

SELF-ESTEEM IN THAI EFL TEACHER TRAINEES WITH HIGH AND LOW ACADEMIC ABILITY

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine a significant difference in self-esteem between teacher trainees with high and low academic ability. The total population consisted of 309 Thai EFL teacher trainees who were studying the English major program in the Faculties of Education of four Rajabhat Universities. The sample was 186 fourth-year-teacher trainees selected by simple random sampling. The teacher trainees were divided into two groups: high and low academic ability. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was used to collect data. The reliability established by Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.72. Content validity was checked by experts. Mean, standard deviation, and the independent t-test were used for data analysis. The results showed that teacher trainees both high and low academic ability rated their self-esteem at the high level. There was a statistically significant difference in self-esteem between the two groups of teacher trainees. The high academic achievers had higher degree of self-esteem than those in the lower group.

Keywords: Self-esteem, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), Teacher Trainees with High and Low Academic Ability, Rajabhat Universities

Introduction

In the early years of language teaching, the cognitive process was conceived as the primary factor contributing to success in language learning; however, recently, the role of affective variables like learners' emotional states has been accepted as an important part of the language teaching process (Horwitz, 2007). [1] An understanding of the role played by emotional variables, particularly "self-esteem", in language learning has been shared by language researchers (Curry & Johnson, 1990; Brown, 1994; Alpay, 2000; Horwitz, 2007; Rubio, 2007). [2, 3, 4, 1, 5] Self-esteem and the association between self-esteem and language learning are discussed.

Self-esteem is one's attitude towards oneself (Rosenberg, 1965). [6] Rubio (2007) [5] described self-esteem in more detail as a psychological and social occurrence regarding individual evaluation of his/her competence and own self based on some values. Such evaluation may result in different emotional states which can become stable or still open to variation depending on individual conditions. In short, self-esteem is likely conceived as a determinant of a person's life, influencing him/her for good or bad (Rubio, 2007). [5] Generally, individuals can feel worthy or unworthy depending on the particular situation and their interactions with people (Lawrence,

1987). [7] When people feel inadequate in doing something, this means they are experiencing low self-esteem. On the contrary, if people can avoid unpleasant situations, the feeling of inadequacy does not affect their overall self-worth (Lawrence, 1987). [7] According to Lawrence (1987) [7], interpersonal relationships are also factors that can influence people's self-esteem. For children of school age, the main people who affect students' self-esteem are their parents, teachers, and peers. The teacher is seen as the person who has a direct impact on students' self-esteem in terms of academic achievements. Teachers should be aware of what they are doing when interacting with learners because their interactions may negatively or positively affect learners' self-worth and lead to "low self-esteem" or "high self-esteem."

Self-esteem is significant for learners in second language success (Curry & Johnson, 1990; Horwitz, 2007) [2, 1]; however, students with low self-esteem are likely to have serious problems (Rubio, 2007; Lawrence, 2000). [5, 8] Students who possess high self-esteem reflect a sense of security and have the capability to perceive one's own efforts and accomplishments (Curry & Johnson, 1990). [2] Individuals with high self-esteem have positive experiences of self, and are confident, energetic, and optimistic (Curry & Johnson, 1990). [2] When learners believe in their actual

abilities, they became more competent (Horwitz, 2007). [1] Not only learners, but self-esteem also benefits for teachers. Teachers with high self-esteem have been found to have the following personal qualities: having a willingness to be flexible; being empathetic; having the ability to personalize teaching; and being cheerful, optimistic and emotionally mature (Lawrence, 1999). [9] On the other hand, people with low self-esteem tend to experience unpleasant emotional states and result in negative outcomes (Rubio, 2007; Lawrence, 2000). [5, 8] Examples of what low self-esteem students may experience are such as avoiding the risks needed to acquire communicative competence, feeling severely insecure, and even dropping classes (Rubio, 2007). [5] People with low self-esteem lack confidence both in themselves and in their skills (Rubio, 2007). [5] When people are over-concerned about their goals but face potential failure, they begin to dislike themselves. Feelings of failure negatively influence the whole personality (Lawrence, 2000). [8] With the effects of self-esteem that can influence people's performance, researchers have paid attention to study self-esteem in varied aspects.

