can influence students' academic success, confidence, motivation, and future educational choices.

3. Meaning of Academic Self-Concept

Academic self-concept means the perception or belief that a student has about his or her academic ability. It includes thoughts such as "I am good at studies," "I can understand difficult topics," "I perform well in exams," or "I am weak in mathematics." These beliefs influence how students behave in academic situations. A student with a strong academic self-concept may show confidence, while a student with a weak academic self-concept may show hesitation. Academic self-concept is not the same as academic achievement, but both are related. Academic achievement means actual performance, such as marks or grades. Academic self-concept means the student's perception of that performance and ability. A student may have good marks but still feel unsure about his or her ability. Similarly, a student with average marks may have confidence and willingness to improve. Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton described self-concept as a person's perception of self formed through experience and interpretation of the environment (Shavelson et al., 1976).

Academic self-concept may be general or subject-specific. General academic self-concept refers to the student's overall belief about academic ability. Subject-specific academic self-concept refers to beliefs about particular subjects such as mathematics, science, English, or social science. A student may feel confident in English but weak in mathematics. This shows that academic self-concept has different dimensions.

Table 1

Major Components of Academic Self-Concept

Component	Meaning
General academic confidence	Overall belief about ability in studies
Subject-specific confidence	Belief about ability in particular subjects
Examination confidence	Belief about ability to perform in tests



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Classroom confidence	Confidence in answering, asking questions, and participating
Learning ability	Belief about understanding and remembering lessons
Academic effort	Belief that effort can improve performance
Future academic belief	Confidence about future educational success

4. Nature of Academic Self-Concept

Academic self-concept is a psychological and educational construct. It is psychological because it is related to students' thoughts, feelings, and self-perception. It is educational because it directly influences learning behaviour and school performance. Academic self-concept is not fixed permanently. It can improve or decline depending on students' experiences.

The nature of academic self-concept is multidimensional. This means that it has different areas. A student may have high academic self-concept in one subject and low academic self-concept in another subject. For example, a student may believe that he is good in history but weak in science. This shows that academic self-concept cannot be judged only by overall marks. It must be understood through different academic areas.

Academic self-concept is also developmental. It changes with age, schooling, feedback, achievement, and social comparison. Younger children may have a simple and positive view of themselves, but adolescents become more realistic and comparative. They start judging themselves according to marks, teacher comments, peer performance, and parental expectations.

Academic self-concept is also influenced by success and failure. Repeated success increases confidence, while repeated failure may reduce it. However, support from parents and teachers can help students maintain confidence even after failure. Therefore, academic self-concept is flexible and can be improved through positive educational practices.

5. Importance of Academic Self-Concept among Adolescents

Academic self-concept is important because it affects adolescents' motivation and learning behaviour. Students who believe that they can learn are more likely to take interest in studies. They try to understand lessons, complete homework, and prepare for examinations. Positive academic self-concept encourages students to work hard and face academic challenges.

Academic self-concept also affects classroom participation. Adolescents with strong academic self-concept are more likely to answer questions, ask doubts, and take part in discussions. They do not fear mistakes as much as students with low confidence. Students with weak academic self-concept may remain silent even when they know the answer because they fear embarrassment.

Academic self-concept is also related to academic achievement. Many studies have found a relationship between students' academic self-concept and their academic performance. Valentine, DuBois, and Cooper found that self-beliefs and academic achievement are positively related, meaning that students with better academic self-perceptions often perform better academically (Valentine et al., 2004).

Academic self-concept also supports emotional adjustment. Adolescents who feel confident in studies may experience



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less academic stress. They may also feel more hopeful about their future. On the other hand, low academic self-concept can create fear, anxiety, discouragement, and avoidance of academic tasks. Therefore, academic self-concept is important for both learning and emotional well-being.

6. Academic Self-Concept and Student Learning

Student learning is influenced by how students see themselves as learners. If students believe that they are capable of learning, they make more effort and remain engaged. If they believe that they are weak, they may avoid learning tasks. In this way, academic self-concept becomes an important factor in learning.

