TWIST

Self-Esteem and Learning Outcomes:
A Correlational Analysis of Foreign Language Learners

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Abstract
It is often postulated that self-esteem, a significant psychological and emotional construct impacting people's beliefs of themselves, influences several aspects of learning. However, not much research has been done to determine the role self-esteem plays in foreign language learning. Thus, using a correlational analysis, this study explores the connection between self-esteem and language learning outcomes in higher education. A survey measuring self-esteem and a language test were used to gather data from first year students studying functional French in a Ghanaian university. The study's findings show no clear correlation between self-esteem and language learning outcomes, indicating that self-esteem is not a direct predictor of language learning success. The findings will help educators better understand the role of self-esteem in foreign language learning and how it impacts student performance.

INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem is believed to be a factor that influences performance in many learning situations. It may be defined as an individual's subjective sense of who they are and how they interact with the environment around them. To Rosenberg (2015), it is a positive or negative attitude toward a particular object, namely, the self. The positive or negative attitude plays a role in undermining or optimizing learning.

Generally, a person with a higher sense of self-esteem is typically seen to be more driven, open to learning, and resilient to challenges than someone with a lower sense of self-worth. Many scholars believe that learners who have high self-esteem have confidence in their abilities and put more effort into learning while learners with low self- esteem avoid learning for fear of judgment or embarrassment. Rosenberg (2015) confirms this by stating that a person with high self-esteem thinks he is very good and considers himself superior to others. Conversely, a person with low self-esteem has self-rejection and lacks respect for self. The self-rejection reduces their chances of getting meaningful feedback from their teachers which affects their progress in learning. For this reason, fostering a supportive and encouraging learning environment is vital for helping learners to build self-esteem to enable them to engage deeply with learning. Contrary to that other scholars are of the opinion that self-esteem is not a complete determinant of academic outcome and performance. According to Baumeister et al. (2003), the modest correlation between self esteem and school performance does not indicate that high esteem leads to good performance. Instead, high esteem is partly the results of good school performance. This group of scholars do not prioritize developing self-esteem as a way of improving learning and performance in the classroom.

In language learning however, there is not enough evidence to determine if self-esteem plays a role in the language acquisition process. Therefore, it is our aim in this study to investigate how varying levels of self-esteem among French language learners impact their overall performance by exploring the relationship between their self-esteems and their success in acquiring the language. The outcome of this research will help us identify students who may need

additional support and in designing interventions aimed at boosting self-esteem with the hope of improving language learning outcomes.

Research Context and Objectives
The objective of this study is to determine if any positive correlation exist between self-esteem and academic performance among foreign language learners. Given the complexity of language learning, knowing how these two variables relate to one another will help us comprehend how psychological and emotional factors affect language learning.

Research Hypothesis
High self-esteem is associated with high learning outcome while low self-esteem is associated with low learning outcome.

Null Hypothesis
Self-esteem plays no role in language learning outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework
This research is conducted through the lens of contingencies of self-worth model developed by Crocker and Park. The contingencies of self-worth model provides the bases for understanding self-esteem and self-validation through areas of personal importance. According to this model, people adopt self-validation goals to prove, demonstrate and confirm that they possess certain qualities in certain domains. For example, a person who bases his self-esteem on gaining others approval may adopt the goal of proving that he is likable. Specifically, people who are highly rejection-sensitive possess insecure attachment styles, have fragile self-esteem or low self-esteem to pursue self-validation goals. Additionally, some socio-cultural factors shape people's self-worth and self-validation goals. First, people's self-worth is shaped through their social interactions with peers, family members, teachers and others. Therefore, positive and negative interactions have the potential to influence one's current self-worth and their self-validation goals. Moreover, contingencies of self-worth may also develop in response to prevailing cultural norms and values in independent and interdependent cultures. In individualistic cultures, the self is defined by independence, distinctiveness from others and personal freedom. On the other hand, the self is defined by one's relationships, group memberships and connections with others in interdependence cultures. The pedagogical implication emphasizes how critical it is for teachers to promote positive interactions in their classrooms to create a learning environment that avoids being overly dependent on outside approval to build students' confidence and self-worth. Teachers need to also place more emphasis on helping students develop a growth mindset by emphasizing effort, tenacity, and resilience through building self-esteem that stems from a sincere love of learning and self-acceptance.

