

## Self-Esteem and Loneliness as Predicting Factors of Arab Children Achievement in Kuala Lumpur

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### Abstract

*Taking into consideration the fact that self-esteem and loneliness have an even more important role to play in students' learning, this study seeks to examine the correlation of these two factors with children academic performance. The study involved 499 (grade 4 to grade 9) Arab children studying at Arab schools in Kuala Lumpur-Malaysia. Data were collected via two questionnaires (one for loneliness and the other for self-esteem). The correlational data analysis yielded a negative correlation between loneliness and academic achievement while there is a positive correlation between self-esteem and achievement. Results also suggested that there is no correlation between students' gender, age, and academic achievement. Furthermore, the results revealed that self-esteem is a good predictor of achievement while loneliness and gender are not good predictors. The findings of the present study are discussed in relation to the relevant literature, taking into consideration the impact of children mental health on their academic achievement. Finally, recommendations for further research are presented.*

**Keywords:** Self-esteem, loneliness, childhood, academic performance, achievement.

### Introduction

Academic achievement is an important indicator of whether the education in a country is successful or not. Many variables may have an influence on a student's ability to achieve academically. Those factors include non-cognitive factors (such as mental health, family circumstances, background, previous academic performances, study skills, and many more) and cognitive factors (such as IQ and standardized test scores, which have traditionally been associated with academic achievement). Many researchers asserted the importance of examining the non-cognitive factors related to academic performance (Coetzee, 2011). As a result, a lot of attention has been given to the children mental health as one of the most influential factors on their academic achievement.

Studies have shown that there is a relationship between social support and both mental and physical health (Tassin, 1999). As children transition from middle level to high school, their self-concept gradually grows. Increasing freedom allows adolescents greater opportunities to participate in activities in which they are competent, and increased perspective taking abilities enable them to garner more support from others by behaving in more socially acceptable ways (Manning, 2007).

Previous research has tied the quality of children's social relationships to their academic achievement, the quality of peer relations has been associated both with students' academic orientations and with their school performance (Flook, Repetti, & Ullman, 2005). Lu & Zhou (2013) find poorer achievement and greater loneliness among migrant children who are isolated in migrant schools. Collectively, research indicates that loneliness is often associated with behavioral and mental health problems (Perlman & Peplau, 1984). The absence of loneliness and social isolation is seen as an important factor for good quality of life (Barrett & Mosca, 2013). Further evidence linking loneliness with social problems, loneliness was associated with poor grades, expulsion from school, running away from home, and engaging in delinquent (Perlman & Peplau, 1984).

## Theoretical Background

Loneliness is a complex emotion resulting from deficiencies in fulfilling intimate or social needs (Tassin, 1999). It is an important aspect of psychological distress in childhood and adolescence (Lu & Zhou, 2013). Asher, Hymel, & Renshaw (1984) found that more than 10% of children from third through sixth grade reported feelings of loneliness and social dissatisfaction. Perlman & Peplau (1984) defined loneliness as an unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relationships is significantly deficient in either quality or quantity. This definition shares three points of agreement with the way most other scholars view loneliness.

1. loneliness results from a deficiency in a person's social relationships.
2. loneliness is a subjective experience; it is not synonymous with objective social isolation. People can be alone with out being lonely, or lonely in a crowd.
3. the experience of loneliness is aversive, unpleasant and distressing.

One of the few theories of loneliness that has been developed to explain loneliness is that of Weiss (Tassin, 1999). Robert S. Weiss (1973) described loneliness as "a chronic distress without redeeming features" (Weiss, 1973, p.15) and he further distinguished between social loneliness (e.g., lack of social integration), and emotional loneliness (e.g., absence of a reliable attachment figure). This theoretical perspective, also called the "social needs" approach. A second conceptual approach to loneliness has focused on social skill deficits and personality traits that impair the formation and maintenance of social relationships (Cacioppo & Hawley, 2015).

