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Understanding of Self-Confidence in High School Students

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Abstract

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Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Students at a private high school in New Jersey exhibited low academic self-confidence as compared to other indicators on the ACT Engage exam. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of academic self-confidence, academic performance, and learning within a sample of students. This research explored students' and teachers' perceptions of self-confidence and their impact on academic performance. The research was guided by Weiner's attribution and Bandura's self-efficacy theories. The research questions focused on 3 areas: students' and teachers 'perceptions of academic self-confidence as factors impacting students' academic performance; and the perceived relationship between academic self-confidence, academic performance, and learning. Data were collected from a sample of 10 sophomore students and 10 teachers of sophomore students through 2 separate focus groups using a semistructured focus group guide. Using Clarke and Braun's framework for thematic analysis, the data were analyzed. Results revealed 2 student themes: (a) developing confidence and (b) set for success, and 3 themes from the teacher focus group: (a) student academic performance, (b) creating a positive space, and (c) student confidence. Professional development was designed for local application, including strategies to enhance students' academic self-confidence to lead to enhanced academic performance. Implications for social change includes increased student success as they transition to college.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

There was a problem in a private high school in a small town on the East Coast of the United States. Students were performing well on standardized test scores such as the SAT, with the average scores higher than national and state averages for the class of 2016 and 2017, yet based on the results of the ACT Engage College (AEC) they had lower mean percentile ranks on the academic self-confidence scale as compared to other scales of the test (school principal, personal communication, October 10, 2017). The mean percentile-rank score for academic self-confidence on the AEC for the students at the school was lower than all other indicators, and lower than the national average (school principal, personal communication, October 10, 2017). These results showed that the scale of academic self-confidence was lower than almost all other scales measured by that instrument, including goal-striving ability, general determination, academic discipline, and steadiness. Based on self-confidence, *academic self-confidence* refers to students' beliefs in their ability to perform well in school and has been demonstrated to improve academic performance in college (Martin, Nejad, Colmar, & Liem, 2013).

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Academic self-confidence has been demonstrated to improve academic performance in college (Martin et al., 2013). The AEC developers have defined *academic self-confidence*, in the context of exam results, as the belief in one's ability to

perform well in school. Additionally, at both the state and national level, scores on the AEC for the academic self-confidence scale have consistently aligned with scores for other scales, such as commitment to college and academic discipline. However, there was a gap in practice in the local setting because, according to the principal at the site (personal communication, June 15, 2017), the mean percentile ranks for academic confidence have been lower than for the other scales for the years 2014, 2015, and 2016, and lower than the national average. Although teaching faculty, counselors, and administrators were aware of the problem, there was lack of understanding regarding what may contribute to this gap. Because academic self-confidence may influence college performance, students in the local setting could benefit from improving scores on the academic self-confidence scale.

Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature

Academic self-confidence has been shown to be one of the most salient factors leading to enhanced academic performance as student's transition to college (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013). Academic self-confidence is based on self-confidence and is defined as students' beliefs in their ability to perform well in school. Students are likely to perform well in school if they believe they can perform well (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013). Komarraju and Nadler (2013) established that students with high levels of academic self-confidence had increased level of academic performance. Additionally, students with high levels of academic self-confidence welcomed challenges and showed a desire to learn, which have also been linked to academic performance (Komarraju & Nadler,

2013). Stankov, Lee, Luo, and Hogan (2012) found that self-confidence was a better predictor of performance than other factors. Consequently, low academic self-confidence can lead to poor academic performance (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013; Stankov et al., 2012). The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding as to why students at a private high school in New Jersey have low academic self-confidence scores and offer suggestions on how it can be improved in the learning environment. The qualitative data were collected through interviews of students and teachers, through which I explored their experiences and perceptions related to academic self-confidence.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined for use in this project study.

Academic performance: Academic performance refers to students' success in reaching personal and institutional educational goals (Stankov, 2013).

Academic self-confidence: Academic self-confidence refers to students' beliefs that they can perform well in school (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013).

Self-belief: Self-belief is defined as individuals' opinions of how they feel about themselves and refers to the three major self-constructs in educational psychology, including self-efficacy, self-concept, and self-esteem (Stankov, Morony, & Lee, 2014).

