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EFL COLLEGE STUDENTS' SELF-ESTEEM AND ITS CORRELATION TO THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Abstract. This study deals with an important personality trait which is self-esteem and how this trait can effect directly on students decisions and relationships. More precisely, the present study attempts to show the kind of the correlation between students' self-esteem and their attitudes towards inclusive education. Two instruments are used in this study to collect data; self-esteem questionnaire that have developed by Rosenberg (1965) and the attitude scale by Moberg & Savolainen (2003). The participants are 140 college male and female students, their ages range between 20-25 years. They are all from the English department, college of education for human science, University of Diyala, Iraq. Results of the study demonstrate that there is no significant difference between male and female college students in self-esteem and in their attitudes towards inclusive education though male students seem more inclined than female students. Results also show that there is a significant correlation between students' self-esteem and their attitudes towards inclusive education.

Key words: *Self-esteem, Inclusive education, The correlation.*

Introduction

Self-esteem refers to a self-evaluation made by every individual, namely a person's attitude about him/herself in the dimension range from positive to negative. Self-esteem is an integral part of human needs. According to Emler (2001), fulfilling individual self-esteem need is very important, because the negative impact will arise on someone who does not have strong self-esteem. The person will be difficult in dealing with the social behavior, feel inferior, awkward, and even not confident in the qualities he/she has. Conversely, if the self-esteem need can be fulfilled optimally, he/she will gain recognition in his social environment, be more confident, and feel more valuable in his environment, so that it will improve his/her learning achievement.

Baron, Branscombe, and Byne (2008) stated that an individual who has high self-esteem will view himself positively, while an individual with low self-esteem tends to view his/herself negatively and considers his/herself weak. People with high self-esteem are aware of the strength they have, and view these strengths more important than their weaknesses. High self-esteem allows a person to generate positive judgments about themselves. It is also an important factor that leads to confidence, strength, recognition, abilities, and proficiency.

Self-esteem also plays a role in the success and failure that a learner experience in education. There is a reciprocal relationship between academic achievement and self-esteem. Learners with high self-esteem generally tend to have higher academic achievements. On the other hand, those with low self-esteem usually have low academic achievement. Mruk and Chirstopher (2006) stated that one of the problems in academic Liqaa Habeb Al-Obaydi, Julia Doncheva, Nashruddin Nashruddin performance and social life of students is low self-esteem. Low self-esteem will cause psychological problems, namely not having confidence in achievement.

Low academic achievement can cause students to feel insecure, embarrassed, excluded, inadequate, worthless, and reduce their motivation to learn. If this is allowed, students will feel stress and depression because their expectations do not match the reality happening to them. Furthermore, this will have an impact on the emergence of maladaptive behavior in those students, such as lack of confidence, unable to make decisions, feeling worthless, unable to adapt socially, and incompetent.

English is one of the foreign languages studied in educational units in several countries (Haryanto, Weda, & Nashruddin, 2018). Some countries position English as a foreign language undeniably studied because the national language of the country is currently unable to be used as a means of communication with the other countries for foreign policy matters and to build friendships with other nations. English is the language of international communication, the language of science, modern technology, commerce, politics, and is spoken in almost all fields, so English should obviously be given first priority to be studied among other foreign languages.

The learning curriculum in every country requires EFL students to master 4 language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The learning orientation of these four skills aims to improve students' ability to communicate both orally and in writing. However, the EFL learning situation in some schools does not lead students towards attaining the proficiency in these language skills. Nashruddin and Ningtyas (2020) found that in some cases of the EFL learning process in schools, instead of prioritizing the skill in using both spoken and written language, teachers more provide language theory and knowledge to students.

According to Tosun (2015) in his research, many students are not able to speak English properly and correctly, both spoken and written, at every level of school. There are many factors that cause students to fail in learning EFL. The low interest of students in learning English is one of them. Many students do not have the high motivation to learn English.

The low self-confidence of non-English students to speak in English also has an impact on their learning motivation. In other cases, when an EFL student made a pronunciation mistake, he was bullied by his peers. It caused the students to feel embarrassed and incompetent. Finally, it made the student perceived his self-esteem as low. This is of course a problem that hinders the achievement of the educational goal.

One of the educational programs that can be done to overcome problems in the education sector is inclusive education. It is a model where the students with disabilities learn the curriculum as their nondisabled peers do and are placed in the regular classroom setting in schools (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 2004). The low self-esteem of students and learning motivation, especially in learning EFL, is one of the problems in education field. Therefore, learners become important figures in the practice of inclusive education.

