Psychological and Academic Self-Concept Among Non-Arabic Speakers

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ABSTRACT

Objective – Self-concept, which is usually defined as the orientation of the learner to the goal of learning the second language, has a major role in language education and is considered an essential component of L2 acquisition. This paper examines academic and psychological self-concepts and their correlation with Chinese non-Arabic-speaking students in selected Islamic institutes in China.

Methodology/Technique – Quantitative data were collected by randomly distributing 250 questionnaires to target students. These questionnaires were designed to measure the extent of psychological and academic self-concepts of the participants.

Findings – The study found that Chinese students have an average degree of self-concept. Academic self-concept is significantly positively correlated with psychological self-concept at $\alpha \leq 0.05$.

Novelty – The study contributes to literature of academic and psychological self-concept using original data.

Type of Paper: Empirical.

Keywords: Psychological; Academic; Self-Concept; Non-Arabic Speakers

JEL Classification: I21, I23.

1. Introduction

The individual is subject to many characteristics that have important roles in their physical, mental, emotional, and social growth, during which s/he begins to create an overview of someone and his/her ideas, trends, and perceptions (Aladdin et al., 1996). These perceptions are formed through experiences in all aspects of life (Gharib, 1992). Previous studies have focused on mental aspects, which are among the many factors linked to academic achievement. Unlike the mentally challenged, intelligent individuals achieve excellent academic performance because of their various mental skills. Recent studies have shed light on the effects of the psychological and social aspects of academic achievement associated with brain function, mental power, and intellectual structure (Al Tahan et al., 1984). Psychologists have also shown interest toward

* Paper Info: Received: January 16, 2017
   Accepted: June 12, 2017

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self-perceptions, including self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-concept because of the point that students’ self-beliefs play a central role in their education success (Pajares & Schunk, 2005).

Self-concept answers the question, “Who am I?”, and it can be defined as people’s feeling of their own through the experience of interaction with the environment and other significant (Shavelson et al., 1976). It is more likely to be used as a people’s understanding of himself (Rogers, 1959). Few researchers have been a comment that self-concept begins to develop during childhood and adolescence, during which self-concept refers to how one perceives himself/herself. Such perception will reflect positively on the behavior of the individual and can increase their chances of living a happy, satisfactory adulthood, possess excellent mental health, and improve their academic achievements (Guay et al., 2003; Srivastava & Joshi, 2014; Mercer, 2011; Chapman et al., 2000). Therefore, self-concept is not natural, but people acquired from the positive and negative influences of the environment and others on the behavior of themselves (Huitt, 2011). On the other hand, Merce (2011) argued on his research that self-concept may vary in different situations and that learner could have contradictory self-concept.

Researchers have identified several components on self-concept: two domains of self-concept namely, academic and non-academic self-concept. Academic self-concept refers to personal beliefs or perceptions of individuals on their abilities or skills for academic achievement (Shavelson et al., 1976; Srivastava & Joshi, 2014; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). This type of self-concept can also be defined as “students’ view of themselves as learners” (De Fraine et al., 2007).

Academic self-concept is a significant factor in the academic achievement of students (Erten & Burden, 2014) and has been the subject of considerable interest in developmental psychology. It is learners’ knowledge and ideas about themselves in academic achievement (Parsons & Taylor, 2011). Table 1 explains the dimensions of academic self-concept in detail.

Table 1. Dimensions of Academic Self-Concept.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Academic Self-Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>personal beliefs or perceptions of individuals on their abilities or skills for academic achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Element</td>
<td>Perceived ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition</td>
<td>Cognitive and affective assess by self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgement specificity</td>
<td>Domain-specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimensionality</td>
<td>Multidimensional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Hierarchical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictive</td>
<td>Emotion, motivation, performance, or academic achievement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Bong and Skaalvik, 2003)

In contrast, non-academic self-concept refers to the feeling of individuals toward their non-academic activities (Suntonrapot et al., 2009). In this study, non-academic self-concept is considered as a psychological aspect.