Self-confidence: Self-confidence refers to individuals' beliefs that they can accomplish a given task or achieve a desired objective (Stankov et al., 2012).

Self-efficacy: Self-efficacy refers to motivational beliefs and confidence that fuel persistence when difficulties are encountered (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013).

Significance of the Study

High schools have a responsibility to bridge the gap between education and practice (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013). Educators, counselors, and administrators in the high school setting are expected to produce innovative strategies that facilitate transition to higher education or vocational settings (Reed, Kirschner, & Jolles, 2015). In the local setting at a private high school in New Jersey, students have consistently had lower mean percentile scores on the academic self-confidence scale in comparison to the other scales of the test (school principal, personal communication, October 10, 2017). This was inconsistent with and below the expected results when compared to national averages (school principal, personal communication, October 10, 2017)

The score on the academic self-confidence scale has been associated with academic performance in higher education (Reed et al., 2015). This study was the first one at the local setting, a private high school in New Jersey, to provide understanding regarding low scores on the academic self-confidence scale of the AEC. This study holds great significance in filling the gap in practice and increasing understanding of this problem of low academic self-confidence scores in the local setting. The evidence obtained from this study will directly benefit future high school students in the local setting. One significant benefit for local high school students to have higher academic self-confidence scores is preparation for performance in higher education (Stankov, 2013).

Regarding social change, self-efficacy, self-concept, and self-esteem directly relate to motivation and performance relative to student academic performance and are negatively impacted by poor psychological well-being, negative stereotyping, gender inequalities, and other factors (Anderman & Patrick, 2012; Bong, Cho, Ahn, & Kim, 2012). Students who are able to manage their emotional and psychological well-being more effectively through adaptability and self-regulation, both in academic and nonacademic settings, experienced a positive correlation to academic performance and available opportunities for growth (Bandura, 1997; Martin et al., 2013). Therefore, I attempted to affect positive social change by focusing on many emotional and psychological factors that impact the self-concepts that one experiences.

Research Questions

In order to explore the problem and gain an understanding of academic self-confidence, I designed the research questions to enable the collection of qualitative data to support this qualitative study. Using attribution theory as a guide to attempt to understand academic self-confidence, the research questions were developed with a focus on self-confidence.

1. How do students perceive academic self-confidence as an influence on academic performance?
2. How do teachers perceive academic self-confidence as an influence on academic performance?
3. What do students perceive as ways to improve their academic self-confidence?

4. What do teachers perceive as ways to improve students' academic self-confidence?

Review of the Literature

In the review of literature, I examined the broader problem of academic self-confidence and academic performance to contextualize this investigation of academic self-confidence in a sample of students at a private high school in New Jersey. This qualitative case study was designed to facilitate understanding of how academic self-confidence can be improved in this learning environment. In this review, I compared, contrasted, and synthesized literature on academic self-confidence, self-efficacy, and academic performance to provide a clear picture of the current research. I searched the following databases at the Walden University Library and included Education Source, Education Research Complete, ERIC, Teacher Reference Center, CINAHL Plus With Full Text, and Proquest. Keywords used either individually or in conjunction included *students*, *high school*, *secondary school*, *academic performance*, *academic self-confidence*, *education*, *learning*, *self-efficacy*, *self-confidence*, *self-concept*, and *self-beliefs*.

Conceptual Framework

Self-efficacy (see Bandura, 1997) served as part of the conceptual foundation for this project study. For decades, one of the dominant issues in educational psychology has been the question of why some students give up trying when confronted with academic difficulties, while others "rise to the occasion using strategies and perseverance" and go

on to earn higher grades (Mega, Ronconi, & De Beni, 2014, p. 121). Social cognitive self-theories (or self-constructs) figure prominently in research on academic performance and motivation (Bandura, 1997; Bong et al., 2012; Cleary & Kitsantas, 2017; Kitsantas, Winsler, & Huie, 2008; Komarraju & Nadler, 2013; Reed et al., 2015; Sander & Sanders, 2003, 2006; Shi, 2016; Wolters, Fan, & Daugherty, 2013). Self-efficacy is arguably the most extensively studied of these self-constructs and tends to demonstrate the strongest effect on performance (Bong et al., 2012; Cleary & Kitsantas, 2017; Hannon, 2014; Shi, 2016).

