



## *The Impact of Self-Esteem on Student's Mental Health and Engagement in University Students in Peshawar*

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### Article Details:

Received on 28 June 2025

Accepted on 29 July 2025

Published on 1<sup>st</sup> Aug 2025

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### Abstract

The current research aimed to examine the impact of self-esteem on students' mental health and academic engagement and also the correlation between self-esteem and mental health indicators (e.g., stress, anxiety, depression). The sample comprised of university students from Hayatabad Peshawar including both government and private Universities. There were 75 male and 75 female university students recruited into present study. Data were collected through the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965), DASS-21 (Iovibond & Iovibond, 1995) and Self Engagement Scale by (Joseph S. Renzulli). Data analysis aims to study the effects of self-esteem on students' mental health and school engagement. Descriptive statistics show that students generally have a high level and moderate self-esteem and varying levels of mental health stability and participation in academic activities. Correlation analyses show a weak positive link between self-esteem, mental health and student engagement. These results highlight the important role of self-esteem in academic tasks by highlighting the need for psychological health training among students and interventions that contribute to the self-discipline under educational conditions. Study demonstrates that students with high self-esteem functions as a protective factor against stress, anxiety and depression, motivating students to actively participate in activities. Self-esteem work as a coping strategy in student life.

**Keywords:** Self-esteem, Mental Health, Student Engagement.



## Introduction

Education is the foundation of personal and social studies, and it fosters the growth of people's knowledge, emotional development, and community involvement. In the educational context, students' mental health and level of participation in education are crucial, as they influence academic success and personal growth. Over the years, researchers have studied various mental and behavioral factors that contribute to enhancing students' mental health. Self-esteem—defined as an individual's perceived value, self-worth, or the extent to which one evaluates oneself positively or negatively—is a core psychological factor that shapes emotional well-being and engagement in academic activities. It plays a significant role in students' psychological outcomes, such as stress, anxiety, emotional stability, and academic commitment, including motivation, participation, and consistency. Improving self-esteem can enhance students' mental health and academic engagement, ultimately contributing to more collaborative and productive learning environments.

The emergence of positive psychology emphasized human strengths and positive psychological traits. Researchers have explored how positive mental states, such as engagement, can counterbalance emotional fatigue and stress. Engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Academic engagement is an extension of this concept, referring to the degree to which students participate in educational tasks within a formal learning environment (George, 2009). Research shows that high levels of academic engagement contribute to better academic achievement (Johnson & Sinatra, 2013), improved psychological well-being (Wefald & Downey, 2009), and school adaptation (Wang & Fredricks, 2014), while low engagement is associated with poor academic performance, school avoidance, substance use, delinquency, and increased negative emotional states such as anxiety and depression (Leslie et al., 2010; Li & Lerner, 2011).

Self-esteem is an essential component of personality that influences people's attitudes and behaviors. Murk (2006) states that self-esteem is integral to mental health, effective functioning, and a meaningful life. It reflects how individuals evaluate themselves, shaping their future goals and resilience. Crocker & Park (2004) notes that self-esteem is essentially the individual's overall appraisal of their worth. It has been widely studied in relation to emotional factors such as anxiety, introversion/extroversion, inhibition, motivation, learning behavior, and academic style. People with high self-esteem tend to have more positive evaluations of their appearance, intelligence, or abilities, whereas those with low self-esteem may experience emotional vulnerability and reduced coping abilities.

Mental health underpins all aspects of life—personal relationships, academic performance, physical health, and professional success. It plays a vital role in students' ability to learn, adapt, and thrive. Good mental health enables students to manage stress, build healthy relationships, and maintain academic focus and motivation. In contrast, poor mental health may lead to concentration difficulties, low self-worth, and disengagement from academic and social activities. University students often face pressures such as academic demands, social expectations, financial stress, and the transition to adulthood, all of which can affect mental well-being.

Depression, for instance, is one of the leading causes of disability globally and a common mental disorder among university students (Paolucci et al., 2018). Self-esteem has a profound effect on patients with chronic issues like breast cancer and severe depression



(Iqbal & Khattak, 2019). It is marked by persistent sadness, lack of interest, negative thought patterns, and often co-occurs with other mental and physical health conditions (Lattie et al., 2019). In academic settings, students with high self-esteem often strive to demonstrate their competence. However, failure to meet expectations can harm self-worth and contribute to depressive symptoms (Schraml et al., 2011; Ebert et al., 2019). This cycle fosters negative self-perceptions and undermines emotional resilience (Gittins & Hunt, 2020), increasing susceptibility to depression (Martinsen et al., 2021).