The investigation into degrees of self-esteem was shown as follows. Liu and Zhang (2008) [10] found that the majority of Chinese EFL learners perceived themselves as worthy,

and Songserm (2001) [11] showed that among 348 Surin Rajabhat Institute students, female, full-time, and students in the Faculty of Industrial Technology had high self-esteem. Other research results showed self-esteem played essential roles in language learning. Firstly, Park and Lee (2005) [12] found the more highly confident Korean students performed better in oral tasks. Secondly, Soureshjani and Naseri (2011) [13] found English proficiency levels of 120 Iranian EFL learners positively correlated with self-esteem. This means that if students were more confident in using the language, their English proficiency level would increase. Thirdly, Fahim and Rad (2012) [14] found Iranian EFL learners who had high self-esteem also had high English language proficiency and high paragraph writing scores. Lastly, self-esteem helps enhance learners' ability and decrease negative emotions as shown in the study of Zare and Riasati (2012) [15], who found that the higher the degree of self-esteem Iranian EFL learners developed, the higher the academic level they reached. Moreover, the Iranian EFL learners who benefitted from a high degree of self-esteem experienced lower anxiety. As having high self-esteem results in positive learning outcomes; thus, teachers should develop and build up students' self-esteem.

Teachers realize the significant place of self-esteem in language learning and the necessity of developing their students' self-esteem (Horwitz, 2007). [1] Since belief in one's own abilities—having self-esteem—leads to successful cognitive and affective processes (Brown, 1994) [3], self-esteem is needed to be developed (Horwitz, 2007). [1] Horwitz (2007) [1] advises strengthening students' self-esteem in order to improve the students' own learning. Language teachers should help students to become more autonomous in language learning, as in the classroom the amount of language knowledge provided is limited. The development of autonomous learning may contribute to the improvements in learners' self-esteem (Horwitz, 2007). [1] Alpay (2000) [4] also supports that improvement in students' self-esteem can lead to improvement in academic achievement and/or interpersonal behavior, as in a study of Alpay (2000) [4] self-esteem positively correlated with students' achievement / performance in language learning.

In sum, self-esteem is seen as helpful in facilitating language learning and teaching, and proved as a significant impact on successful language acquisition. However, very few studies deal with self-esteem. Therefore, it is worth studying whether teacher trainees who are going to be language teachers achieve a satisfied degree of self-esteem or not. It is important to encourage teacher trainees to develop their self-esteem

before they undertake a teaching career. An understanding of self-esteem in teacher trainees with different ability will help educational administrators better develop those teacher trainees' self-esteem. This study was conducted with the research question, "Are there any significant differences in self-esteem between Thai EFL teacher trainees with high and low academic ability?"

Methodology

The section describes the participants, research instruments, procedures, and statistical devices used for data analysis.

Population, Sample, and Sampling

The total population consisted of 309 fourth-year-teacher trainees. They were studying in the English major program in the Faculties of Education in four Rajabhat Universities. The teacher trainees were selected by simple random sampling and Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) [16] table for sample size. The sample included 186 teacher trainees. The sample was divided into two groups—high and low academic achievers—by using participants' grade point averages (GPA) and Fan's (1952) [17] high-low-27-percent group method. However, to increase reliability, the percentage for the two groups was increased from 27% to 30% (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997; Bausell & Li, 2002). [18-19] To divide participants into two groups, the GPAs for the entire

population of each Rajabhat University was displayed from the highest GPA to the lowest. Then, the teacher trainees who had a GPA in the top 30-percent group were randomly selected and put in the group of high academic achievers, while teacher trainees who had a GPA in the low-30-percent group were also randomly selected and considered as low academic achievers.

Research Instruments

The RSES, or the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, designed by Rosenberg (1965) [6] was used as a research instrument. Rosenberg (1965) [6] reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranging from 0.77 to 0.88 based on randomly selected 5,024 high school juniors and seniors studying in 10 schools in New York State. The 10-item-RSES questionnaire uses a four-point Likert scale format to classify the levels of self-esteem. The Thai version of RSES questionnaire translated by Wongpakaran and Wongpakaran (2011) [20] was asked for permission and employed in this study. This self-report instrument was used to measure individuals'

self-esteem as they are related to overall feelings of self-worth or self-acceptance. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire was tested. The reliability of the RSES as determined by Cronbach's alpha was 0.72. To assure the validity of the questionnaires, the content validity was checked by experts. Rankings are evaluated as shown in Table 1. Note that items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9 are reverse scores.

Table 1: The Rating Scale Description in the RSES

Scale	Descriptions
1	Strongly disagree
2	Disagree
3	Agree
4	Strongly agree

The manner of classifying participants' self-esteem scores into high and low levels is based on Rosenberg (1965). Average mean scores ranging from 2.51 – 4.00 indicate “high self-esteem” while average mean scores ranging from 1.00 – 2.50 indicate “low self-esteem”.