Empirical Reviews
To get a better understanding of how self-esteem influences language learning, this section looks at the scholarly research that has previously been done to explain how self-esteem interacts with language learning. Gultom and Oktaviani (2022) used quantitative research methods to analyze the correlation between students' self-esteem levels and their English proficiency outcomes with the Pearson product moment method to calculate the correlation coefficient between the two variables. They found a positive relationship between self-esteem and proficiency levels. The positive relationship between the two variables proves that when students have higher self-esteem, they perform better in language learning done when their self-esteems are lower. Similarly, Wijaya (2023) studied the impacts of cultivating positive self-esteem into EFL learners during speaking activities with qualitative research methodologies including thematic analysis of previously produced research findings from speech and self-esteem-related studies. Key findings showed that encouraging positive self-esteem greatly boosts students' confidence when speaking, which improves speaking performance and increases their level of satisfaction with their academic accomplishments. Therefore, the study recommended the establishment of emotionally supportive and entertaining speaking environments that assist students to feel at ease and confident while expressing their thoughts to help them develop communicative skills and resilience when faced with speaking difficulties. Despite the demonstrated positive influence of self-esteem on language learning, some studies have reported negative relationships between student self-esteem levels and their language learning outcomes.

Alghazo (2023) correlated learners foreign language anxiety and students' self-esteem levels and found the correlation between foreign language anxiety and self-esteem to be negative. The researchers recommended for language teachers to enhance students' self-esteem through a supportive learning environment that recognizes and manages students' anxiety in a language learning environment. Subsequently, Szyszka (2022) investigated the relationship between second language (L2) accentedness and self-esteem with Pearson's correlation. A strong negative correlation was found between the two constructs of L2 accentedness and self-esteem. The speakers whose L2 accent is closer to native-like exhibited higher self-esteem than those whose speech were more accented. In other words, the closer a participant's articulation was to the nativelike pronunciation, the higher self-esteem they exhibited. The results provided a basis for some pedagogical recommendations for language educators interested in factors that influence language development. The study recommended for language educators to consider the impact of pronunciation on learners' self-esteem and to implement strategies to support learners to improve their pronunciation to enhance their overall language learning

experience. Furthermore, a quantitative study involving self-reported measures from a population of 431 college students enrolled in language preparatory classes were used in Gultom and Oktaviani (2022) study to examine the relationship between foreign language anxiety and beliefs about foreign language learning, considering personal and social-environmental factors that may influence these beliefs. The study's key findings showed that failure anxiety was positively associated with less favorable beliefs about language learning, while low self-confidence correlated negatively with these beliefs. In addition, the study found that both foreign language anxiety and beliefs varied depending on the specific language being learned. The researchers suggested to educators to take into account the influence of anxiety and self-confidence on language learning beliefs and suggested addressing these factors to improve language learning experiences for diverse student populations. The impacts of Instagram feed-based assignments on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' self-esteem, academic buoyancy (AB), academic engagement (AE), and language achievement (LA) was investigated by Ibrahim and Basim (2024) through quasi-experimental research. The experimental group scored better than the control group in terms of self-esteem, academic buoyancy, academic engagement and language achievement. The study suggested to educators and policymakers to take into account the potential to improve educational outcomes through student self-esteems and encouraged more research into social platforms as a tool to support. Chen et al. (2024) examined how language learning through music affected English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' academic performance (AA), creative thinking (CT), and self-esteem (SE). Three questionnaires were used to gather data: one for academic accomplishment, one for self-esteem, and one for creative thinking. It used a quantitative study approach. The main conclusions showed that technology-enhanced music-based language learning significantly improved the AA, CT, and SE of EFL students, indicating that using music in language education can improve a number of language learning outcomes. To enhance teaching methods and learning outcomes, the study proposed to educators, curriculum designers and legislators to think about incorporating technology-enhanced language learning through music (TELLTM) into English language instruction.