Many social scientists have speculated about the various forms that loneliness can take. Three underlying dimensions have been identified in these discussions of the different types of loneliness. These dimensions have to do with the positive or negative nature, the source, and the duration of loneliness (Perlman & Peplau, 1984).

1. Positivity-negativity. We can distinguish between existential loneliness and loneliness anxiety. Existential loneliness is an inevitable part of the human experience, involving periods of self-confrontation and providing an avenue for self-growth. Existential loneliness can lead to positive experiences of "triumphant creation." In contrast, loneliness anxiety is a negative experience that results from a "basic alienation between person and another".
2. Social versus emotional loneliness. Based on the social deficiency perspective, Weiss (1973) distinguished emotional loneliness (the absence of a personal, intimate relationship or attachment) from social loneliness (a lack of social "connectedness" or sense of community). He believes that emotional loneliness is the more acutely painful form of isolation; social loneliness is experienced as a mixture of feeling rejected or unacceptable, together with a sense of boredom.
3. Chronicity. The duration of loneliness over time is an important dimension. Young (1982) distinguished among three types of loneliness. Transient or everyday loneliness includes brief and occasional lonely moods. Situational or transitional loneliness involves people who had satisfying relationships until some specific change occurred, such as divorce, bereavement or moving to a new town. Situational loneliness can be a severely distressing experience. While chronic loneliness occurring when a person has lacked satisfactory social relations for a period of two or more years.

Many factors can contribute to the experience of loneliness. Perlman & Peplau (1984) distinguished between:

1. predisposing factors which make people vulnerable to loneliness. Those factors can include characteristics of the person (e.g., self-esteem, shyness, lack of social skills), characteristics of the situation (e.g., competitive interaction, social isolation), and general cultural values (e.g., individualism).related to the characteristics of the person.

2. Precipitating events that trigger the onset of loneliness. They are factors such as the break-up of a love relationship or moving to a new community which change a person's social life in some significant way.

Since loneliness is the result of dissatisfaction with a perception of social relationships, and it varies with the type of social relationship being considered, it was hypothesized that altering which level of self a person is focusing on would also alter their reports of how they are experiencing loneliness (Tassin, 1999).

James (1896/1958) was one of the first writers to use the term self-esteem, which he described as a self-feeling that "in this world depends entirely on what we back ourselves to be and do" (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). Self-esteem continues to be one of the most commonly researched concepts in social psychology (Tassin, 1999).

Self-concept and self-esteem are among the most widely discussed but misunderstood constructs in education. Early theorists defined and used self-concept in general terms as global perceptions of self-worth, or self-esteem (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). Although the terms self-concept and self-esteem are often used interchangeably, they represent different but related constructs. This self-concept is seen in more general terms (Campbell, 1967), it refers to a student's perceptions of competence or adequacy in academic and nonacademic (e.g., social, behavioral, and athletic) domains and is best represented by a profile of self-perceptions across domains. Self-esteem is a student's overall evaluation of him- or herself, including feelings of general happiness and satisfaction (Manning, 2007)

Theories of self-esteem have been based on one of two fundamentally different assumptions about the essential nature of self-esteem. Traditionally, intrapersonal theorists have conceptualized self-esteem as a person's private self-evaluation. Humanistic approaches that dominated thinking about self-esteem in the middle of the 20th century likewise viewed self-esteem as a personal evaluation of one's goodness or worth (MacDonald, Saltzman, & Leary, 2003).

Issues of self-esteem are likely to arise in middle and late childhood, children become more aware about managing and controlling their emotions to meet social standards. A greater sense of social awareness arises because of the wide increase of significant others, as well as some internalisation of the perceived values and norms of society could lead to those issues. At this stage, statements of self-image will include emotionality, interpersonal references, as well as trait labels (Alpay, 2000) and is so necessary as to be the prime motivator of all behavior (Campbell, 1967).