Table 2: Criteria for Assessing the Levels of Self-Esteem

Levels of Self-Esteem	Total Scores	Average Mean Scores
High Self-Esteem	26 – 40	2.51 – 4.00
Low Self-Esteem	10 – 25	1.00 – 2.50

Human Subjects

The study was conducted during the first semester of the 2013 academic year. *First*, before conducting the actual research, consent forms were sent to those responsible for the teacher education programs at the four chosen Rajabhat Universities. The researcher contacted them in order to inform them of the purposes of the present study and ask for permission to investigate their teacher trainees' level of self-esteem. *Second*, after getting permission to conduct the research, a convenient date was selected to distribute the questionnaires. The researcher, oneself, went to collect the data from the four Rajabhat Universities in NakhonSawan, Nakorn Pathom, Maha Sarakham, and Songkhal. *Third*, the questionnaires were distributed by hand to the participants who agreed to participate after the end of class. The purpose of the study was told to all participants so that they would understand why the researcher needed information concerning their experiences of self-esteem. In addition, they were informed that there was no right or wrong answer when completing the questionnaires. The researcher asked the participants to answer the questions

truthfully. The researcher explained that their participation would not have any effect on their course grades. After participants completed the questionnaires, the researcher collected the self-esteem questionnaires. *Fifth*, anonymity of personal information was preserved in the study. The participants did not have to provide their names or contact information; they only needed to provide gender, age, and G.P.A. *Finally*, the data collected were keyed in and analyzed.

Data analysis

The statistical devices used for quantitative data analysis were mean, standard deviation, and the independent t-test. Mean and standard deviation were used to identify the central tendency for self-esteem held by teacher trainees with high and low academic ability; whereas, the independent t-test was used to compare the levels of self-esteem of the high and low achieving groups.

Results

The results from this data analysis are presented in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3: Comparison of self-esteem between teacher trainees with high and low academic ability

Self-esteem	High		Low		Independent t-test		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-esteem	3.05	0.41	2.82	0.39	3.807	183	.000

Table 4: Sub-scales for self-esteem among teacher trainees with high and low academic ability

Self-esteem	High		Low		Independent t-test		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	3.19	0.67	3.02	0.59	1.820	181.857	.070
2. At times I think I am no good at all.	2.93	0.90	2.60	0.83	2.618	184	.010
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	3.20	0.55	3.06	0.71	1.532	184	.127
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.	3.25	0.65	3.13	0.64	1.212	184	.227
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	3.19	0.87	2.73	0.80	3.707	184	.000
6. I certainly feel useless at times.	3.23	0.95	2.91	0.91	2.304	184	.022
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	2.97	0.77	2.67	0.88	2.450	162.276	.015
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.	1.66	0.60	1.94	0.71	-2.867	184	.005
9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	3.34	0.84	2.76	0.92	4.469	184	.000
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.	3.48	0.57	3.32	0.67	1.748	183	.082

Table 3 (the self-esteem scale) and Table 4 (the sub-scales for self-esteem) present the average degree of self-esteem in 186 Thai EFL teacher trainees, and the comparison of such degree between the teacher trainees in high and low academic groups. The results show that 93 high academic achievers had high levels of self-esteem with a mean score of 3.05 while the low academic achievers also had high self-esteem but with a lower mean score of 2.82. In addition, there was a statistically significant difference in self-esteem between the teacher trainees with high and low academic ability. The high academic achievers had higher levels of self-esteem than the teacher trainees in the lower academic group. In other words, both high and low academic achievers perceived themselves as worthy. The higher the self-esteem levels the teacher trainees developed, the higher the academic ability the teacher trainees reached.

Discussion

The levels and the difference of self-esteem in 186 Thai EFL teacher trainees with high and low academic ability are discussed, and the reasons underlying the results are provided. In general, the teacher trainees in those two groups perceived themselves as worthy. This finding is consistent with the finding of Liu and Zhang (2008) [10], who reported that the degree of self-esteem among Chinese EFL learners in English class was high, so students

perceived themselves as worthy. In the Thai context, this finding is in partial agreement with the results of Songserm (2001) [11], who found that among 348 Surin Rajabhat Institute students, female students, full-time students, and the students in the Faculty of Industrial Technology had high self-esteem. Furthermore, the higher academic achievers had higher self-esteem. This result is mostly in agreement with those of Zare and Riasati (2012) [15], who found that the higher the academic level Iranian EFL reached, the higher the degree of self-esteem they developed. Additionally, the results of the present study are in partial agreement with those of the following researchers who showed similar findings for a positive relationship between self-esteem and students' ability: Fahim and Rad (2012) [14] found that Iranian EFL learners who had high self-esteem also achieved high English language proficiency and high paragraph writing scores. Soureshjani and Naseri (2011) [13] also found that English proficiency levels strongly correlated with Iranian EFL learners' self-esteem. If English proficiency levels increased, learners would be more confident in using the language. Finally, Park and Lee (2005) [12] showed that self-confidence positively correlates with oral performance; the Korean students who were more highly confident performed better in oral tasks.