While the empirical reviews present various studies that examine the interplay between self-esteem and language proficiency outcome in different contexts there exist limited research about how self-esteem directly impact students who study French as a foreign language studies. This gap necessitates the need for research that explicitly establishes a correlation between self-esteem levels and academic outcomes French language learners.

Research Design

This study used quantitative research methods for data collection and analysis. The research employs a self-report questionnaire (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale) to enable students to self-evaluate their self-esteems at the beginning of the Spring 2024 semester. The scale consists of 5 positive and 5 negative statements which are rated on a 4-point Likert scale. Additionally, data from standardized language tests were also collected at the end of the semester to gather comprehensive data on learners' self-esteems and language outcomes for analysis. This means two sets of data were used for each student. The first set of data consists of scores from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale ranging from 0 to 30 where scores between 15 and 25 will be considered within the normal range and scores below 15 considered low self-esteem. The second set of data are their individual scores from the end of semester French test. Finally, we analyzed the relationship between the variables using scatter plots and Pearson correlation.

Research Sample

A total of 50 undergraduate students from a Ghanaian university studying Functional French 1 in the Department of Liberal Studies were randomly selected to participate in the research. This group of participants are diverse in terms of age, gender, and academic abilities. The bar chart below shows that 83% of our participants, who are the majority falls between the ages of 18 to 24.
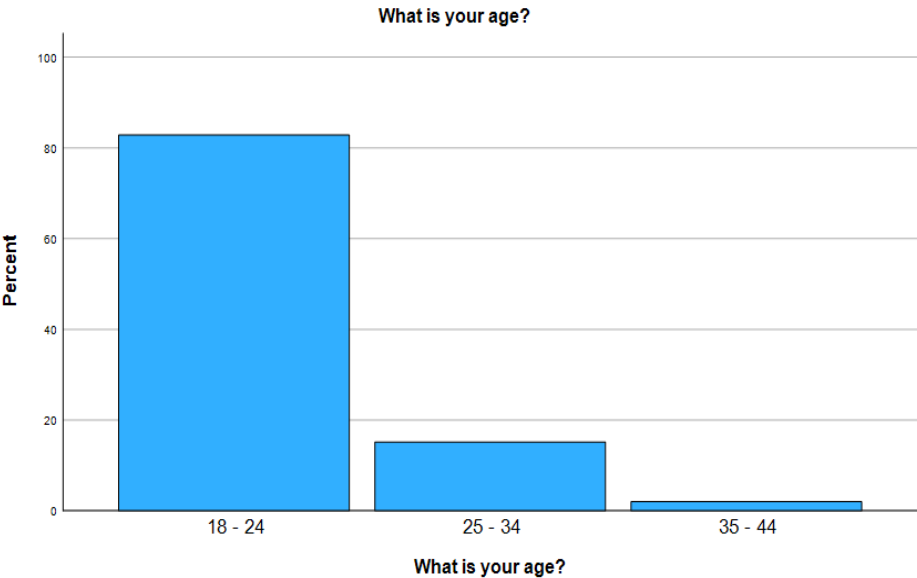
Out of the different age groups, 86% are female, 11% are male and 2% are of other genders.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	11	11.0	11.1	11.1
Female	86	86.0	86.9	98.0
Other	2	2.0	2.0	100.0
Total	99	99.0	100.0	
Missing System	1	1.0		

Involving the different sexes and different age groups was necessary to allow variability in responses and ensures that the conclusions drawn are more accurate and comprehensive.

