

The Impact of Societal Beliefs Toward Educational Pathways (Academic and Vocational) on Self-Esteem Among Secondary School Students: A Comparative Study

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ملخص الدراسة

الهدف: هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف أثر المعتقدات المجتمعية تجاه المسارات التعليمية (الأكاديمي والمهني) على تقدير الذات لدى طلاب المرحلة الثانوية في منطقة الضنية شمال لبنان، في ظل التصورات النمطية التي تفضل التعليم الأكاديمي وتقلل من شأن التعليم المهني. المنهجية: اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي، وطبقت على عينة مكونة من 300 طالب وطالبة موزعين بالتساوي بين المسارين، باستخدام مقياس "هودسون" لتقدير الذات واستبيان معد لقياس المعتقدات المجتمعية.

النتائج: أظهرت النتائج عدم وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في مستوى تقدير الذات بين طلاب التعليم الأكاديمي وطلاب التعليم المهني، كما لم تُسجل فروق مرتبطة بالجنس. في المقابل، كشفت الدراسة عن وجود علاقة ارتباطية سلبية دال إحصائياً بين المعتقدات المجتمعية السلبية تجاه التعليم المهني ومستوى تقدير الذات،

الخلاصة أوضحت نتائج تحليل الانحدار أن تلك المعتقدات تُفسر ما نسبته 20% من التباين في تقدير الذات لدى الطلاب. وتوصي الدراسة بضرورة إعادة النظر في الصورة النمطية للتعليم المهني من خلال برامج توعية وتوجيه مهني مبكر يراعي الفروق الفردية ويعزز من تقدير الذات لدى جميع الطلاب، بغض النظر عن المسار التعليمي المختار.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المعتقدات الاجتماعية، المسارات التعليمية، تقدير الذات.

Abstract

Objectives: This study aimed to explore the impact of societal beliefs regarding educational tracks (academic and vocational) on the self-esteem of secondary school students in the Al-Dinniyeh region of northern Lebanon, in light of prevailing stereotypes that favor academic education and devalue vocational paths.

Methods: The study adopted a descriptive-analytical methodology and was conducted on a sample of 300 students equally distributed between both tracks, using the Hudson Self-Esteem Scale and a specially designed questionnaire to assess societal beliefs.

Results: The results showed no statistically significant differences in self-esteem levels between students in academic and vocational education, nor were there significant differences based on gender. However, the study revealed a statistically significant negative correlation between negative societal beliefs toward vocational education and students' self-esteem. Regression analysis further indicated that these societal beliefs explained 20% of the variance in self-esteem levels.

Conclusion: The study recommends revisiting the stereotypical views toward vocational education through awareness programs and early educational guidance that respects individual differences and enhances students' self-esteem, regardless of their chosen educational path.

Keywords: Societal Beliefs, Educational Paths – Self Esteem

Introduction

The secondary education stage is one of the most influential phases in a student's life, during which they begin to shape the contours of their academic or professional future. Choosing an educational track at this stage—whether academic or vocational—is a critical decision whose implications extend beyond the realm of study to affect students' psychological, social, and emotional dimensions. This decision is not made in isolation from the surrounding environment but is influenced by a set of societal beliefs reinforced through upbringing and popular culture. These beliefs often idealize the academic track while devaluing the vocational path in terms of both social prestige and perceived professional viability (Abdul Latif, 2017).

In this context, **societal beliefs** are defined as inherited perceptions based on cultural and social foundations that are passed down from one generation to the next, influencing the life decisions individuals make, including their educational choices (Al-Salmi, 2020). Within a social system that equates success with university education, these beliefs contribute to an indirect form of

discrimination between students in the two tracks, potentially shaping their self-concept and personal sense of worth.

Self-esteem, a key psychological indicator of how individuals view themselves in terms of competence and worthiness, was defined by Rosenberg (1965) as “the evaluation an individual makes of themselves based on feelings of acceptance, respect, and ability.” This variable is directly affected by social experiences, school practices, and cultural contexts. Numerous studies have shown that students enrolled in vocational education tend to report lower levels of self-esteem due to social stigma and the inferiority associated with this type of education (Al-Khateeb, 2018; Hashemi & Ghaderi, 2016).