The reasons that the teacher trainees with high and low academic ability rated themselves as worthy may be related to the well-preparation. When these teacher trainees had to perform teaching tasks, the teacher trainees in both groups always prepare and practice their teaching beforehand such as planning teaching contents and activity arrangement. Well-preparation helps the teacher trainees reduce their stress and have much confidence. When they possess greater confidence, they are likely to believe in themselves and in their skills which lead to a positive thinking. Therefore, it is possible that the teacher trainees perceived themselves as more worthy or at least equal to other people, even low academic ability students. The explanation regarding the result that the teacher trainees who had higher academic ability achieved higher levels of self-esteem may be related to confidence in one's own ability. As the teacher trainees in the higher group achieved high academic competence, these learners may think that they have greater capacity in performing tasks or doing learning activities than those in the lower group. The more the teacher trainees believed in their ability, the better the performance they had. According to Brown (1994) [3], belief in one's own abilities—having self-esteem—leads to successful cognitive and affective processes. On the other hand, when the teacher trainees

lacked confidence or did not much believe in their competence, they may experience concerns about their inadequate ability. As the teacher trainees in the lower group attained low academic achievement, from time to time, these learners may question their ability. This worry possibly affects their thinking of self-worth and result in greater negative emotional states.

Implications

The present study offers certain useful implications for teacher education programs, instructors, teacher trainees, and future researchers who may be interested and going to follow up on this research topic.

1. The data obtained will be useful for teacher education programs in enhancing self-esteem among the teacher trainees. Administrators in teacher education programs should collaborate with relevant instructors to help better teacher trainees' self-esteem, particularly the teacher trainees who had low academic achievement because self-esteem is proved to be significant in second language success (Brown, 1994; Horwitz, 2007; Alpay, 2000; Rubio, 2007). [3, 1, 4,5] The promotion of students' self-esteem may contribute to the motivation in learning and acquiring English competence.

2. Students' self-esteem needs to be supported especially in classroom language learning by a teacher who is seen as a person

directly impacting students' self-worth. The instructors should create a close relationship with teacher trainees because a warm relationship can lead to more effective teaching, and is more likely to have an effect on students' self-esteem (Lawrence, 1987). [7] The instructors should create a lively classroom environment, provide fun activities, and reduce stressful competition between learners with high and low academic ability. An informal classroom setting should be established and helpful collaboration among the instructor, the high ability learners and the low ability learners should be encouraged.

3. The most significant thing that the teacher trainees should take into consideration is the development of their own self-esteem. Significantly for teacher trainees who are going to be English teachers in the future, teachers with high self-esteem have been found to have the following personal qualities: having a willingness to be flexible; being empathetic; having the ability to personalize teaching; and being cheerful, optimistic and emotionally mature (Lawrence, 1999). [9] Thus, the development of self-esteem benefits in both their language learning and future teaching profession. The teacher trainees should believe in their own capacity together with constantly practice all English skills in order to be

competent in the target language and become effective English teachers.

4. The following suggestions are given for future studies. Although the present research studied the teacher trainees' self-esteem, it was limited to general self-esteem. The investigation of the teacher trainees' self-esteem in regards to language learning should be focused on in a later study, since no such study can be found in the Thai context, according to information obtained from the ThaiLIS data base (2013) (Thai Library Integrated System). [21] In addition, the qualitative method, such as gathering information from observations and interviews, should be added in order to obtain in-depth data. The implications of this study should lead to further studies, such as an investigation into the advantages of self-esteem in enhancing teacher trainees' English proficiency, and the ways that help develop the teacher trainees' greater self-esteem.

Conclusion

The current condition of self-esteem among 186 Thai EFL fourth-year-teacher trainees was indicated that the teacher trainees perceived themselves as worthy. Furthermore, a significant difference between the degrees of self-esteem in the two groups—high and low academic ability—of the teacher trainees was found that the higher the degree of self-esteem, the higher the teacher trainees' ability tends to be. The

present investigation can be used to inform administrators in teacher education programs and responsible instructors to perceive the significance of developing teacher trainees' self-esteem and prepare these teacher trainees to be ready to transmit the knowledge of English professionally. The teacher trainees themselves should perceive their own effort and accomplishment, that is, believe in themselves and their ability in order to achieve high self-esteem. The greater self-esteem the teacher trainees develop, the better the performance they may have.

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