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## **A study on self-esteem and academic background of the students in higher education**

**Pratim Maity<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Indrani Nath<sup>2</sup>, Md Kutubuddin Halder<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Education, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, Department of Education, Sarsuna College, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

<sup>3</sup> Professor and Head, Department of Education, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

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### **Abstract**

This paper intends to study the self-esteem and academic background of arts, science and commerce students in higher education and also attempts to find out the relationship between self-esteem and academic background among students in higher education. The researchers used purposive, stratified random sampling technique for selecting the sample comprising of 600 under graduate students from different colleges affiliated to University of Calcutta. Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI) developed by Singh and Srivastava (2010) and self-made Interview Schedule for measuring the academic background of the students was used for collecting data. The collected data were analyzed by using mean, Standard Deviation (SD), percentage, t-test, and Pearson product-moment coefficient of correlation test and accordingly interpretations were made. Result revealed that arts and commerce students are significantly different from the science students in respect of level of self-esteem; but however no significant difference was noted in the level of self-esteem between arts and commerce students. The researchers also observed that there is no significant difference in the academic background between arts and commerce students however, the academic background of science students was found to be relatively better than arts and commerce students. It was noted that there is a significant positive relationship between self-esteem and academic background among the students pursuing their studies in higher education.

**Keywords:** self-esteem, academic background, educational stream, under graduate students

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### **Introduction**

Self-esteem is related to personal beliefs about skills, abilities, and social relationships. It is also defined as a global barometer of self-evaluation involving cognitive appraisals about general self-worth and affective experiences of the self that are linked to these global appraisals (Murphy, Stosny and Morrel, 2005). In other words, it is related to the process of becoming a self-actualizing person. All people have a need or desire for a stable, firmly based sense of self-regard or self-respect and they need esteem from themselves and from others (Maslow, 1954). In this study, self-esteem has been defined as the belief of the students studying at under graduate level regarding himself / herself. The overall academic performance as well as the aggregate marks obtained by the students in all the previous final examinations as applicable has been considered in this study as the academic background of the under graduate students. Sheikholeslami *et al.* (2010) study showed that there is a positive relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement among students. It was found that those person whose academic status was better also had high degree of self-esteem. Schmeichel *et al.* (2009) found that self-esteem has an impact on the students performance, charting a desired career path, stimulating 'positiveness' about oneself as this is supported by good academic performance. Pullmann and Allik (2008) in their studies attempted to investigate the direct relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement and found that low general self-esteem does not necessarily signal a poor academic

Achievement. Trzesniewski *et al.* (2006) found that low self-esteem during adolescence predicts poorer mental and physical health, worse economic well-being and higher level of criminal activity in youth. Miraei (2005) conducted a research to find the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement and found that there is no significant difference. Emamzadeh (2004)<sup>[4]</sup> did a research in order to compare the social skills, self-esteem and academic achievement among 261 students (boys and girls) in Orumieyeh city. The result showed that there was no significant relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement. Bankston and Zhou (2002) in their study on self-esteem and academic achievement concluded that self-esteem and academic achievement are positively correlated. Malbi and Reasoner (2000) reported that good academic grades enhance one's sense of worthiness and competence. Davies and Brember (1999) found a weak positive correlation between self-esteem and better academic performance, indicating that positive self-esteem is good for academic performance. Atherley (1990) conducted a study on academic achievement and economic status on self-concept revealed that school children of higher ability possessed higher level of self-esteem. While reviewing the related research it was found that though some studies have been conducted in aboard hardly any study has been conducted in the area of self-esteem and academic background particularly in West Bengal. The present study therefore focuses mainly on self-esteem and academic background of the students in higher education.

### Objectives of the study

1. To study the self-esteem and academic background of arts, science and commerce students in higher education.
2. To find out the relationship between self-esteem and academic background among students in higher education.

### Hypotheses of the study

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the level of self-esteem among arts and science students.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the level of self-esteem among arts and commerce students.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the level of self-esteem among commerce and science students.

**H<sub>04</sub>:** There is no significant difference in regard to academic background among arts and science students.

**H<sub>05</sub>:** There is no significant difference in regard to academic background among arts and commerce students.

**H<sub>06</sub>:** There is no significant difference in regard to academic background among commerce and science students.

**H<sub>07</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and academic background among students in higher education.