Field studies indicate that such societal perceptions contribute to a psychological gap between students in the two educational tracks. For instance, Al-Zahrani’s (2019) study revealed that students who are forced into vocational education due to social or academic pressures suffer from heightened anxiety and a noticeable decline in self-esteem. Meanwhile, Al-Jabri (2021) found that improving society’s view of vocational education can have a direct positive impact on students’ self-confidence and sense of belonging to their educational path.

From this standpoint, the importance of the present study lies in exploring how societal beliefs shape students’ self-perception and in identifying whether these beliefs directly influence self-esteem levels among secondary school students in both the academic and vocational tracks. The study also aims to highlight the need to reconsider the prevailing social and educational discourse surrounding vocational education by promoting a culture of conscious choice—one that is grounded in individual interests and abilities rather than in the pressures of dominant cultural norms.

Furthermore, this study seeks to make a scientific and empirical contribution by linking socially and psychologically significant variables—such as societal beliefs and self-esteem—to the realities of educational guidance. It aims to offer practical recommendations to support the development of a balanced school environment that fosters students’ self-confidence and restores the value of all educational tracks as equally valid options that reflect diverse abilities rather than a social hierarchy.

Research Problem

The secondary education stage is among the most sensitive phases in shaping students’ self-awareness and their educational and professional identities. With the growing range of options available to students—between academic and vocational tracks—**societal beliefs remain a decisive factor** influencing this choice. In many communities, stereotypical perceptions continue to prevail, favoring academic education while devaluing vocational education. This often leads some students, particularly those enrolled in vocational education, to experience feelings of inferiority.

The impact of these beliefs extends beyond mere educational choice; it also influences **self-esteem**, a critical psychological variable that affects students' mental well-being, academic success, and social adjustment.

Accordingly, the core problem of this study can be summarized as follows:

To what extent do societal beliefs about educational tracks affect self-esteem among secondary school students?

And do self-esteem levels differ between students in academic and vocational tracks as a result of these beliefs?

Sub-questions:

1. What is the nature of prevailing societal beliefs toward both the academic and vocational tracks?
2. What is the level of self-esteem among secondary school students in both tracks?
3. Are there statistically significant differences in self-esteem between students in the academic track and those in the vocational track?
4. To what extent are societal beliefs correlated with self-esteem among secondary school students?
5. Are there statistically significant differences in self-esteem between academic and vocational track students based on gender?

Research Hypotheses

1. There are statistically significant differences in the level of self-esteem between students in the academic track and those in the vocational track, in favor of academic track students.
2. There are statistically significant differences in the level of self-esteem among secondary school students in both tracks, in favor of male students.
3. There is a negative correlation between negative societal beliefs toward the vocational track and students' self-esteem.
4. Societal beliefs play a predictive role in determining the level of self-esteem among secondary school students.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its focus on a contemporary educational and psychological issue that intersects with deep social and cultural dimensions. It contributes to:

- Understanding the relationship between societal attitudes and students' psychological development—particularly their **self-esteem**.
- Drawing attention to the **stereotypical image** surrounding the vocational track, which may negatively affect students and limit their sense of competence and belonging.

- Supporting **decision-makers** in the fields of education and student guidance by providing field-based data that can help in developing counseling programs aimed at ensuring psychological equity among students.
- Encouraging society to reconsider its perception of **vocational education** as an inferior option and to promote it as an educational path **equal in value** to academic education.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the prevailing societal beliefs toward different educational tracks.
2. To measure the level of self-esteem among students in both the academic and vocational tracks.
3. To examine the differences in self-esteem between students of the two tracks.
4. To investigate the relationship between societal beliefs and self-esteem.
5. To provide practical recommendations that support positive educational guidance and reduce the negative effects of stereotypical perceptions.