Underlying Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory is the concept of *human agency*: the belief that people are capable of using initiative to achieve desired outcomes. According to Bandura, beyond affecting behavior directly, self-efficacy perceptions operate indirectly through their impact on factors such as aspirations and goals, outcome expectations, thinking and strategy, strength of commitment, effort exertion, stress and anxiety, resilience to adverse conditions, and appraisals of obstacles and opportunities in the social environment. Without the belief that one can produce desirable results by persisting in a course of behavior or changing an unsuccessful one, there is minimal motivation to act. Self-efficacy is similar to confidence and holds that individuals are more likely to accomplish a task if they believe that they can accomplish it (Bandura, 1997). Academic self-confidence is based on the idea of self-confidence, and academic self-confidence refers to students' beliefs in the abilities to perform well in school (Stankov, 2013). Because students with high academic self-confidence are likely to

perform well in school, self-efficacy is a suitable theoretical foundation for this project study.

Weiner's (1985) attribution theory served as the other part of the conceptual framework for this project study. Weiner developed attribution theory to help understand and explain human behavior. According to attribution theory, individuals attribute causes to behavior in an attempt to understand why people behave the way they do (Weiner, 1985). Weiner referred to behavioral control as being either external (outside the individual's control) or internal (within the individual's control), and identified effort, ability, task difficulty, and luck as key determinants of motivation. Students' performance may be attributed to innate ability (something outside of their control) or to effort (something within their control; Reed et al., 2015).

What factors students' performances are attributed to may influence the students' academic self-confidence, which may influence their academic performance. For example, attributing academic performance to innate ability may enhance academic self-confidence (Reed et al., 2015). However, Bandura (1997) holds that mastery experiences based on efforts expended to meet challenges are necessary to build self-efficacy, making self-efficacy a necessary component of the conceptual framework as well. As Weiner's (1985) attribution theory is directly related to the performance of an individual, related to internal and external factors, it will guide this research to help understand self-confidence and its relation to academic performance.

Review of the Broader Problem

Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) and attribution theory (Weiner, 1985) will help to understand the relationship between academic self-confidence and academic performance. Academic self-confidence is defined as students' beliefs in their ability to perform well in school (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013). Academic self-confidence is based on self-confidence and self-efficacy. Academic self-confidence has been shown to be a crucial factor for enhanced academic performance as student's transition to college (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013). Additionally, whether students attribute academic success to innate ability or effort helps to understand their performance in relation to confidence. Therefore, the review of the literature includes synthesis and analysis of research on self-constructs in educational psychology, such as self-efficacy and self-esteem, and research on causal attributions of academic performance.

Academic self-efficacy. Academic self-efficacy is not contingent on students' knowledge and skills per se, but rather on how they perceive their abilities to apply them to successfully reach intended goals (Bandura, 1997). Profiles of gifted students in mathematics and science drawn from the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 revealed that only 23% of the math students and 14% of the science students had high self-efficacy for their respective subjects (Andersen & Cross, 2014). The combination of high ability and low motivation was not unusual, defining 15% of the math students and 28% of the science students. Students high in both science ability and motivation represented the smallest group (Andersen & Cross, 2014).

In the Netherlands, where secondary school students are stratified into ability tracks, high self-efficacy for mathematics in sixth grade was negatively related to performance in ninth grade among students in the highest track (Reed et al., 2015). One explanation, according to Reed et al. (2015) is that these high-ability students may have excelled in primary school with minimal effort. As a result, they were unprepared for the rigorous, academically demanding secondary school curriculum. The high track curriculum is designed to prepare students for a university education. Evidence suggests that U.S. students of similar age (11 years) and grade level may have inflated and unrealistically optimistic self-appraisals of their academic competencies, leading to a decline in self-esteem when their academic performance falls short of their expectations (Honicke & Broadbent, 2016).

Academic indicators such as high school GPA and SAT or ACT scores can play a significant role in predicting performance in college (Hannon, 2014); however, they are insufficient for explaining individual differences in performance and persistence. In fact, GPA is a poor predictor of academic performance in college (Hannon, 2014). Rather, students' self-efficacy, self-rated abilities, and adjustment proved to be the decisive factors in college success (Hannon, 2014). SAT scores, however, were only significant for freshmen (Hannon, 2014).