The current study aims to determine how EFL students' attitude towards the implementation of the inclusive education. In addition, this study also aims to investigate inclusive education in relation to student self-esteem. In this vein, it attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Do college students in general education have high self-esteem?
2. Do college students in general education have positive attitudes towards the inclusion of their peers with special needs?
3. Is there any difference between male and female towards their peers with special needs?
4. Is there any correlation between EFL college students' self-esteem and their attitude towards inclusive education?

Literature Review Self-esteem

In some schools, there are still many students who show less confident behavior when they are asked to express their opinions. They cannot enjoy and express the classroom atmosphere. In addition, they tend to be passive, so they don't seem to understand their abilities. These symptoms actually indicate that those students have low self-esteem. Low self-esteem is the distrust of abilities.

According to Branden (1992) self-esteem is a phenomenon that is largely influenced by the way a person thinks. Every individual should have self-esteem. The existence of self-esteem influences how every individual can accept his/her condition. A person is considered to have self-esteem if he/she can accept their existence as a creation of God. Self-esteem is the individual's overall view of himself. Someone who has high self-esteem will always be motivated to behave well.

In line with that, Burger (1998) proposed that self-esteem is an evaluation or judgment made by a person about himself, in which he believes himself as a capable, important, successful, and valuable individual. In other words, self-esteem is a person's assessment of himself which is expressed through his daily behavior. Thus, self-esteem is a personality aspect that has an important role and a major influence on attitudes and behavior.

Another opinion according to Murk (2006), self-esteem is an evaluation made by a person. The evaluation views him/her on the ability, meaning, success, and worth. In short, self-esteem is a personal judgment about feeling of worth, which is expressed in attitudes toward oneself. It can also be said that self-esteem is a belief in one's own ability to think and overcome challenges in life, and belief in the right to be happy, to feel valuable, to express needs and desires, and to enjoy the results of the efforts that have been made.

Branden (1992) declared that self-esteem has six pillars, namely:

- live mindfully
- learn to take responsibility for self
- live with self-integrity
- live with assertiveness
- learn to accept self
- live with a specific purpose

The importance of student self-esteem in schools has been widely investigated by researchers. Hills, Francis, and Jennings (2011) conducted a qualitative study and found that students' self-esteem was shaped by their interactions with the school environment. Students' self-esteem was well maintained because of the respect, acceptance, and understanding from teachers and other students towards them. The research results also indicated several factors that influence the difference of every student's self-esteem are gender, intelligence, physical condition, family, and social environment.

Through an experimental design, Erol and Orth (2011) found that when children enter the stage of secondary school education, they are in adolescence. At this stage, the school environment will be more developed their mindset and social life. In the school environment, they often experience problems related to self-esteem. Those problems can affect their learning achievement at school.

Another research conducted by Hutteman, Nestler, Wagner, Egloff, and Back (2015) shows 12% of students experience decreased self-esteem after entering high school, and 13% of students have low self-esteem in high school. Low self-esteem can affect mental, cognitive function, thought processes, self-worth, and behavior. The impact of low self-esteem that occurs on high school students can cause negative emotions and behavior.

Inclusive Education

Every child has the right to education. Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities, and learning needs. Therefore, education services must pay attention to this diversity characteristics and needs. Those with special educational needs should have regular access schools, namely regular schools with an inclusive ethos are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating friendly and inclusive communities (Quality, 1994).

Inclusive practice is a new challenge for school administrators. Inclusive education aims to fulfill human rights to education, without discrimination, by giving all children the opportunity to get quality education. According to Olson (2003) inclusive education provides equal opportunities for all children to actively develop their personal potential in the same environment.

Inclusive education is education that includes students with special needs to be with other normal students. Inclusive education is a process to remove the barriers that separate students with special needs from normal students so that they can learn and work together effectively in one school. It talks about the same rights that every child has (Stubbs, 2002). It can be said that inclusive education is an educational service that accepts all children with special needs regardless of differences in children's characteristics.

Artiles, Koleski, and Christensen (2006) suggested five profiles of learning in an inclusive education, namely:

1. Inclusive education creates and maintains a warm classroom community, accepts diversity and respects differences.
2. Inclusive education applies multi-level and multi-modal curriculum
3. Inclusive education encourages teachers to teach interactively
4. Inclusive education removes the barriers associated with professional isolation.
5. Inclusive education involves parents significantly in the planning process.