Definition of Terms

1. Societal Beliefs

Abdul Latif (2017) stated that “societal beliefs are patterns of expectations and perceptions held by members of society about specific topics, which influence their behaviors and attitudes toward those topics.”

Youssef (2020) also defined them as “a reference framework individuals use to interpret social reality and make decisions based on what is considered acceptable or unacceptable by society.”

In this study, **societal beliefs** refer to the attitudes and opinions held by the local community toward academic and vocational education, as perceived by the student. These beliefs were measured using a researcher-developed scale that includes a set of statements reflecting both stereotypical and positive attitudes toward each educational track.

2. Educational Track (Academic / Vocational)

According to Al-Salmi (2020), “the educational track is the academic path a student follows after completing lower secondary education, including the academic track, which qualifies students for university admission, and the vocational track, which focuses on practical skills.”

Al-Khader (2019) noted that “educational tracks reflect the educational strategy that guides students based on their interests and academic abilities, and include various options such as general education or technical and vocational education.”

In this study, the **educational track** refers to the program in which a student is enrolled at the secondary level, whether academic (scientific/literary) or vocational (technical/industrial/commercial), and is identified through collected demographic data.

3. Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is defined as “an individual’s perception of their self-worth and the extent to which they respect themselves; it is considered one of the most essential components of mental health” (Rosenberg, 1965). It also refers to a general sense of competence and self-satisfaction, which directly affects a person’s motivation, behavior, and social interactions (Coopersmith, 1967).

In this study, **self-esteem** refers to the total score obtained by the student on the **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale**, which measures the student’s sense of acceptance, self-confidence, and self-respect.

Delimitations of the Study

This study addresses the topic of **societal beliefs and their impact on the level of self-esteem among secondary school students** in both academic and vocational tracks. Accordingly, the study is defined by the following delimitations:

- **Human Delimitation:** The study population consisted of 300 secondary-level students enrolled in public high schools and institutes in the **Dinnieh region**, with 150 students from each educational track.
- **Temporal Delimitation:** The fieldwork for this study was conducted during the **first semester of the 2023–2024 academic year**, during which the instruments used in the current study were administered.
- **Geographical Delimitation:** This study covers a sample of academic and vocational track students from the **Dinnieh region in northern Lebanon**.

Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature

Self-esteem is considered a central psychological construct that reflects an individual’s evaluation of oneself and includes feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the self. It refers to the degree of self-acceptance and the ability to adapt to oneself and others.

Rosenberg (1965) defined self-esteem as “a positive or negative attitude that an individual expresses toward the self,” serving as an indicator of how a person generally perceives their own worth.

The dimensions of self-esteem can be categorized as follows:

1. **Global Self-Esteem:** The individual's overall evaluation of themselves.
2. **Social Self-Esteem:** The sense of being accepted and valued by others in society.
3. **Academic/Vocational Self-Esteem:** The individual’s assessment of their abilities in educational or professional contexts.
4. **Physical Self-Esteem:** How individuals perceive their own body and physical appearance.

Several theoretical perspectives have explained the development and structure of self-esteem:

- **Rosenberg's Theory:** Views self-esteem as a **unidimensional construct** that reflects the extent to which an individual accepts or rejects themselves.
- **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs:** Classifies self-esteem as one of the **higher-level needs**, emphasizing the importance of gaining self-respect and the respect of others for healthy personality development.
- **Carl Rogers' Theory:** Considers self-esteem as a **component of the self-concept**, which is influenced by the congruence between real experiences and the ideal self.
- **Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory:** Highlights the role of **self-efficacy**, suggesting that individuals derive their sense of self-worth from their perceived ability to control their behavior and achieve success.

A range of factors influences self-esteem, including **family dynamics** (emotional support and upbringing), **peer relationships**, and experiences of **academic or professional success or failure**, in addition to **cultural and societal expectations**.

Therefore, self-esteem is a dynamic concept shaped by individual experiences. Understanding and addressing it is essential for promoting psychological well-being and personality development, which underscores the importance of examining it from a comprehensive, multi-theoretical perspective.