The transition to middle or secondary school is widely recognized as presenting a challenge to learners' self-concepts and self-efficacy (Reed et al., 2015; Romero, Master, Paunesku, Dweck, & Gross, 2014). Beyond academic challenges, adolescence can be a

difficult stage of development. Nevertheless, the transition to higher education marks a much more dramatic departure from a familiar learning environment. Consequently, academic self-concepts, self-efficacy, and confidence can fluctuate considerably (Gorges & Goke, 2015). Roughly one quarter of students who enter college, including those who entered with high GPAs, do not return for their sophomore year (Kena et al., 2016). Only 60% of the students who entered a baccalaureate program in 2008 graduated within 6 years (Kena et al., 2016). Changes at the high school level and during adolescence can influence students' self-concepts, including academic self-confidence, necessitating exploration of academic self-confidence in relation to academic achievement.

Attributions for academic performance. From a social cognitive perspective, students' attitudes, perceptions, and judgments are at least as significant in predicting academic outcomes as prior performance and ability levels (Bandura, 1997; Wolters et al., 2013). The focus of Wolters et al.'s (2013) research on high school students' academic functioning was on performance goals and causal attributions. Weiner (1985) developed an attributional theory of motivation and emotion, and identified effort, ability, task difficulty, and luck as key determinants of motivation and performance. In educational research, the driving question is usually whether students attribute success and failure to innate ability or effort (Weiner, 1985). Task difficulty is examined to a lesser extent, and some studies include teaching or other environmental influences on learning (Enlund, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2015). Because innate ability and effort are salient

components of academic self-confidence (Weiner, 1985), attributional theory was suitable for the study of academic achievement.

Western cultures tend to view individuals as independent, autonomous entities with internal characteristics to which their actions and outcomes are attributable (Wolters et al., 2013). Such an attitude is especially common in the United States. Students in the United States, for example, often believe that a person who is good at something or preforms well in school is successful with little effort because of natural ability (Wolters et al., 2013). Indeed, students with high self-confidence tend to ascribe their success to ability and their failure to lack of effort (Wolters et al., 2013).

Attributing failure to lack of ability is especially detrimental as it can lead to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, therefore reducing self-efficacy and confidence (Verniers & Martinot, 2015). At the same time, if individuals perceive ability or intelligence to be a fixed attribute, they are likely to view effort as compensation for intellectual limitations (Verniers & Martinot, 2015). This attitude has been implicated in perpetuating gender stereotypes that inhibit the mathematics performance of female students and dissuade many women from pursuing mathematical careers (Verniers & Martinot, 2015). In a study of French secondary school students, Verniers and Martinot (2015) found that the hardest working girls were judged to have less academic potential than their less-diligent female peers. No parallel pattern was observed for boys. In the United States, performance in mathematics and writing have been found to impact girls' and boys' self-esteem differently, likely reflecting cultural expectations for their

respective performance in the two disciplines (Honicke & Broadbent, 2016). Therefore, students may attribute effort to lack of innate ability, influencing academic self-confidence, and, in turn, their achievement.

In somewhat similar fashion, teachers often attribute the success of majority culture students to ability and minority students' success to effort (de Haan & Wissink, 2013). Teachers may inadvertently create a learning environment that fosters maladaptive attributions for performance and undermines students' motivation and confidence (Anderman & Patrick, 2012; Jones & Shindler, 2016; Rattan, Good, & Dweck, 2012; Wiesman, 2012; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Therefore, it was important to obtain students' and teachers' perspectives on academic self-confidence and improving learning environments in focus groups that took place at my study site.

Self-constructs in educational psychology. Self-efficacy, self-concept, and self-esteem are the most widely studied self-constructs in educational psychology, particularly in relation to motivation (Bong et al., 2012). Bong et al. (2012) noted that despite this extensive study, researchers still find it difficult to separate them empirically, leading to inconsistent findings regarding their respective roles in academic endeavors. Self-concept and self-efficacy have the most direct relationship to academic performance and motivation. Self-esteem is less clearly defined in the literature. Broadly, self-esteem refers to "how individuals feel about themselves and evaluate their global self-worth" (Bong et al., 2012, p. 337). Of the three self-constructs, self-esteem is typically regarded as the least context-specific and the most relevant to the student's overall psychological

well-being. In the context of attributions and achievement goals, students who attribute failure to ability are likely to choose unchallenging performance goals as a mechanism for preserving their sense of self-worth (Anderman & Patrick, 2012).