Data Analysis and Findings
As it is indicated above, students were made to self-evaluate themselves with the aid of the Rosenberg self-esteem scale to determine their individual self-esteems. The responses from our participants were scored on a scale of 0 to 30. Those who score below 15 were determined to have low self esteem while those with a score of 15 and above were determined to have normal to high self-esteems.

Students' Self-Esteem Scores				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
10.00	1	1.0	2.0	2.0
12.00	7	7.0	14.0	16.0
13.00	2	2.0	4.0	20.0
14.00	5	5.0	10.0	30.0
15.00	10	10.0	20.0	50.0
16.00	9	9.0	18.0	68.0
17.00	7	7.0	14.0	82.0
18.00	8	8.0	16.0	98.0
19.00	1	1.0	2.0	100.0
Total	50	50.0	100.0	
Total	100	100.0		

From the table above, it was determined that 35 out of the 50 participants scored 15 and above to demonstrate normal to high self-esteems. Their combine score represents 70% of the total score. On the other hand, a total of 15 participants had a self-esteem score below 15 which represents 30% of the total.

At the end of the semester, the final score of the participants in their examinations were used to determine their academic performance which is reported in the table below;

Students' Examination Scores				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
52.00	1	1.0	2.0	2.0
54.00	1	1.0	2.0	4.1
55.00	1	1.0	2.0	6.1
56.00	1	1.0	2.0	8.2
59.00	1	1.0	2.0	10.2
61.00	4	4.0	8.2	18.4
62.00	1	1.0	2.0	20.4
63.00	2	2.0	4.1	24.5
64.00	4	4.0	8.2	32.7
65.00	6	6.0	12.2	44.9
66.00	3	3.0	6.1	51.0
67.00	3	3.0	6.1	57.1
68.00	2	2.0	4.1	61.2
70.00	3	3.0	6.1	67.3
71.00	1	1.0	2.0	69.4
72.00	6	6.0	12.2	81.6
73.00	1	1.0	2.0	83.7
75.00	2	2.0	4.1	87.8
77.00	1	1.0	2.0	89.8
78.00	2	2.0	4.1	93.9
79.00	2	2.0	4.1	98.0
83.00	1	1.0	2.0	100.0
Total	49	49.0	100.0	
Total	100	100.0		

Statistics		
	Students' Self-Esteem	Students' Exam Score
N Valid	50	49
Missing	50	51
Mean	15.3200	67.3265
Median	15.5000	66.0000
Std. Deviation	2.12315	6.81111

From the scores, 1 student attained a final grade of 83, 43 students attained a grade between 61-79 and 5 students attained a grade of 59 and below. Statistically, there was a self-esteem mean score of 15.3200 and an examination means score of 67.3265.