Community beliefs are considered fundamental concepts in sociology and social psychology. They refer to a set of ideas, values, and perceptions shared by members of a society about what is true, acceptable, or expected. These beliefs form the basis of collective behavior and influence decision-making, social relationships, and cultural organization.

Some define them as "deeply held perceptions within a particular social group, stemming from shared cultural and historical experiences, and guiding behavior within the society" (Ajzen, 1991). They have several general characteristics:

1. Shared: held by a large number of society members.
2. Acquired: transmitted through socialization.
3. Behavior-oriented: influencing actions and decisions.
4. Culture-linked: affected by cultural, religious, and historical contexts.

There are many theories explaining community beliefs, the most important being Social Learning Theory (Bandura), which emphasizes that individuals acquire beliefs through observation and imitation, especially of influential figures. The Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein) focuses on the role of beliefs in shaping intentions and behaviors, while Social Constructionism (Berger & Luckmann) views beliefs as outcomes of ongoing social and historical processes.

Several factors influence the formation of community beliefs, including media, educational institutions, family and socialization, historical and political experiences, and religion.

Community beliefs are considered a mirror of society's identity and play a central role in guiding individuals and defining acceptable behaviors. Understanding them is essential for analyzing social and cultural transformations within any society.

Studies show that many societies, especially in Arab contexts, hold varied beliefs about vocational education, ranging from appreciation to disdain. Some individuals regard vocational education as a secondary or lower-status option compared to academic education, which negatively affects its uptake. This perception is attributed to cultural and economic factors, such as linking professional success to university degrees or traditional views about social status.

From the perspective of the Theory of Reasoned Action, these beliefs directly influence the intentions of students and their families regarding choosing vocational education. Meanwhile, Social Constructionism argues that these beliefs are not fixed but shaped through social interaction and accumulated experiences and can be changed through awareness campaigns and educational policy reforms.

Previous studies revealed a close relationship between community beliefs about educational pathways and self-esteem among high school students. Most of these studies indicate that prevailing beliefs in Arab societies tend to favor academic education and associate it with higher social status, whereas vocational education is viewed with stigma, potentially negatively impacting students' self-perceptions. For example, Al-Khalidi's study (2019) pointed out that the negative image of vocational education still dominates societal awareness, leading students to avoid it unless forced. Al-Anzi's study (2020) confirmed the impact of these perceptions on parents' decisions and students' educational choices.

Similarly, foreign studies such as Houtte et al. (2012) showed that clear stratification within schools between academic and vocational tracks reinforces psychological and social gaps among students, lowering self-esteem levels particularly among vocational students, especially in environments that emphasize such divisions.

Regarding the educational track itself, studies by Al-Hashimi (2018) and Al-Otaibi (2021) revealed statistically significant differences favoring academic students in psychological adjustment and achievement motivation, pointing to the cumulative effect of socially pressured educational choices rather than individual preferences. Mortimer & Staff (2004) supported this view by tracing the long-term impact of vocational education on individual psychological development.

Regarding self-esteem, most studies, such as Kharkharia (2019) and Heatherton & Polivy (1991), agree that self-esteem is influenced by several factors, notably the type of educational track and associated social impressions. Fonseca-Pedrero et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of using modern self-esteem measures that consider temporal and situational dimensions, enhancing measurement accuracy in psychological research.

Despite the abundance of studies examining each variable separately, few have directly linked community beliefs about educational tracks and self-esteem within a unified explanatory framework, especially in Arab contexts. Moreover, most studies focused on the academic track as

a reference point without deeply exploring the profound impact of vocational track stereotypes on the student's psychological structure.

Hence, this study aims to fill this research gap by exploring the relationship between community beliefs regarding both academic and vocational education and self-esteem among high school students, considering the effect of gender, in an attempt to provide a comprehensive perspective that can inform the development of educational policies and vocational and psychological guidance programs.