Barongo and Nyamwange (2013) showed that academic self-concept is stronger in predict academic achievement than non-academic self-concept. Yet academic self-concept has a direct effect on academic achievement only, whereas non-academic self-concept has both direct and indirect effects on academic achievement.

This research aims to examine the academic and psychological self-concepts of the students of Arabic language institutes in China because an increasing number of Chinese people have begun to focus on the Arabic language, with many Chinese institutes have begun offering Arabic as a second language courses. A diploma in this course requires three years of education. This course aims to create practical, special, and competitive talents in foreign affairs, foreign trade, international cultural communication, enterprise...
management, press, publication, foreign language teaching, and foreign studies. The students are expected to have sound basic knowledge of Arabic language and literature and develop their listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating skills at the end of the course (SFL, 2015).

For this reason, students are in dire need of a self–concept that has a major role in their acquisition of the Arabic language; this self–concept can help students move to higher stages of thinking as well as understand the use of metacognitive strategies (Chan, 2000). The study deals with the academic and psychological self–concepts in the domain of second language learning. Unfortunately, only a few studies have been conducted in this area, especially among non–native Arabic speakers. The students of Arabic language institutes in China are in great need of the beliefs that have a major role in their learning of the Arabic language. Therefore, we propose the following questions:

- What is the self–concept of students of the Institute of Education in China?
- What is the level of correlation between the psychological and academic self–concepts of students from Islamic institutes in China?
- Do students from different gender and academic level groups demonstrate significant differences in their academic and psychological self–concepts?

2. Method

2.1 Participant and Sampling

The study population is comprised of Chinese students studying in Islamic government institutes in China. The questionnaire for the academic and psychological self–concepts are distributed among non–Arabic language speakers who are randomly sampled from three Islamic government institutes. The 250 respondents are distributed as follows: Islamic government institutes in Zheng Zhou (36 males and 54 females), Islamic government institutes in Beijing (68 males), and Islamic government institutes in Yin Chuan (92 males).

2.2 Study Instrument

To answer the research questions, a questionnaire has been designed based on the following principles: easy to understand, concise, and suitable for the Chinese environment. The questionnaire includes 31 items in the academic and psychological dimensions. The questionnaire is written in Mandarin, which is the first language in China.

2.3 Reliability of the Instrument

A 31–item questionnaire is developed after determining the validity and reliability of this instrument. The reliability is measured based on Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, which must exceed 0.7 (Pallant, 2007). To ratify the internal consistency of the instrument, test–retest is performed using SPSS. Table 2 shows the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the entire instrument is (0.71, 0.75), thereby indicating a favorable internal consistency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscales</th>
<th>N of items</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological self-concept</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entire scale</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Result

This study answers the following questions: The first question: What is the self-concept of students of the Institute of Education in China? The means and standard deviations of the responses are calculated to answer this equation. Table 3 shows the calculation results.

Table 3. Means and standard deviations scores on psychological self-concept and academic self-concept.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscales</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>3.0117</td>
<td>.52284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>3.3261</td>
<td>.43618</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The students have medium levels of academic (M = 3.012, SD = 0.522) and psychological (M = 3.33, SD = 0.437) self-concepts. Therefore, these self-concepts cannot be described as either positive or negative.

The second question: What is the level of correlation between the psychological and academic self-concepts of students from the Islamic institutes in China?

Pearson's correlation is used to answer the above question. Table 4 shows the correlation between these two self-concepts. A medium positive correlation is observed between these self-concepts (r = 0.494, n = 217, p = 0.000), thereby indicating that the academic and psychological self-concepts of the students predict and estimate each other.

Table 4. Correlation of psychological self-concept and academic self-concept

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscales</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Psychological</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic self-concept</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.494**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological self-concept</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>.494**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third question: Do those students from different gender and academic level groups demonstrate significant differences in their academic and psychological self-concepts? T-test and ANOVA from SPSS are used to answer the above question. Tables 5 and 6 show the results.