To determine the role their individual self-esteems played in their performances, we used a scatter plot to visualize the relationship between the two.
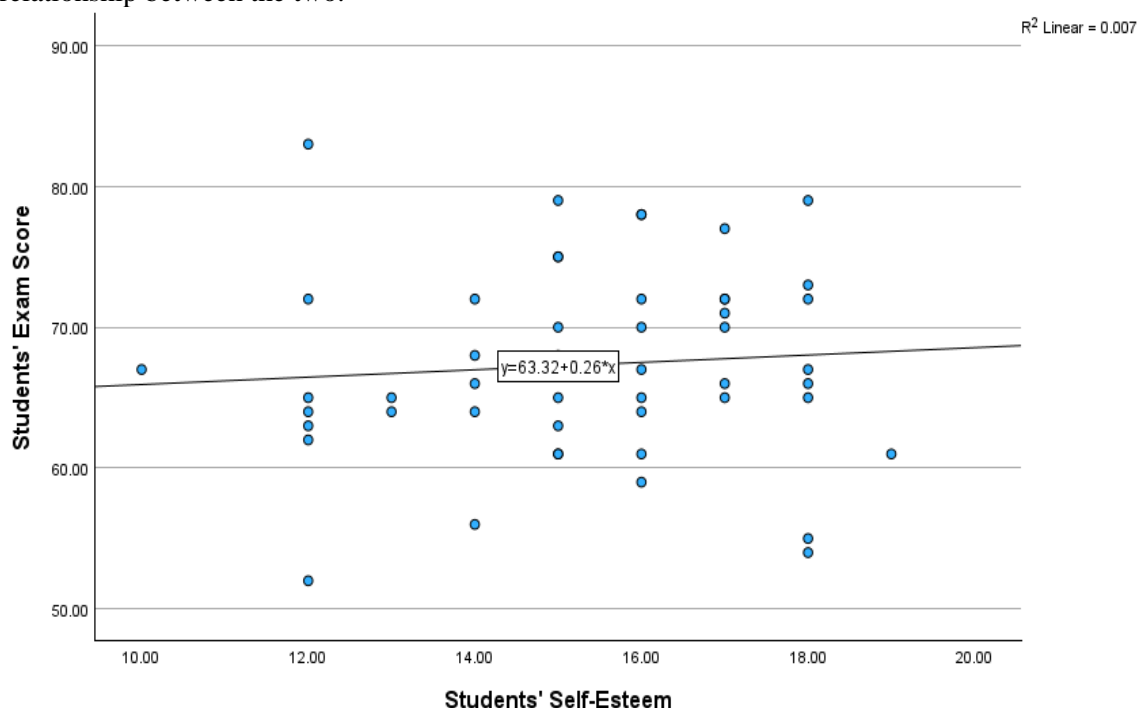
From the plot, the points appear a little scattered with no clear upward trend along the line. This is an indication of a weak positive relationship between students' self-esteems and their language learning outcomes. The weak relationship is partly due to the presence of an outlier in the plots. Scores that are 15 and above showing high esteem on the x-axis are generally associated with exam scores that range between 60 and 79 on the y-axis. This shows that most students with a normal to higher self-esteem attained average passes in their final examinations. However, their high self-esteems were not determined to be the major determinant of their academic successes.

Additionally, we used the Pearson correlation to emphasize the direction and strength of the relationship between the two variables in the table below;

Correlations			
		Students' Self-Esteem	Students' Exam Score
Students' Self-Esteem	Pearson Correlation	1	.082
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.574
	N	50	49
Students' Exam Score	Pearson Correlation	.082	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.574	
	N	49	49

A Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.082 which was recorded indicates a very weak positive linear relationship between the two variables. This means that as one variable increases, the other variable tends to increase slightly in a trend which is not strong or significant. It implies that in general, a higher self-esteem causes a just a slight increase in academic performance or in language learning outcome.

Moreover, there is a p-value of 0.574 which is much higher than the threshold or the alpha value of 0.05. Since a p-value of more than 0.05 is not considered statistically significant, there is a high probability (57.4%) that the observed correlation could have occurred by random chance, so we do not have enough evidence to conclude that there is a significant relationship between the self-esteem and academic performance.

Also, the p-value of .574 which is greater than the alpha level of 0.5 suggest there is not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. This means the observed data is likely to have occurred under the assumption that the null hypothesis is true, hence failing to support the research hypothesis that high self-esteem leads to high language learning outcome while low self-esteem leads to low language learning outcome.

DISCUSSION

Despite the assumption that higher self-esteem leads to better academic performance, the outcome of this research reveals a weak and non-significant correlation between these variables. The weaker relationship may be due to a myriad of factors that possibly dilute the direct impact of self-esteem on academic performance, resulting in a weaker correlation. Numerous factors could potentially be responsible for the weaker relationship between the two variables.