Research Methodology

- **Study Approach**

The study relied on the descriptive-analytical approach, as it suits the nature of the research aimed at uncovering the relationship between community beliefs toward educational tracks and self-esteem among high school students, and comparing the differences according to educational track and gender.

- **Study Sample**

A stratified random sample was selected from the study population, consisting of 300 students, equally distributed between the academic and vocational tracks, with a balanced representation of both genders. This sample represents 25% of the study population, which enhances its representativeness of the original community.

- **Study Population**

The study population consists of high school students in public and private secondary schools and institutes, distributed across academic and vocational educational tracks. The population size is estimated at 1,200 students aged between 16 and 18 years.

- **Statistical Methods**

The SPSS statistical program was used for data processing through:

- Means and standard deviations: to describe sample characteristics.
- T-test: to compare self-esteem averages between the two tracks.
- ANOVA (Analysis of Variance): to test differences according to gender and track.
- Pearson correlation coefficient: to examine the relationship between community beliefs and self-esteem.
- Simple linear regression analysis: to reveal the predictive ability of community beliefs on self-esteem.

Study Instruments:

1. **Self-Esteem Scale by Hodson**, translated and prepared by Magdy Mohamed Al-Dosouqi (2002) (Rakebat, 2015)

This scale was developed to measure individuals' level of self-esteem and consists of 25 items. Each student responds to each item by choosing one of six options, each with a corrective weighting: Never (1), Very rarely (2), Slightly (3), Sometimes (4), Often (5), Most of the time (6). The items with these response options are numbers 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 14, 15, 18, 21, 22, 23, and 25.

Among the scale items, 12 are reverse-scored with the following weights: Never (6), Very rarely (5), Slightly (4), Sometimes (3), Often (2), Most of the time (1).

- **Psychometric Properties of the Scale**

Psychometric properties consist of validity and reliability.

- **Reliability**

The reliability of the scale was verified using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which measures internal consistency, reflecting how well the items correlate with each other. The following table shows the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients for the study instruments, with results as follows:

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient for the Self-Esteem Scale Instrument

Cronbach's alpha value	Total paragraphs	Scale
0.888	25	self-esteem

As shown in the table, the Cronbach's Alpha value for the Self-Esteem Scale is (0.888), which is greater than 0.7. Therefore, the self-esteem measurement tool used in this study demonstrates excellent reliability and internal consistency among its items.

- **Split-Half Method:**

This method is based on dividing the questionnaire into two equal halves, then calculating the correlation coefficient between the average scores of the odd-numbered items and the even-numbered items. The result is as follows:

Table 2: Correlation Coefficient Using the Split-Half Method for the Self-Esteem Scale Instrument

Guttman value	Number of even paragraphs	Number of individual paragraphs	Scale
0.886	25	13	self-esteem

It is evident from Table 2 that the Guttman coefficient for the Self-Esteem Scale is (0.886), which is scientifically acceptable. This indicates a very good degree of reliability for the scale, meeting the study's requirements.

- **Validity**

- **Construct Validity:**

This is shown in the following table by calculating the Spearman correlation coefficient and the statistical significance level for each item with the total scale score.

Table 3: Spearman Correlation Coefficient Between Self-Esteem Scale Items and the Dimension Score They Belong To

Statistical significance	Correlation coefficient	Paragraph	Statistical significance	Correlation coefficient	Paragraph
significant at 0.01	.532	14	significant at 0.01	.473	1
significant at 0.01	.284	15	significant at 0.01	.448	2
significant at 0.01	.456	16	significant at 0.01	.428	3
significant at 0.01	.494	17	significant at 0.01	.557	4
significant at 0.01	.619	18	significant at 0.01	.549	5
significant at 0.01	.626	19	significant at 0.01	.464	6
significant at 0.01	.543	20	significant at 0.01	.464	7
significant at 0.01	.306	21	significant at 0.01	.617	8
significant at 0.01	.641	22	significant at 0.01	.545	9
significant at 0.01	.521	23	significant at 0.01	.621	10
significant at 0.01	.596	24	significant at 0.01	.666	11
significant at 0.01	.542	25	significant at 0.01	.574	12
significant at 0.01	.532	38	significant at 0.01	.602	13

From the previous table, it is observed that all the items of the Self-Esteem Scale are significantly correlated with the total scale score at the 0.01 significance level, with correlation values ranging between 0.284 and 0.666. This achieves an acceptable degree of internal consistency among the items and confirms that all items possess an acceptable level of validity, thus there is no need to delete any item from the scale.