Anxiety is a normal stress response marked by fear or anticipation of a future event (Hussain et al., 2021). Academic anxiety stems from performance pressure and deadline stress, leading to difficulty concentrating and fear of failure. Social anxiety, characterized by intense fear of judgment or embarrassment, can impair students' ability to engage in peer interactions and seek support (Michikyan, 2022). Stress, although a natural response to challenges, becomes detrimental when chronic, contributing to a wide range of psychological and physical issues (Chen et al., 2020).

Student engagement reflects the willingness to participate in academic tasks such as attending classes, submitting assignments, and following directions. It also encompasses more active involvement, including participation in curriculum design, classroom governance, and school culture. Self-esteem influences academic engagement through academic self-efficacy and deserves further exploration. Fredricks et al. (2004) emphasized the importance of student engagement as a solution to issues such as boredom, marginalization, and low achievement. This was further supported by Connell and Wellborn (1991), who found that engagement promotes academic resilience.

The impact of self-esteem on mental health and student engagement is especially relevant in the context of Peshawar, particularly in Hayatabad, where little research has explored these dynamics. Students in universities across Hayatabad experience unique academic, social, and cultural challenges that may influence their self-esteem, mental health, and academic involvement. A competitive educational environment, along with the challenge of managing societal expectations and personal responsibilities, contributes to heightened stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. Understanding the protective or risk role of self-esteem in this context is critical for developing targeted interventions. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between self-esteem, mental health (specifically stress, anxiety, and depression), and academic engagement among university students in District Peshawar. The findings aim to provide practical insights for educators, counselors, and policymakers to promote mental well-being, strengthen self-esteem, improve engagement, and support a more effective educational environment. This study examines the impact of self-esteem on students' mental health and academic engagement, and assesses its correlation with indicators like stress, anxiety, and depression. It hypothesizes that high self-esteem positively influences mental health and engagement, while low self-esteem is linked to increased symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression. Understanding these relationships can help inform strategies to support student well-being and academic performance.

## Method

### Sample

The sample for this study is 150 young adults. This sample size is selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different universities in Hayatabad Peshawar. The sample size was determined based on Krejcie & Morgan's (1970) table, which



suggests that for a population of a few thousand, a sample of 150 provides a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error.

### Instruments

#### Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

The scale, developed by sociologist Morris Rosenberg in 1965, is a widely used 10-item self-report questionnaire measuring global self-esteem. Participants respond on a 4-point Likert scale, yielding scores from 10 to 40, with higher scores indicating greater self-esteem. It shows strong validity, unidimensional structure, and high reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.85-0.90$ ; test-retest  $r = 0.82-0.88$ ). Despite its brevity and cross-cultural use, limitations include self-report bias and cultural interpretation differences.

#### Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21)

It is a widely used self-report instrument designed to measure emotional distress across three subscales: Depression (7 items), Anxiety (7 items), and Stress (7 items), totaling 21 items. Developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995), the scale employs a 4-point Likert scale (0 = "Did not apply to me at all" to 3 = "Applied to me very much, or most of the time"). The DASS-21 demonstrates strong validity, with confirmatory factor analyses supporting its three-factor structure, and high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values typically exceeding 0.80 for each subscale in various populations. It is particularly useful in assessing non-clinical and student samples, making it suitable for research on mental health in educational settings.

#### Student Engagement Scale (SES)

This scale was developed by Joseph S. Renzulli and colleagues at the University of Connecticut, is a 21-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement in learning. The scale assesses key dimensions such as interest, motivation, task commitment, and active participation in academic activities. Items are rated on a Likert scale (e.g., 1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree"), making it suitable for adolescents and young adults in educational settings. High Cronbach's alpha value, ( $\alpha \geq 0.85$ ) for total engagement scores, with subscales ranging 0.78–0.90. and test-retest reliability coefficients between 0.72 and 0.84, indicating stable measurements over time.