Students with positive academic self-concept usually show better study habits. They attend classes regularly, listen carefully, take notes, revise lessons, and ask questions. Their confidence helps them continue learning even when topics are difficult. They believe that they can improve through effort.

Students with low academic self-concept may show poor study behaviour. They may delay homework, avoid tests, remain quiet in class, or depend too much on others. They may think that effort will not help them. This attitude can reduce learning. Therefore, teachers should identify such students and provide encouragement.

Academic self-concept also affects learning goals. Confident students often set higher academic goals. They want to improve their marks and learn more. Students with weak academic self-concept may set low goals because they do not believe in their ability. Therefore, improving academic self-concept can improve students' learning behaviour.

7. Factors Affecting Academic Self-Concept

Academic self-concept is affected by many factors. One important factor is academic achievement. Students who receive good marks and positive results usually develop confidence. Repeated failure may create doubt and fear. However, achievement alone does not determine academic self-concept. The way students interpret success and failure is also important.

Teacher feedback is another important factor. Positive and constructive feedback helps students understand their strengths and weaknesses. If the teacher appreciates effort and guides students properly, students feel encouraged. However, harsh criticism, public insult, and negative comparison can damage academic self-concept.

Parental support also affects academic self-concept. Parents who encourage children, provide study support, and avoid unnecessary comparison help build confidence. If parents only focus on marks and criticise poor performance, adolescents may feel pressure and develop negative self-beliefs.

Peer comparison is also important during adolescence. Students compare their marks, answers, and classroom performance with classmates. Healthy competition can motivate students, but constant comparison can reduce confidence. Therefore, academic self-concept is shaped by family, school, peers, and personal achievement experiences.

Table 2

Factors Influencing Academic Self-Concept among Adolescents

Factor	Possible Influence
Academic achievement	Success increases confidence, failure may reduce it



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Teacher feedback	Encouragement builds positive self-concept
Parental support	Supportive family improves academic confidence
Peer comparison	Healthy comparison motivates, negative comparison discourages
Classroom environment	Safe classroom increases participation
Subject difficulty	Difficult subjects may reduce confidence

8. Role of Family in Academic Self-Concept

Family plays an important role in developing academic self-concept among adolescents. Parents are the first source of encouragement and guidance for children. Their attitude toward education influences how adolescents see themselves as students. If parents show trust in their child's ability, the child is more likely to develop confidence.

Parental expectations can be helpful if they are realistic and supportive. When parents encourage children to study and improve gradually, adolescents feel motivated. However, if expectations are too high or based only on marks, students may feel pressure. This pressure can reduce academic confidence and create fear of failure.

Home environment also affects academic self-concept. A peaceful home, proper study time, availability of books, and emotional support can help students develop good learning habits. If the home environment is disturbed or unsupportive, students may face difficulty in concentrating on studies.

Parents should avoid comparing their children with siblings, cousins, or classmates. Negative comparison can make adolescents feel inferior. Instead, parents should appreciate effort and guide children according to their own abilities. Supportive parenting helps adolescents develop a healthy academic self-concept.

9. Role of Teachers in Academic Self-Concept

Teachers have a strong influence on students' academic self-concept because students spend a large part of their time in school. Teacher behaviour, teaching style, feedback, and expectations affect how students see their academic ability. A teacher who supports and motivates students can improve their confidence.

Teacher expectations are very powerful. If a teacher believes that a student can improve, the student may also begin to believe in himself or herself. On the other hand, if a teacher labels a student as weak or careless, the student may accept that negative identity. Rosenthal and Jacobson showed that teacher expectations can influence student performance and classroom behaviour (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

Constructive feedback is very important. Teachers should not only point out mistakes but also explain how students can improve. Feedback should focus on effort, learning strategies, and progress. This helps students understand that academic ability can improve through practice.

Teachers should also provide equal opportunities in the classroom. Every student should get a chance to answer, ask questions, and participate. When students feel included, their academic self-concept becomes stronger. Therefore, teachers play an important role in shaping adolescents' academic confidence.