2. Community Beliefs Questionnaire Toward Educational Tracks:

This questionnaire was specifically developed for this study and, in its final form, consists of 30 items distributed over two main axes:

1. Beliefs toward Academic Education (15 items)
2. Beliefs toward Vocational and Technical Education (15 items)

The items were designed as statements where participants express their level of agreement using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Care was taken to diversify the wording of the items to include both positive and negative attitudes, with the inclusion of reverse-scored statements to ensure construct validity.

Study Results and Interpretation

- **Results Related to the First Hypothesis:**

There are statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level between the students' mean scores on self-esteem according to their educational track, in favor of students enrolled in the academic track.

Table 4: Table Showing the T-test Between the Self-Esteem Scale and the Type of Education Variable

Statistical significance	standard deviation	arithmetic mean	number	Type of education	Scale
0.680	13.878	54.35	150	Academic (Secondary)	self-esteem
	11.597	54.03	150	professional	

The above table shows the T-test for the Self-Esteem Scale according to the students' type of education. As is clear, the significance value is 0.680, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05. This indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between students in academic education and those in vocational education in their self-esteem levels. Therefore, we accept the null hypothesis that there are no statistically significant differences between adolescents' mean self-esteem scores according to their educational track.

The study indicated that all sample members, the adolescents, have a moderate to low level of self-esteem regardless of their educational track. This can be explained by the nature of adolescence, characterized by emotional fluctuations, internal conflicts, and self-influenced by the opinions of others, especially family and society. This relatively balanced low level across both groups reflects that the choice of track does not always stem from personal conviction but is influenced by external pressures, leading to low self-satisfaction and self-esteem, even for those belonging to a track favored by society, such as the academic track.

- **Results Related to the Second Hypothesis:**

There are statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level between adolescents' mean self-esteem scores attributed to the variable of gender, in favor of males.

To study the differences between the Self-Esteem Scale and gender variable, a T-test was conducted, with the following result:

Table 5: Table Showing the T-test for the Self-Esteem Scale According to Gender Variable

Statistical significance	standard deviation	arithmetic mean	number	Sex	Scale
0.622	13.569	55.04	92	male	self-esteem
	12.413	53.81	208	feminine	

The above table shows the T-test for the Self-Esteem Scale according to the student's gender. As is clear, the significance value is 0.622, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05. This indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between male and female students in their self-esteem levels. Therefore, we accept the null hypothesis that there are no statistically significant differences in self-esteem levels according to gender.

Despite expectations of gender-based differences, the study showed a balance in self-esteem between the two genders. This was attributed to the similarity of social and psychological conditions experienced by males and females in the study community, and to the development of some socialization patterns that now encourage both females and males to have self-confidence and social interaction. The text also confirms that females in this environment receive balanced treatment similar to males, which enhances their self-esteem and prevents significant gender differences in this regard.

- **Results Related to the Third Hypothesis:**

There is a statistically significant negative correlation between negative community beliefs toward the vocational track and students' self-esteem. The correlation analysis showed a significant negative relationship ($r = -0.45$, $p < 0.01$).

The text explains that students who chose vocational education experience alienation and dissatisfaction due to the negative societal perception that considers vocational education a "lower" option. These students may have chosen this track either because of poor academic achievement or family pressure, which increased their doubts about themselves and their abilities. The text supports this result by repeatedly referring to adolescents' social sensitivity (as mentioned by Rosenberg) and their reliance on external evaluation, which makes them vulnerable to decreased self-esteem when confronted with stereotypical beliefs.