### Method of the study

The researchers used a purposive, stratified random sampling technique for selecting the sample comprising of 600 under graduate students of the age group ranging between 17-25 years from different colleges affiliated under the University of Calcutta. In this study independent variable is stream and dependent variable is self-esteem and academic background. Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI) developed by Dr. R. N. Singh & Dr. Ankita Srivastava (2010) and self-made Interview Schedule for measuring the academic background was used for the study. The collected data were analyzed by using mean, Standard Deviation (SD), t-test, and Pearson product-moment coefficient of correlation test and accordingly interpretations were made.

### Analysis and interpretation of the data

#### Objective 1

**To study the self-esteem and academic background of arts, science and commerce students in higher education.**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the level of self-esteem among arts and science students.

**Table 1:** 'T-Test' showing educational stream (arts and science) wise mean difference in self-esteem score of under graduate students

Stream	N	Mean	M difference	SD	SE <sub>M</sub>	df	t value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Significance level
Arts	200	66.09	4.495	7.523	.532	398	4.683	.000	S** (at 0.01 level)
Science	200	70.58		11.300	.799				
Total	400								

\*\*S: Significant

### Interpretation

After analysing the data presented in the above table it was found that 200 arts students had 66.09 and 7.523 as mean score and Standard Deviation (SD) of self-esteem respectively and for the 200 science students it was 70.58 and 11.300 respectively. Here the calculated t-value i.e. 4.683 is higher than the critical value of 2.59 at 0.01 level of significance. Hence, the result is significant at 0.01 level of significance and thus the null hypothesis is rejected.

Therefore, it is interpreted that arts students are significantly different from the science students in respect of self-esteem. Even during the informal discussion of the researcher with the students revealed that science students were relatively more confident and focussed about their studies as well as career than the students pursuing arts subjects.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the level of self-esteem among arts and commerce students.

**Table 2:** 'T-Test' showing educational stream (arts and commerce) wise mean difference in self-esteem score of under graduate students

Stream	N	Mean	M difference	SD	SE <sub>M</sub>	df	t value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Significance level
Arts	200	66.09	1.135	7.523	.532	398	1.302	.194	NS* (at 0.05 level)
Commerce	200	67.22		9.764	.690				
Total	400								

\*NS: Not significant

### Interpretation

The analysis of the data presented in the table-2 revealed that 200 arts students had 66.09 and 7.523 as mean score and Standard Deviation (SD) of self-esteem respectively and for the 200 commerce students it was 67.22 and 9.764 respectively. Here the calculated t-value i.e. 1.302 is lower than the critical value of 1.97 at 0.05 levels of significance. Therefore, the result is not significant at 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that mean value did not differ significantly at 0.05 level. Consequently, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected and as a result, the given

difference in sample means being insignificant can only be attributed to some chance factors or sampling fluctuations. Hence, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in the self-esteem between arts and commerce students. Both mathematical test result as well as informal discussion with the students revealed that in regard to self-esteem not much difference was noted among the students pursuing studies in either arts or commerce stream.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the level of self-esteem among commerce and science students.

**Table 3:** 'T-Test' showing educational stream (commerce and science) wise mean difference in self-esteem score of under graduate students

Stream	N	Mean	M difference	SD	SE <sub>M</sub>	df	t value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Significance level
Commerce	200	67.22	3.360	9.764	.690	398	3.182	.002	S** (at 0.01 level)
Science	200	70.58		11.300	.799				
Total	400								

\*\*S: Significant

**Interpretation**

From the data presented in the table-3 it was found that 200 commerce students had 67.22 and 9.764 as mean score and Standard Deviation (SD) of self-esteem respectively and for the 200 science students it was 70.58 and 11.300 respectively. Here the calculated t-value i.e. 3.182 is higher than the critical value of 2.59 at 0.01 levels of significance. Hence, the result is significant at 0.01 levels of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis can be rejected. Hence, it can be

Concluded that there is significant difference in the self-esteem between commerce and science students. Both the test result as well as the informal discussion of the researcher with the students revealed that regarding self-esteem science students were relatively more serious, confident and focussed about their studies and future plan than the students pursuing commerce subjects.