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to people's appraisals of their ability to plan and execute the actions needed to achieve a desired goal (Bandura, 1997). Individuals with high self-efficacy strive for challenging goals and exhibit determination to persist through obstacles to attain them (Bandura, 1997). Setbacks are viewed as challenges to overcome and often motivate them to intensify their efforts. In contrast, those with low self-efficacy attempt to avoid difficult tasks and are less committed to achieving their personal goals (Bandura, 1997). Rather than being motivated to try harder in the face of setbacks and obstacles, individuals with low-self-efficacy are more predisposed to interpret setbacks as signs of personal weakness or deficiency (Bandura, 1997).

Experiences that produce enduring effects on self-efficacy involve setting and striving toward challenging but realistic goals. Bandura (1997) emphasized that self-efficacy is based on the self-appraisal of one's level of competence. Bandura's conceptualization of self-efficacy is primarily domain specific. Once internalized, high self-efficacy tends to generalize to other situations with attributes similar to the experiences on which the efficacy beliefs are built.

Bandura (1997) described four sources of self-efficacy. Mastery experiences represent the most powerful and direct source of self-efficacy, and vicarious learning or modeling is the second source of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). The effectiveness of

modeling is maximized when the model is perceived as similar to the learner (Bandura, 1997). The third source of self-efficacy is social (or verbal) persuasion, encompassing feedback and encouragement (Bandura, 1997). According to Bandura, support should be focused on effort rather than performance. Especially for novices or for individuals who are insecure in their ability, supporting and encouraging effort conveys the message that the learner is capable of reaching his or her goals even if the performance falls short of those goals.

There are hazards in praising children in a manner that communicates that their performance is contingent on an innate and immutable attribute (intelligence, goodness; Phan & Ngu, 2016). However, effort praise can also be detrimental if it conveys the impression that the person lacks ability. According to the idea of *attributional feedback*, effort feedback works best in the early stages of learning (Phan & Ngu, 2016). Praise for early successes reinforces the impact of mastery experiences on self-efficacy and increases motivation to strive for higher attainment. As the learner becomes more proficient, ability feedback ("You're good at this") tends to be more effective for boosting confidence and inspiring motivation (Phan & Ngu, 2016).

The fourth influence on self-efficacy is the person's physiological or somatic state (Bandura, 1997). Stress, tension, anxiety, and negative mood diminish self-efficacy, whereas energy, enthusiasm, and optimism intensify it (Bandura, 1997). The relationship is bidirectional. Confident in their abilities, individuals with high self-efficacy approach their tasks energetically, while those with low self-efficacy may be daunted by the same

tasks even if they are equally capable (Bandura, 1997). Test anxiety has been associated with low self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). It may be that stressful or negative affective states also negatively influence students' academic self-confidence leading to decreased academic performance.

Arslan (2013) found mastery experiences and vicarious learning to be the most effective sources of self-efficacy among secondary school students (Grades 6-8). Social persuasion only proved effective for boosting self-efficacy in boys and was less effective for the sixth and seventh graders compared to the older learners (Arslan, 2013). Physiological state was only significant for the sixth-grade students (Arslan, 2013), perhaps because they were in a new learning environment that might have induced anxiety or apprehension. While all four sources of self-efficacy have empirical support (although physiological state is the least examined in educational research), it is valuable to have insight into which of the sources are most effective for different groups of learners.

Self-concept. Self-concept is defined as a global or composite view of the self, and self-efficacy is one of the constructs that comprises self-concept (Stankov et al., 2014). Self-concept is developed through interactions between the individual and the environment and is reinforced in particular by personal experiences and feedback from significant others (Stankov, 2013). Social comparisons figure prominently in the development of self-concepts.

There are four key antecedents of self-concept: (a) *frames of reference,* denoting standards by which the individual judges his or her personal traits or accomplishments; (b) *causal attributions*; (c) *reflected appraisals from significant others*; (d) *mastery experiences*; and (e) *psychological centrality,* referring to the importance individuals ascribe to specific areas of life (academic self-concept, social self-concept; Stankov, 2013). In the educational setting, academic self-efficacy is considered a major precursor of academic self-concept (Stankov, 2013). Self-concept and self-efficacy share several key influences, and both are associated with cognitive, psychological, and behavioral outcomes. Nevertheless, each has distinctive features and distinctive effects on academic performance and motivation. The precise nature of self-esteem and its relationship to academic performance is less clearly defined (Stankov, 2013).