10. Peer Influence and Academic Self-Concept



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Peers have a strong influence during adolescence. Adolescents spend much time with classmates and friends. They compare their marks, answers, abilities, and study habits with peers. These comparisons can affect their academic self-concept.

Positive peer influence can improve academic self-concept. Friends who discuss studies, share notes, encourage each other, and help in difficult subjects can create a supportive learning environment. Such peer support improves confidence and motivation.

Negative peer influence can reduce academic self-concept. Teasing, bullying, group pressure, and negative comparison can make students feel inferior. If a student is repeatedly called weak or slow by classmates, he or she may begin to believe it. This can reduce participation and interest in studies.

Teachers should encourage cooperative learning rather than unhealthy competition. Group activities, peer tutoring, and respectful classroom interaction can help students learn from one another. A healthy peer environment supports positive academic self-concept.

11. Academic Self-Concept and Academic Achievement

Academic self-concept and academic achievement are closely connected. Students who believe they are capable of doing well often perform better because they make more effort and remain motivated. At the same time, students who perform well academically usually develop stronger academic self-concept. Therefore, the relationship between academic self-concept and achievement can work in both directions.

A student with positive academic self-concept is more likely to accept academic challenges. Such students do not easily give up when they face difficult topics. They believe that they can improve through practice and guidance. This belief helps them perform better in examinations and classroom tasks.

A student with low academic self-concept may avoid difficult subjects and expect failure. Even if such a student has ability, low confidence may reduce performance. This shows that academic success depends not only on ability but also on self-belief.

Marsh and Yeung found that academic self-concept and achievement influence each other over time, which means that self-concept can affect achievement and achievement can affect self-concept (Marsh & Yeung, 1997). Therefore, schools should focus not only on marks but also on students' academic confidence.

12. Problems Related to Low Academic Self-Concept

Low academic self-concept can create many problems among adolescents. Students with low academic self-concept may think that they are not good in studies. They may lose interest in learning and avoid academic activities. Such students may not ask questions even when they do not understand the lesson.

Low academic self-concept can also reduce classroom participation. Students may fear that their answers will be wrong. They may remain silent during discussions and avoid presenting work in front of the class. This can reduce their communication skills and academic confidence.

Another problem is academic stress. Students who believe that they cannot perform well may feel anxious before examinations. They may become worried about failure, teacher criticism, or parental disappointment. This stress can further reduce performance.

Low academic self-concept can also affect future educational choices. Students may avoid choosing challenging



subjects or higher studies because they do not believe in their ability. Therefore, low academic self-concept can limit students' academic and career development.

13. Suggestions for Improving Academic Self-Concept

Teachers should encourage students and appreciate their effort. Appreciation should not be limited only to high marks. Students should also be appreciated for improvement, regularity, participation, and hard work. This helps students believe that they can improve.

Parents should provide emotional and academic support. They should avoid comparing their children with others. Instead, they should understand the child's ability and guide him or her patiently. Supportive parenting can improve adolescents' confidence.

Schools should create a positive classroom environment. Students should feel safe to ask questions and make mistakes. Mistakes should be treated as part of learning, not as failure. This type of environment helps students develop positive academic self-concept.

Peer support should also be encouraged. Group learning, peer tutoring, and cooperative activities can help students learn from one another. Healthy peer interaction reduces fear and increases confidence.

Conclusion

Academic self-concept is an important factor in adolescent learning and academic development. It refers to students' beliefs about their academic ability, learning capacity, and school performance. Adolescents with positive academic self-concept are usually more confident, motivated, and active in learning. They participate in class, complete academic tasks, and face challenges with confidence.

The study shows that academic self-concept is influenced by many factors such as achievement, teacher feedback, parental support, peer comparison, classroom environment, and personal study habits. Low academic self-concept can create fear of failure, low participation, academic stress, and poor performance. Therefore, academic self-concept should be given proper attention in schools.

Teachers, parents, and schools can help adolescents develop positive academic self-concept through encouragement, fair treatment, emotional support, constructive feedback, and positive classroom practices. A healthy academic self-concept helps students become confident learners and supports their future academic success.

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