**H<sub>04</sub>:** There is no significant difference in regard to academic background among arts and science students.

**Table 4:** 'T-Test' showing stream (arts & science) wise mean difference in academic background score of under graduate students

Stream	N	Mean	M difference	SD	SE <sub>M</sub>	df	t value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Significance level
Arts	200	182.57	20.518	31.862	2.253	398	7.527	.000	S** (at 0.01 level)
Science	200	203.09		21.699	1.534				
Total	400								

\*\*S: Significant

**Interpretation**

From the data presented in the table-4 it was found that 200 arts students had 182.57 and 31.862 as mean score and Standard Deviation (SD) of academic background respectively and for the 200 science students it was 203.09 and 21.699 respectively. Here, the calculated t-value i.e. 7.527 is higher than the critical value of 2.59 at 0.01 level of significance. Hence, the result is significant at 0.01 level of significance and the null hypothesis is rejected.

Therefore, it is interpreted that arts students are significantly different from the science students in respect of academic background. It was found that most of the students who opted for science courses had relatively better/stronger academic background than those students who were pursuing their studies in arts subjects.

**H<sub>05</sub>:** There is no significant difference in regard to academic background among arts and commerce students.

**Table 5:** 'T-Test' showing educational stream (arts and commerce) wise mean difference in academic background score of under graduate students

Stream	N	Mean	M difference	SD	SE <sub>M</sub>	df	t value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Significance level
Arts	200	182.57	3.716	31.862	2.253	398	1.188	.236	NS* (at 0.05 level)
Commerce	200	178.85		30.674	2.169				
Total	400								

\*NS: Not significant

**Interpretation**

After analysing the data presented in the above table it was found that 200 arts students had 182.57 and 31.862 as mean score and Standard Deviation (SD) of academic background respectively and for the 200 commerce students it was 178.85 and 30.674 respectively. Here the calculated t-value i.e. 1.188 is found to be lower than the critical value of 1.97 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the result is not significant at 0.05 level of significance.

This indicates that mean scores did not differ significantly at 0.05 level. Consequently, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. As a result, the given difference in sample means being insignificant can only be attributed to some chance factors or sampling fluctuations. Hence, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in the academic background between arts and commerce students.

**H<sub>06</sub>:** There is no significant difference in regard to academic background among commerce and science students.

**Table 6:** 'T-Test' showing educational stream (commerce and science) wise mean difference in academic background score of under graduate students

Stream	N	Mean	M difference	SD	SE <sub>M</sub>	df	t value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Significance level
Commerce	200	178.85	24.234	30.674	2.169	398	9.121	.000	S** (at 0.01 level)
Science	200	203.09		21.699	1.534				
Total	400								

\*\*S: Significant

### Interpretation

The analysis of the data presented in the table-6 revealed that 200 commerce students had 178.85 and 30.674 as mean score and Standard Deviation (SD) of academic background respectively and for the 200 science students it was 203.09 and 21.699 respectively. Here the calculated t-value i.e. 9.121 is higher than the critical value of 2.59 at 0.01 level of significance. Hence, it can be said that the result is significant at 0.01 level of significance and so, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it is interpreted

That commerce students are significantly different from the science students in respect of academic background. The academic background of science students was found to be relatively better than commerce students.

### Objective 2

**To find out the relationship between self-esteem and academic background among students in higher education.**

**H<sub>07</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and academic background among students in higher education.

**Table 7:** Relationship between self-esteem and academic background

Correlations			
		Self-Esteem	Academic Background
Self-Esteem	Pearson Correlation	1	.154**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	600	600
Academic Background	Pearson Correlation	.154**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	600	600

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

### Interpretation

The analysis of the data presented in the table-7 revealed that there is significant positive relationship between Self-Esteem and Academic Background of the students in higher education. The computed r-value (.154) is significant at 0.01 level of confidence. Hence, the null hypothesis is not accepted. Therefore, it can be said that there is a significant relationship between self-esteem and academic background among the students pursuing their studies in higher education.

### Conclusion

There is a general stereo type belief that good students always opts for science subjects, mediocre students opts for commerce subjects and it is only those who are academically poor and backward ones opts for arts subjects. T-test was applied (table no-4 and 6). The findings of the test result also reflects the same. It proves that in reality also good and academically strong students' selects science subjects, average ones selects commerce subjects and academically poor/backward ones selects arts subjects. In regard to self-esteem among under graduate students t-test was applied (table no-1 and 3). Test result reveals that science students score much better than commerce and arts students. This means that science students are more confident and focussed regarding their future plans related to academic and career options than their counterparts pursuing studies in arts and commerce streams. Informal discussion of the researcher with the arts and commerce students also revealed that arts and commerce students were comparatively less confident, lacks awareness regarding academic and career options and had a very casual approach towards their future academic plans.

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