Table 5. The significant differences in self-concept (academic, psychological) according to Academic Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic level</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological self-concept</td>
<td>.514</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.171</td>
<td>.900</td>
<td>.442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40.389</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>.191</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40.904</td>
<td>215</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic self-concept</td>
<td>.981</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.327</td>
<td>1.200</td>
<td>.311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>58.065</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>.273</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>59.047</td>
<td>216</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows no significant difference in the psychological and academic self-concepts of students from different academic levels (levels 1 to 4) (p = 0.311, p > 0.05).
Table 6 shows no significant difference in the academic self−concept of male and female students (p = 0.557, p > 0.05). In contrast, a significant difference is found in the psychological self−concept of males and females (p = 0.007, p < 0.05).

4. Discussion

This study discussed the self−concept of students of the Institute of Education in China. The result showed the students have a medium level of self−concept and some Items have a low level, indicating that the students are facing many challenges during their learning of the Arabic language, thereby affecting their concentration.

Lee Ning (2011) and Yuxiang (2011) found that some of these problems resulted from the teaching methods that neither motivated the learning of students nor helped them express themselves. Items 1, 2, 7, and 8 of psychological self−concept have a low level. From this finding, we assume that the students do not have a favorable relationship with other people and that they have a negative and pessimistic attitude toward the surrounding events. Hattie (2014) found that important people, such as parents, teachers, and peers, could influence the formation of self−concept. Therefore, the self−concept formation of an individual is not only affected by his/her past experiences, but also by the reaction and evaluation of others. Parental influence exerts a profound influence on self−concept.

Many studies have noted the importance of adapting to the surroundings and accepting new conditions. The adaptation level varies across people with different personalities (Little, 2001). Therefore, students must change how they deal with others to address the challenges in their language learning.

Abdullah et al. (2009) suggested that several programs should be organized to enhance the relationship and feelings between students and institutes. Some practical activities must also be launched to teach students how to interact with others and build a positive self−concept.

This study finds also that no significant difference between psychological and academic self−concepts of students from different academic levels. Yet, few researchers indicated different answers: Dusek et al. (1981) and Marsh (1989) found grade−level differences in self−concept and rejected the discontinuity views of adolescence. Cole et al. (2001) found that the academic self−concept of American youth students increased during Grades 7 and 8, but remained relatively stable from Grades 9 to 11. However, another study found that the academic self−concept of Australian students reached its lowest point in either Grade 8 or Grade 9. In this regard, Dusek et al. (1981) and Marsh (1989) suggested that adolescent self−concept results from the continual and gradual growth based not only on social circumstances but also on emergent cognitive competencies and skills.

With regard to gender differences, in this study, we found no significant difference in the academic self−concept of male and female students (p = 0.557, p > 0.05). In contrast, a significant difference is found in the psychological self−concept of males and females (p = 0.007, p < 0.05). However, some studies show that female adolescents have lower academic self−concept than male students (Young & Mroczek, 2003; Fredricks & Eccles, 2002). However, Dusek et al. (1981) and Erten, N. B. and Erten, İ. H (2014) found that male and
female students had different academic self-concepts, in which female students were more positive than male students. Table 3 showed that female students (M = 3.341, SD = 0.326) have higher psychological self-concept than male students (M = 3.322, SD = 0.459) because females are more prone to internal distress than males (Pomerantz et al., 2002) or because females have higher learning motivation than males (Liqin, 2003). Given these differences, teachers must teach their students on the use of appropriate learning methods, inform them of the advantages of physiological and psychological development, and cultivate their positive attitudes toward learning to enable them to maximize their learning potential (Shekhar et al., 2012). Oxford (1990:8) refers the learning strategy as “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to any changes.” These strategies are the components to “enhance language learning and help develop language competence, as reflected in the learner’s skills in listening, speaking, reading, or writing the L2 or FL” (Self-Assessment, S, 2010). According to (Pennycook, 1997) self-regulated learning is a long-term aim of education and one of the most important factors in successful language learning, because the learners will not always have teachers around to guide as they use the language outside the classroom, so teachers should give appropriate guidance to build learners self-regulated learning and help them select suitable strategy to improve the academic and psychological achievement for lifelong learning.

References