Since a self-report questionnaire was used to assess self-esteem, there is a possibility of bias and inaccuracies in the self-assessment. It is possible some students reported on items that do not reflect their true personalities. Also, academic performance or language learning outcome was measured with grades which may not fully reflect learning progress. It is possible that the lack of variability in measurements contributed to the weaker correlation which was observed. Furthermore, individual differences such as personality traits, resilience, and learning strategies can influence the relationship between the variables. A student with high resilience for instance may perform well academically despite having low self-esteem. Similarly, a student who uses effective learning strategies may achieve high academic performance regardless of self-esteem levels.

To sum up the findings, the research suggests that the effectiveness of foreign language learning is not significantly influenced by a student's level of self-esteem. This means that both students with low self-esteem and those with high self-esteem have the potential to excel in learning a new language. The findings challenge the commonly held belief that higher self-esteem is a prerequisite for better academic performance in this area. Instead, the research emphasizes that factors other than self-esteem may play a more crucial role in language acquisition, such as motivation, teaching methods, and exposure to the language. Consequently, educators and language instructors can design their teaching strategies and support systems with the understanding that boosting a student's self-esteem may not be as critical to their language learning success as previously thought. This insight allows for a more inclusive and equitable approach to language education, where all students, regardless of their self-perception, are given equal opportunities to succeed.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS AND LEARNERS

The results of this study indicated that language learning success is not significantly impacted by self-esteem. While self-esteem may not be a direct predictor of success in language learning, educators still need to consider the broader role of emotional and psychological factors in language learning by making the development of a positive self-esteem an important aspect of learning.

Educators, communities and stakeholders need to address the factors that affect the development of a positive self-esteem and implement strategies to boost students' self-esteems. According to Topçu and Leana-Taşcılar (2018), among the main factors that affect the development of self-esteem are the family, school and socio-economic status. Within the family, consistent encouragement, and positive reinforcement can promote a healthy self-concept while criticism and neglect from the home erodes self-esteem. For socio-economic status, financial stability can provide access to resources or opportunities that can positively impact self-esteem. On the other hand, economic hardship, limited access to education or healthcare etc can create barriers to developing a positive self-image thus shaping individuals' perceptions of themselves and their overall self-esteem. Educators play a role by not creating a lot a space for mistakes in the classroom.

Creating a space for mistakes is crucial in promoting self-esteem because it makes learners feel comfortable taking risks and experimenting with learning. When learners know they won't be punished with grades or judged for making errors, they will become more willing to practice and engage without fear of failure and embarrassment. In a language class, this freedom will allow the students to focus on improving their language skills rather than worrying about being perfect. Again, making mistakes is a natural part of learning as it provides opportunities for reflection and correction. Learners are more likely to seek feedback, ask questions, and engage in meaningful conversations, all of which accelerate language acquisition. Ultimately, a safe space for mistakes encourages learners to step out of their comfort zones, make progress at their own pace, and gain confidence in using the language effectively. Terblanche et al. (2021) suggest to teachers to implement specific interactive pedagogical strategies such as team building and mentorship programs to enhance self-esteem and self-confidence.

CONCLUSION

The research aimed to test the widely held belief that higher self-esteem leads to positive learning outcomes. Contrary to this assumption, the findings indicate a weak and non-significant correlation between self-esteem and language learning outcomes.

The Pearson correlation coefficient obtained was 0.082, signifying a very weak positive linear relationship between self-esteem and academic performance. Additionally, the p-value associated with this correlation was 0.574, which is considerably higher than the commonly accepted threshold of 0.05 for statistical significance. This suggests that the observed correlation is not statistically significant and likely due to chance rather than a meaningful association.

The results highlight the complexity of academic success, suggesting that factors other than self-esteem may play a more critical role in determining learning outcomes.

The study however was not without limitations. The sample size was small and the participants were from a limited demographic area which may have affected the results. Future research could benefit from a larger and more diverse sample to validate these findings further. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how self-esteem and language learning outcomes influence each other over time.

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