Self-esteem. The most widely accepted definition of self-esteem comes from Rosenberg and colleagues who defined self-esteem as "an individual's positive or negative attitude toward the self as a totality" (as cited in Bong et al., 2012, p. 337). Implicit in this conception of self-esteem is that it is more relevant to a person's overall psychological well-being than to a particular domain unlike self-efficacy, which Bandura (1997) conceptualized as domain specific. A large body of educational research indicates that for adolescents in Western societies a healthy self-esteem is beneficial to both academic and social functioning (Chung et al., 2014). However, despite extensive investigation, understanding the precise relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement has been elusive.

The key issue confronting researchers is the *direction* of the relationship between self-esteem and behavioral outcomes such as academic achievement (Chung et al., 2014). This appears to be particularly true for early adolescents, whose self-esteem has been found to fluctuate in response to changes in school climate and success in specific subject areas. Such variations in self-esteem are consistent with the overall pattern of changes in self-beliefs affecting young adolescents as they navigate the transition to secondary school (Reed et al., 2015; Romero et al., 2014).

Further complicating understanding of the relationship between self-esteem and academic performance is the presence of cultural differences arising from cross-cultural research (Verniers & Martinot, 2015). For the most part, researchers have focused on Western societies, with most cross-cultural studies focusing on the respective influences of individualism and collectivism. However, this approach masks the potential effects of individual variations. Furthermore, within a given society, gender, ethnicity, and social class are all cultural constructs that affect the development of self-esteem, as well as the broader associations between self-beliefs and academic endeavors. The most consistent and striking example is the pervasive cultural stereotype surrounding gender and mathematics (Verniers & Martinot, 2015).

Studies derived from several theoretical perspectives have confirmed a number of assumptions about self-esteem; specifically, that high self-esteem is connected with academic performance, that ability levels can affect depressive symptoms as well as self-esteem, and that a positive self-concept fosters children's healthy development (Chung et

al., 2014). Most studies suggest that the relationship between self-esteem and academic performance is bidirectional, though some findings appear to be inconclusive. Despite some inconsistent findings, the overarching implication is that high self-esteem is beneficial to the personal development of children and youth, academically and socially.

Self-beliefs and achievement. Bong et al. (2012) endeavored to clarify the confusion surrounding the empirical distinctions between self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-esteem by comparing the relative utility of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-concept for predicting academic performance. These self-beliefs were examined in conjunction with task value and test anxiety in a study involving Korean middle and elementary school students. This study provides an interesting context for further understanding of the relationship between self-esteem and academic performance given the influence of culture on self-esteem (Bong et al., 2012). The association between self-efficacy and academic performance has been documented in a wide variety of educational studies (Bandura, 1997). No other study found in the literature searches examined self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-esteem concurrently.

The participants were 512 middle school students and 234 elementary school students, primarily from middle-class backgrounds and drawn from a larger exploration of motivation and learning (see Bong et al., 2012). Self-esteem and self-concept were assessed by relevant items from the Academic Self-Description Questionnaire. Self-efficacy was assessed with items derived from Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Scale combined with items from the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ).

Task value was captured by items covering perceived importance, utility and interest, and test anxiety was captured by items adapted from the MSLQ (Bong et al., 2012). All these instruments are used extensively in educational research in the United States.

The findings affirmed the importance of specificity in the ability of self-beliefs to act as significant predictors of academic performance (Bong et al., 2012). Academic self-concept and self-efficacy were both important predictors of student performance in relation to a specific subject area regardless of the assessment tool used. The only exception was the elementary school students' self-efficacy as assessed with the MSLQ, which fell short of significance. The MSLQ is often used in research with college students and may be less suitable for younger learners.