Based on the previous section, the study concluded that there are no statistically significant differences between students' average self-esteem scores according to their educational track, in favor of students in the academic track. This result can be analyzed in light of the findings related to the items of the self-esteem scale.

The study results showed that most high school students, whether in the academic or vocational track, have moderate to low self-esteem levels, with no statistically significant differences attributed to the type of education or gender. This indicates that the adolescent stage plays a major role in shaping self-esteem, as it is a period marked by internal conflicts, identity formation, and strong influence from others' opinions. Interpretations pointed out that self-esteem during this stage is not stable but highly affected by social, familial, and environmental contexts.

The analysis showed that students with low self-esteem suffer from excessive sensitivity to societal views and live in doubt about their abilities, which makes them inclined to choose socially acceptable educational tracks rather than those reflecting their true preferences. Conversely, the proportion of students who showed moderate self-esteem (52.30%) was mostly linked to the presence of relative family support and an understanding family environment aware of adolescence's specificity. The smaller proportion who attained high self-esteem was explained by the existence of a balanced and encouraging family environment, along with positive personal traits such as high self-confidence, initiative, and creativity, as also noted by Rosenberg and Coopersmith.

Through a deep analysis of the social environment to which the students belong (a conservative rural environment), the study suggested that many educational choices were made in response to parental pressures rather than internal desires, which negatively affected students' satisfaction with themselves and their choices. This disconnect between internal desire and imposed choice can lead to psychological conflicts, academic decline, and a feeling of alienation within the educational track.

Regarding gender differences, the results of the T-test revealed no statistically significant differences in self-esteem levels between males and females. This is attributed to the similarity of social and psychological conditions experienced by adolescents in both tracks, alongside the development of social awareness that increasingly supports female participation and provides psychological and social support on par with males.

The study interpreted these results in light of Coopersmith's theory (1976), which posits that self-esteem is influenced by acceptance from others and previous success experiences. Maslow's theory also supported these findings by emphasizing that the need for self-esteem ranks high in the hierarchy of human needs and that satisfying this need enhances performance and personal motivation.

Accordingly, the researcher affirmed that the absence of differences does not mean that self-esteem is a fixed, permanent personality trait, but rather reflects the influence of the adolescent stage context, characterized by hesitation, fragility in self-perception, and heavy reliance on external judgments. This highlights the pivotal role of family, school, and society in building self-esteem.

Study Recommendations

Based on the study's results and analysis, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Enhance early educational guidance in schools and secondary schools, especially during the preparatory stage, to help students discover their vocational and academic inclinations and abilities away from stereotypical societal influences.
2. Launch awareness campaigns targeting the community to educate them about changing the negative image of vocational education, emphasizing its importance in developing a balanced economy and a productive society, focusing on success stories from the local context.
3. Strengthen and support students' mental health through specialized school counseling programs that address adolescents' needs and help them boost their self-esteem, especially under the pressures of educational choice.
4. Empower parents and raise their awareness of their crucial role in psychologically supporting their children during decision-making by organizing workshops on the subject.
5. Integrate education on self-respect and self-esteem within curricula and extracurricular activities, encouraging students to express themselves, and promoting values of independence, self-confidence, and conscious choice.
6. Continue scientific research on the reflections of community and psychological beliefs and ideas on educational tracks, expanding geographically and socially diverse samples to enrich the understanding of the phenomenon and enhance the effectiveness of educational interventions.
7. **Study Summary**
8. This study is an attempt to understand the impact of prevailing community beliefs toward educational tracks (academic and vocational) and the level of self-esteem among high school students. The results revealed that most students, regardless of their track or gender, suffer from moderate to low self-esteem. This is attributed to the nature of adolescence and the strong influence of society and family in guiding their educational choices. The study also showed a significant negative correlation between negative community beliefs toward vocational education and self-esteem, confirming that the stereotypical image of this type of education contributes to a decline in students' self-perception and feelings of incompetence.

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