Promoting high self-esteem is important because it relates to academic and life success (Manning, 2007). Research indicates that persons who maintain positive self-concepts with higher self-esteem tend to report more positive affective states, greater wellness, more life satisfaction and fewer depressive symptoms which in turn affect their performance in school (Yaacob, Juhari, Talib, & Uba, 2009) (Campbell, 1967).

Self-concept is frequently positively correlated with academic performance, but it appears to be a consequence rather than a cause of high achievement. This suggests that increasing students' academic skills is a more effective means to boost their self-concept than vice versa (Manning, 2007).

From middle to late childhood, loneliness appears to be an indicator of internalizing emotional problems and negative self-perceptions such as anxiety, shyness, depression, or low self-esteem (Bonetti, 2009). The available evidence suggests that loneliness is associated with poor mental health, loneliness was associated with indices of poor personality integration (Perlman & Peplau, 1984). Barrett & Mosca (2013) found that social isolation is a significant feature of the lives of return migrants. In a study conducted by Shouqair on a sample of 290 pupils from second grade of middle school in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the results showed a positive relationship between self-esteem and mutual social relations and a negative relationship between the scores of members of the two samples in appreciation of self-esteem and loneliness (Shouqair, 1993).

Salomon and Strobel examined loneliness, social support, and help-seeking behavior in children, ages 9 to 13. Participating were 330 fourth to sixth graders from middle and low income families from the Montreal, Canada region, who completed two questionnaires measuring feelings of loneliness and social dissatisfaction and help-seeking. Independent variables were sex, school performance, and socioeconomic status (SES). The results indicated that children with lower school performance were significantly more lonely than children with higher school performance, and more particularly expressed feelings of rejection and isolation. Sex and SES had no effect on the loneliness score (Salomon, A.; Strobel, 1996)

Similarly, Norman (2003) examined the identification and perception of 170 middle school children in the seventh grade in a public school in Tennessee to determine the extent and direction of the relationships among children's loneliness scores. The results indicated that there is no statistically significant relationship between students' loneliness scores and school performance (Norman, 2003).

In Malaysia, Yaacob, Juhari, Talib, & Uba (2009) examined the degree of relationships between loneliness, stress and self-esteem with depression among adolescents. The findings of the study showed that loneliness, stress and self-esteem have moderate significant relationships with depression and stress emerged as the strongest predictor of adolescent depression.

From the educational literature, it is clear the relationship between student achievement, loneliness and self-esteem. There is general agreement amongst researchers that students who are underachieving at school are also likely to have low self-esteem, and that improvements in self-esteem will lead to improvements in achievement (Alpay, 2000). A low self-esteem may be exhibited through several operations by the child such as avoidance, compensation, low motivation, and resistance (Alpay, 2000), this could also lead to loneliness as low self-esteem is one of the most powerful predictors of loneliness (Mahon, Yarcheski, Yarcheski, Cannella, & Hanks, 2006; Harward, 1989).

### **Statement of the problem**

The deformation of the self-concept can lead to loneliness (Hamza, 2003). Low self-esteem has been shown to relate to concurrent and later feelings of loneliness in adolescence (Vanhalst, Luyckx, Scholte, Engels, & Goossens, 2013). The assumption that children's self-beliefs are inextricably tied to their thinking and functioning seems so sound (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). A path analysis supported the model; a lack of peer acceptance in the classroom in 4th grade predicted lower academic self-concept and more internalizing symptoms the following year, which in turn, predicted lower academic performance in 6th grade (Flook et al., 2005). Vanhalst et al., 2013 investigated the direction of effects between loneliness and self-esteem in two independent longitudinal studies, and the underlying role of social acceptance was investigated. Results indicated that self-esteem and loneliness influenced one another in a reciprocal manner. Furthermore, the dominant path from self-esteem to loneliness was partially mediated by perceived—but not actual—social acceptance (Vanhalst et al., 2013).