According to Daniel (2009) inclusive education is an educational system that values all students and staff equal, increasing the participation of students, reducing their exclusion from the cultures, curricula, and communities of local school, reducing barriers to learning and participation for all students, not only those with impairments or those who are categorized as having special educational needs. Inclusive education is learning from attempts to overcome barriers to the access and participation of particular students to make changes for the benefit of students more widely. This definition positions the inclusive education as education that places all students with special needs in regular school all day long. Teachers have full responsibility for those students with special needs.

In his paper, Messiou (2017) sets out to challenge thinking and practice amongst researchers in the field of inclusive education. That paper identified topics and methodologies used in studies of inclusive education. The researcher said that if inclusion is about presence, participation and achievement of all, then:

- we should aim to involve all learners, rather than focusing only on some,
- we should employ collaborative transformative approaches of research in order to facilitate presence, participation and achievement.

In her research, Moriña (2017) argued that inclusive education was originally developed for younger students, prior to its application within higher education. However, as more students with disabilities successfully complete their early schooling, the need to move towards inclusive practices within higher education has increased. She said that in the case of disabilities that are due to external events, the importance granted to the university is even greater, because, as they state, the fact of studying university courses motivates and encourages them and also serves as an escape to overcome the difficulties associated with their disability. That research aimed at offering thoughts on inclusive practices within higher education.

Method Instrument

Two questionnaires are used in this study to collect data. The first one is the self-esteem questionnaire that developed by Rosenberg (1965) which is widely dependent as a self-report instrument to measure college students' self-esteem. The other instrument is the attitude scale that promoted by Moberg & Savolainen (2003) which is used to measure students' attitudes towards inclusive education. The present study deals only with the part that related to students and used for each item four-point Likert scale. As the two instruments are well known and they used and validated by many researchers, there is no need to ensure their validity accepts with the plan of the study. It exposes to certain specialists and all of them agree on the suitability of the instruments to the context of the study.

Participants

As table 1 clarifies, the number of participants was 140 college students. They are all studying in the third stage, English department, University of Diyala. They are told about the kind of the study before asking them to fill the questionnaires. The sample comprises 20 male students and 120 female. Most of their ages range between 20-25 years, as they all third year college students in English department, college of education or human sciences.

Table 1.
Demographics

| Variable | Attribute | Count | Percent |
|----------|--------------|-------|---------|
| Gender | Male | 20 | 14% |
| | Female | 120 | 86% |
| Age | 20-25 | 132 | 94% |
| | 25-30 | 4 | 3% |
| | More than 30 | 4 | 3% |
| Total | | 140 | 100% |

Results

In order to collect data, the students were given the two questionnaires online after explaining the kind of the research to them. The results of the four questions of the study are arranged in the tables below:

1. Do college students in general education have high self-esteem?

Results of this question show that 39% of students have high self-esteem as they agree and strongly agree with the items of self-esteem questionnaire as clarified in table 2. Other results show that 55% of the students look to themselves naturally without feeling to have high self-esteem as mentioned in table 2.

Table 2.
Self-Efficacy

| Scale | Count | Percent |
|-------------------|-------|---------|
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 1% |
| Disagree | 7 | 5% |
| Neutral | 77 | 55% |
| Agree | 53 | 38% |
| Strongly Agree | 1 | 1% |
| Total | 140 | 100% |

2. Do college students in general education have positive attitudes towards the inclusion of their peers with special needs?

Students' responses demonstrate that 44% of them agree and strongly agree with the inclusion of their peers with special needs in their education. On the other hand, 49% of them stay neutral and only 7% of them disagree and strongly disagree with this assumption as clarified in table 3.

Table 3.
Attitude

| Scale | Count | Percent |
|-------------------|-------|---------|
| Strongly Disagree | 1 | 1% |
| Disagree | 9 | 6% |
| Neutral | 69 | 49% |
| Agree | 50 | 36% |
| Strongly Agree | 11 | 8% |
| Total | 140 | 100% |

3. Is there any difference between male and female towards their peers with special needs?

There was not a significant difference between male (Mean = 3.35, SD = 0.34) and female (Mean = 3.27, SD = 0.55), conditions $t(138) = 0.558$ for self-efficacy. Also, there was not a significant difference between male (Mean = 3.39, SD = 0.77) and female (Mean = 3.38, SD = 0.63), conditions $t(138) = 0.558$ for attitude towards students with special needs. However, males are more inclined towards agreement with statements of self-efficacy and attitude.