Global self-esteem was only significant in relation to the middle school students' performance in language arts (Bong et al., 2012). In fact, the researchers noted that while self-esteem was positively associated with achievement indicators for both groups of students, these correlations were substantially weaker than those for the domain-specific constructs and even more tenuous than the correlations for task value and test performance. This pattern highlights the complexity of establishing relationships between self-esteem, as a more encompassing self-belief, and more specific academic indicators (Bong et al., 2012). The predictive power of the self-beliefs was stronger for the middle school students compared to the younger learners (Bong et al., 2012). Early adolescence typically marks a point at which self-beliefs tend to be more sensitive to effects of the school environment (Chung et al., 2014). Bong et al. (2012) noted that their

results for the three self-constructs of self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-esteem were consistent with previous findings from Western studies, but they did not discount the potential presence of culture-specific aspects, which have been disclosed by cross-cultural research.

The one area where there is a consistent link between self-esteem and academic performance is in mathematics, and this connection was supported by the quantitative and qualitative findings for both the American and British youth (Andersen & Cross, 2014; Reed et al., 2015; Verniers & Martinot, 2015). In North America and Europe, mathematics is enshrouded in preconceived beliefs regarding ability and performance, and even high achievers may lack confidence and motivation (Andersen & Cross, 2014; Rattan et al., 2012; Reed et al., 2015; Verniers & Martinot, 2015). The combination of cultural stereotypes about mathematics and intelligence can be especially damaging for girls (Gunderson, Hamdan, Sorhagen, & D'Esterre, 2017).

Mathematics, however, is not the only subject in which cultural stereotypes influence students' attitudes and performance. The prevailing attitude in American society is that boys perform better in mathematics, while girls perform better in language arts. Researchers have found that pressure to adhere to conventional gender roles intensifies in early adolescence, with consequent effects on the respective performances of boys and girls in the two subject areas (Wolters et al., 2013). A consistent theme that reverberates throughout the literature is that teachers need to provide students with feedback that encourages them to develop a sense of their own abilities that will allow

them to feel good about their successes and not be discouraged by challenges (Bandura, 1997; Wolters et al., 2013).

Academic confidence. Stankov (2013) espoused the perspective that confidence might be superior to self-efficacy in predicting academic performance. Sander and Sanders (2003) were motivated to develop a measurement tool distinct from self-efficacy on the rationale that certain differences might exist between self-efficacy and self-confidence in academic endeavors. They surmised that such differences might be especially relevant to higher education where students' autonomy and self-direction are critical to academic success. A preliminary study provided support for this theory and led to the development of the Academic Behavioural Confidence (ABC) scale, which draws heavily on Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory.

Academic confidence was conceptualized as "how students differ in the extent to which they have a 'strong belief, firm trust, or sure expectation' of how they will respond to the demands of studying at university" (Sander & Sanders, 2006, p. 35). Sander and Sanders (2003, 2006) proposed that academic confidence may arise from the same sources as self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological states. Self-efficacy is likely to change substantially over the course of students' college careers (Kitsantas et al., 2008). Similar to self-efficacy, confidence was presumed to change with experience (Sander & Sanders, 2003). Academic confidence was hypothesized as a mediator between the learners' abilities, learning styles, and the opportunities offered by the educational institution.

Rather than predicting academic performance, academic confidence was influenced by academic performance (Sander & Sanders, 2003). Of particular relevance to the situation of high school students, the pattern observed for psychology students (who were assessed at two points) suggested that they found the college learning environment very different from their previous educational setting. As a result, they had to develop a sense of confidence in the novel environment. Kitsantas et al. (2008) believe that self-efficacy may be particularly important during the first college year for this reason.

Martin et al. (2013) approached the question of performance on novel academic (and nonacademic) tasks from the perspective of adaptability. Martin et al. drew on the American Psychological Association definition, which describes *adaptability* as "the capacity to make appropriate responses to changed or changing situations; the ability to modify or adjust one's behavior in meeting different circumstances or different people" (p. 731). According to Martin et al., adaptability has cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements. As part of a longitudinal study, Martin and colleagues devised the Adaptability Scale, which encompasses these three components. A study of adolescents demonstrated that the students who were more adaptable expressed higher aspirations for their futures, were more capable of keeping up with the rapid pace and changing demands of school coursework, were more active in class, derived more pleasure from school, and were less inclined toward self-handicapping behavior and disengagement than nonadaptable students were. Furthermore, adaptability predicted positive academic and

psychosocial outcomes and negatively predicted self-handicapping behavior and disengagement (Martin et al., 2013).