Therefore, the major purpose of this study is to test the relationship between Arab children's self-esteem, loneliness and their achievement in Arabic schools in Malaysia. It also investigates if self-esteem and loneliness are predicting factors of Arab children's achievement.

For more specification, the study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of self-esteem and loneliness among Arab children's in Arabic schools in Malaysia?
2. How well does the Arab children's self-esteem and loneliness predict their achievement?
3. What is the role of some dependent variables (age and gender) on predicting Arab children's achievement?

### **Research Method**

#### **Research design**

This research is descriptive in nature; its key purpose is a description of the state of affairs, as it exists at present. Surveys are concerned with describing, recording, analyzing and interpreting conditions that either exist or existed (Kothari, 2004). According to this research methodology, the researcher achieved the objectives of the study by using suitable methods for data collection such as, a questionnaire to identify the level of self-esteem and loneliness among Arab children's in Arabic schools in Malaysia.

## The Sample

The sample in this study was randomly selected from four Arab schools in Kuala Lumpur city: which resulted in 499 students (age average 12.13 years) in the middle stage. Table (1) illustrates the research sample in terms of gender and age. The students' sample consisted of 499 students in Arab schools in Kuala Lumpur. The male students formed 46.9% of the sample while the female students formed about 53.1%. Concerning the students' age, the majority of the sample (68.7%) aged 11-14 years, 19.2% aged 9-10 years and 12% are 15-17 years old.

## Materials

In order to test the children level of loneliness and self-esteem, the researchers adapted two instruments; revised version of the self-report UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) Loneliness Scale developed by Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona (1980), and Index of Self-esteem (ISE) A 25-item questionnaire developed by Hudson (1982).

The adapted UCLA-R Loneliness Scale comprises 20 items that presented statements about children's feeling of Loneliness. The items are 3 Likert scale (usually, sometimes, never). The scale divided into three sub-scale: social relationship (6 items), rejection (9 items) and loss of mutual intimacy (5 items). Cronbach's alpha, the measure of reliability, was calculated for the scales and subscales; "social relationship" had an alpha of 0.71, "rejection" had an alpha of 0.76, and "loss of mutual intimacy" had alphas of 0.706. The overall scale had an alpha of 0.75. All scales and subscales were greater than 0.7, which is considered "acceptable" for exploratory research.

This study utilized the Index of Self-Esteem (ISE) (Hudson, 1982). This 25-item index is intended to measure the amount, intensity, and/or significance of a problem an individual has with self-esteem. The items are rated on a Likert scale from 1-3 (usually, sometimes, never). 3 items has been deleted according to the results of validity and reliability test. The researchers test the reliability using Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient. The results of Cronbach's Alpha for the 22 items scale indicate that the overall scale had an alpha of 0.85. This means that the instrument has a good reliability and can be used to measure the pre-service teachers' perceptions towards mlearning.

## Results

The main aim of this study is to measure the relationship between Arab children's self-esteem, loneliness and their achievement Arabic schools in Malaysia. It also investigate if self-esteem and loneliness are predicting factors of arab children achievement. Therefore, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to predict children's achievement in from the predictor variables.

The two questionnaires asked children to report their feeling of loneliness and self-esteem. table (2) includes the means and standard deviations about Arab children's feeling of loneliness and their self-esteem.

The results in table 2 show that Arab children have a moderate level of loneliness with 54.3% ( $M = 1.63$ ,  $SD = 0.4$ ). Regarding the loneliness scale subcategories, the highest percent 59.5% is for "loss of mutual intimacy" ( $M = 1.785$ ,  $SD = 0.552$ ), while the lowest percent 52.2% is for "rejection from the others" ( $M = 1.567$ ,  $SD = 0.467$ ). the "social relationship" get 54.9% ( $M = 1.646$ ,  $SD = 0.469$ ). Such results support the results that the Arab children have a moderate level of loneliness.