Table 4. Compared Means (Independent t-test)

| Variable | t-value | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---------------|---------|-----|-----------------|
| Self-Efficacy | 0.587 | 138 | 0.558 |
| Attitude | 0.041 | 138 | 0.967 |

4. Is there any correlation between EFL college students' self-esteem and their attitudes towards inclusive education?

Results of question 4 show that there is a significant correlation between students' self-esteem and their attitudes towards the inclusion of their peers in the general education.

Table 5. Correlation Matrix

| Variable | SE | SA |
|----------|--------|----|
| SE | - | |
| SA | .503** | - |

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

Discussion

The present study tries to shed light on an important aspect in human nature which is self-esteem and how this psychological merit can effect on college students' decision towards the inclusion of the students with special needs in the same classes in higher education. Results show that 39% of the total number of the students has high self-esteem in comparison to other students. This result seems natural as it is not acceptable to find that all students have the same degree of the merit. Therefore, the result of the first question seems justifiable. Self-esteem, as a merit, is either high or low. If the students own high self-esteem, they usually feel confident and positive about themselves and about the decision they make in life. On the other side, when the students own low self-esteem, they look at life in a more negative and critical light. As a result, they thought that they can't handle the obstacles they face in life and are unable to take balanced decisions of life. This interpretation is recommended by McLeod (2012) who mentioned that individuals who have high self-esteem concentrate on growth and improvement, other individuals who have low self-esteem usually concentrate on living their life straight forwards. In this concern, what is mentioned above shows the way self-esteem of the students effects their decisions towards others.

The second question of the study wonders about the attitudes of college students towards inclusive education. The data gained from the participants demonstrates that 49% of them were agree and strongly agree with the idea of inclusive education and only 7% refuse the idea of including the students with disabilities in the mainstream classes. The scary feelings of some students towards the idea of inclusion may be due to the ignorance of how to deal with the students with disabilities as they need special care and support to feel safe and to engage in the class environment. Another reason for that result may be due to the unawareness of school and college teachers with the policies of dealing with disabled students, and most of them are not trained to transact correctly and implement educational programs.

The results of the third question clarified that there was no significant difference between male and female college students in self-esteem and in their attitudes towards inclusive education though male students proved to be more inclined towards inclusive education. The result may be related to

the nature of males generally as they tend to be more confident than females specifically in dealing with such sensitive matters.

The last question wonders about the nature of the correlation between college students' self-esteem and their attitudes towards inclusive education. The result shows that there is a significant correlation between them at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). This means that whenever students' self-esteem increased, their acceptance to disabled students will increase. This leads to focus on the crucial role of self-esteem as a personality merit that has a direct effect on students' choices, relationships, and living their full potential.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study indicates that there is moderate percent of self-esteem and attitudes towards inclusive education and there is no difference between male and female college students in these two dimensions though male students seem more inclined. On the other hand, there is a significant correlation between students' self-esteem and their attitudes towards inclusive education. One of the main lessons that teachers should now is to provide their students comfortable and healthy teaching environment where they can deal with each other freely. In this vein, it is recommended that students need to study in positive class environment with a trained teacher to become self-actualized and self-fulfilled learners (Al-Obaydi, 2020) which can affect in turn on raising their confidence and self-esteem.

The road to achieving inclusive education is not easy as it full of real challenges; the main of them are the socio-economic situation of most countries, the lack of trained specialized teachers, and the level of awareness of non-disabled peers and their families. Therefore, this study recommends the concentration on two main things in order to raise the actual situation of dealing with disabled students and to apply inclusive education in the right way; the first one is advancing public awareness for non-disabled students and their families towards inclusive education. The second thing is providing adequate conditions in schools, including the training of teachers and creating appropriate teaching environment that has suitable learning facilities.

I would say that the all of us and institutions are debtors of people with specific learning and educational needs. If we continue to pretend that these children, students, people, and their problems do not exist, there is a risk the number of young people with antisocial behavior and antisocial acts to increase. Hundreds of children, people, with such problems remain outside the society and actually takes them right to education and development. (Doncheva,

2014 and 2017) These should be seen by all pedagogical and administrative community as young people at risk, which should take special care and attention. Only then can we expect their specific needs to be met, and their number becomes smaller.

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