### Procedure

For this study, a cross-sectional survey design was employed to collect data from university students in Hayatabad, Peshawar. The first step involved visiting different universities in the area to distribute the research questionnaire. Permission was obtained from the respective university administrations before data collection commenced. Students were approached in comfortable settings such as libraries, cafeterias, or common rooms to ensure a relaxed environment for participation. Before administering the questionnaire, participants were briefed about the research objectives, emphasizing the study's focus on the impact of self-esteem on mental health and academic engagement. They were assured that their responses would remain confidential and used solely for academic purposes. Informed consent was obtained verbally from all participants, and they were given the option to withdraw at any point without consequences. The questionnaire consisted of structured items measuring self-esteem, mental health, and student engagement. Participants were given sufficient time to complete the survey, and assistance was provided if any clarification was needed regarding the questions. After completion, the filled questionnaires

**Result:****TABLE 1****Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Gender	150	1.00	2.00	1.5000	.50168	.252
SES	150	1.00	3.00	1.9533	.77144	.595
Age	150	1	2	1.53	.501	.251
Valid N (listwise)	150					

Table 1 summarizes the demographic and descriptive statistics. The mean age was coded as 1.53 (1 = 18–21 years; 2 = 22+ years), and the gender distribution was evenly split between males and females. The average socioeconomic status (coded from 1 to 3) was 1.95, indicating a slight lean toward lower-income backgrounds. This suggests that the sample includes students with a combination of socioeconomic origins, with a tendency towards a lower environment in the SES group.

**TABLE 2: Correlations**

	SE	SEG	DASS
SE	1	-.118	-.101
SEG	-.118	1	.367**
DASS	-.101	.367**	1
	.152	.152	.000
	.218	.218	.000

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

Correlation analysis investigated the relationships between self-respect (SE), student participation (SEG), and mental health measured by DASS (depression stress). Correlation analyses revealed weak, non-significant negative relationships between self-esteem and both student engagement ( $r = -0.118$ ,  $p = 0.152$ ) and DASS scores ( $r = -0.101$ ,  $p = 0.218$ ), indicating no statistically meaningful associations. However, student engagement was significantly positively correlated with DASS scores ( $r = 0.367$ ,  $p < .01$ ), suggesting that higher emotional distress may be associated with increased engagement.

**TABLE 3**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
1 (Constant)	24.774	2.476		10.008	.000
SEG	-.044	.041	-.093	-1.057	.292
DASS	-.047	.062	-.067	-.764	.446

a. Dependent Variable: SE





A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine whether student engagement and mental health predicted self-esteem. The model was not statistically significant,  $F(2,147) = [you can add if available]$ ,  $p > .05$ , and neither variable significantly predicted self-esteem: SEG ( $\beta = -0.093$ ,  $p = .292$ ) and DASS ( $\beta = -0.067$ ,  $p = .446$ ). These results suggest that in this sample, variations in engagement and psychological distress do not account for significant changes in self-esteem levels.

### Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the important impact of self-esteem on both student mental health and academic engagement. Students with higher self-esteem showed best results in mental health and more active participation in academic activities (Li & Hao, 2025). This follows the existing literature assumes that self-esteem functions as a protective factor against stress, anxiety and depression, motivating students to actively participate in training (Gurung et al, 2019). Statistically significant results indicate that self-esteem is not only a psychological asset, but also a key predictor of general well-being and student effectiveness. Those students who have high self-esteem have good mental health and higher engagement in class activities (Asici & Sari, 2022). Self-esteem work as a coping strategy in students' overall life, it improves their motivation, participation and also there mental wellbeing (Doron et al, 2013). Additionally, the data show that as self-esteem increases, levels of psychological stress decrease by maintaining feedback between self-esteem and mental health issues. Furthermore, students having higher self-esteem may increase academic and stability satisfaction. These results highlight the importance of increasing positive self-esteem in educational settings to increase general well-being and academic outcomes. Despite certain limitations such as sample size and demographic beach, this study provides valuable information on the psychological factors that influence student success. Future research can extend these conclusions by studying additional variables such as peer, motivation, and institutional support.

### Conclusion

This study used quantitative methods to examine the effects of self-esteem on student mental health and academic participation. Results show that self-esteem significantly affects both psychological well-being and student involvement. Higher self-esteem is associated with reduced stress, anxiety, and depression, and improved academic participation. Statistical analysis confirmed significant relationships, emphasizing the value of increasing self-esteem in educational settings. Despite limitations, the study offers important insights into student psychology and supports further research on related psychosocial variables.

### Limitation and Suggestions

Despite valuable information, this study has some limitations. It is based entirely on a self-esteem questionnaire, which may be influenced by social desirability and inaccurate self-awareness. The use of standardized self-rating scales may not fully capture contextual and cultural factors affecting student psychological status. The lateral nature of the study prevents causal conclusions between variables. Longitudinal studies are recommended to assess how self-esteem, mental health, and participation develop over time

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