On the other hand, the results in table 2 show Arab children have high level of self-esteem with 78.8% ( $M = 2.365$ ,  $SD = 0.381$ ).

Full model entry was employed to regress all predictor variables onto the dependent variable simultaneously. A standard multiple regression analysis was employed to predict achievement. Table 3 displays the correlations between the variables.

Each variable has a significant correlation with each other variable. Achievement was positively correlated with self-esteem, and negatively correlated with loneliness. on the other hand, self-esteem is negatively correlated with loneliness. To get more information about the goodness of fit of a model, the results about R Square is presented in Table 4.

In this case the  $R^2$  of 0.138 indicates that 13.7% of the variation in achievement is explained by the regression variables. The adjusted  $R^2$  value of 0.131 indicates that a little percent of the variability in achievement could be predicted by self-esteem, loneliness, gender and age.

For more information about the model, Table 5 shows the regression ANOVA, which tests for a linear relationship between the variables.

The results in the ANOVA Table ( $F(4, 494) = 19.728, p < .001$ ) indicate that the value of  $F$  is significant beyond the 0.01 level. The full model  $R^2$  was significantly greater than zero,  $R^2 = 13.8\%$ .

On the second step all of the predictors were entered simultaneously, resulting the "Coefficients", that provides the estimates of the regression coefficients (table 6).

Analysis of regression coefficients (Table 6) indicated that Arab children achievement could be predicted by self-esteem ( $Beta = 0.285, p < .01$ ). this result is aligned with the results in table 4 that the variables predicted significantly 13.8% of the variance in achievement. The other three variables; loneliness ( $Beta = -0.089, n.s.$ ), gender ( $Beta = 0.039, n.s.$ ), and age ( $Beta = -0.054, n.s.$ ) were not a significant predictor of achievement for arab children. The overall model fit was  $R^2 = 0.138$ . Thus, the higher a children's self-esteem, the greater children's achievement.

## DISCUSSION

children's mental health could be one of the crucial factors for their achievement. As a result, it is important to test the relationship between children achievement and some of the non academic factors related to children's mental health. The present study employed a multiple regression analysis to determine if the children's level of self-esteem, loneliness, gender and age could be predictors of their achievement. The results indicate that a linear combination of the predictor variables is able to account for a significant amount of variance in a children's achievement.

The findings further indicate that the self-esteem predict a significant amount of variance in children's achievement. Contrary to this, children's feeling of loneliness, age and gender did not individually; predict a significant amount of variance in children's achievement.

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Table 1. The Sample

Age	Gender				Row Totals	
	male		female			
9-10	38	16.2%	58	21.9%	96	19.2%
11-14	154	65.8%	189	71.3%	343	68.7%
15-17	42	17.9%	18	6.8%	60	12.0%
All	234	46.9%	265	53.1%	499	

Table 2. Basic Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	% of Mean	Std. Deviation	level
social	1.646	54.9%	0.469	Moderate
rejection	1.567	52.2%	0.467	Moderate
loss of mutual intimacy	1.785	59.5%	0.552	Moderate
Loneliness	1.630	54.3%	0.400	Moderate
Self-esteem	2.365	78.8%	0.381	high

Table 3. Correlations Between Predictor Variables

	achievement	loneliness	self-esteem
achievement	1	-.290**	.359**
loneliness	-.290**	1	-.681**
self-esteem	.359**	-.681**	1

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

Table 4. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.371a	.138	.131	13.4089

a. Predictors: (Constant), self-esteem, age , gender , loneliness

Table 5. The regression ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	14188.464	4	3547.116	19.728	.000
Residual	88820.610	494	179.799		
Total	103009.074	498			

Table 6. Regression output (Regression Coefficients)

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	60.380	9.072		6.656	.000
gender	1.122	1.254	.039	.894	.372
age	-.446	.351	-.054	-1.271	.204
loneliness	-3.186	2.066	-.089	-1.542	.124
self-esteem	10.759	2.211	.285	4.866	.000