Although not a measure of adaptability like the scale developed by Martin et al. (2013), the ABC scale can be utilized to assess changes in confidence at both global and more specific levels (Nicholson, Putwain, Connors, & Hornby-Atkinson, 2013). This property in particular distinguishes the ABC scales from self-efficacy scales, which are designed to be specific (Bandura, 1997). An advantage of the ABC scale is that it acts as a conceptual bridge between the constructs of self-efficacy and self-esteem/self-concepts, although it is most closely aligned with self-efficacy. A unique feature of the ABC scale is its ability to capture students' expectations for teaching and learning, thus making it a potentially valuable tool for designing an engaging and motivational learning environment (Nicholson et al., 2013).

Bong et al. (2012) noted that there is some confusion about the relative roles of the different types of self-beliefs on students' academic functioning and performance. Stankov (2013) analyzed the relationships of several prominent noncognitive variables to intelligence and academic performance. Self-concept and self-efficacy emerged as good predictors of academic performance in a specific area, which is consistent with how they are conceptualized (Bandura, 1997; Stankov, 2013). In contrast, confidence proved to be domain general (Stankov, 2013). Confidence was related to self-efficacy, self-concept, and openness to experience, and emerged as the best predictor of cognitive performance.

Stankov's (2013) research was driven by the theory that confidence could be a general predictor of academic performance analogous to general intelligence. Stankov et al. (2014) further explored this idea in a study involving 598 Singapore secondary school students who were presented with a survey composed of more than 200 items and covering 15 cognitive and noncognitive factors: confidence in mathematics performance, mathematics self-efficacy, math self-concept, math anxiety, math enjoyment, English self-concept, general academic self-concept, memory self-concept, reasoning self-concept, depression and anxiety, well-being, fate control, toughness, mathematics performance, and ability estimates. Whereas self-esteem is more susceptible to cultural influences (Stankov, 2013), studies examining the more domain-specific self-concepts and self-efficacy in relation to academic performance tend to produce similar results independent of culture (Bandura, 1997; Bong et al., 2012).

Exploratory factor analysis produced three factors: mathematics self-beliefs, nonmathematics self-beliefs, and psychological maladjustment (Stankov et al., 2014). Mathematics self-beliefs encompassed confidence, mathematics self-efficacy, mathematics concept, and mathematics enjoyment, along with math anxiety and English self-concept, which both loaded negatively on this factor. Nonmathematics self-beliefs encompassed English, general academic self-concept, and memory and reasoning self-concepts. Well-being also loaded on this factor, implying that a more positive sense of self is linked with a greater sense of well-being. It is this association that drives much of the research on self-esteem (Stankov, 2013). Not unexpectedly, anxiety and depression

displayed the strongest correlations with psychological maladjustment (Stankov et al., 2014). Smaller loadings were found for toughness, fate control, and math anxiety, with well-being loading negatively.

Confidence proved to be the most powerful noncognitive predictor of test performance (Stankov et al., 2014). As in Stankov's (2013) earlier study, confidence was related to the other self-beliefs. Stankov et al. (2014) emphasized that the superior predictive power of confidence did not negate the impact of self-concept, self-efficacy, and anxiety; in fact, mathematics self-efficacy showed the strongest relationship to mathematics performance. However, confidence, which was strongly correlated with self-efficacy, was the key factor in explaining overall performance, as reflected in a large body of educational research (Bandura, 1997). The overall implication of the research conducted by Stankov et al. (2014) is that confidence plays a complementary role to self-efficacy in explaining academic performance.

One finding reported by Stankov et al. (2014) may have particular implications for American secondary school students. With respect to the relationship between confidence and accuracy, which reflects the degree wo which an individual's confidence judgements are realistic, the Singaporean students had an unusually low bias score or high degree of accuracy compared to American, Australian, and European students (Stankov et al., 2014). Stankov et al. (2014) noted that 15-year old mathematics students in Singapore are often the highest performers on international benchmark studies of math such as the TIMSS and the PISA. It is possible that their realistic appraisal of their

mathematical ability gives the Singaporean students a noncognitive advantage. In contrast, American students are especially prone to exaggerated self-assessments to the detriment of their self-esteem (Andersen & Cross, 2014). Unrealistic expectations may be a reason that even gifted students in mathematics often lack confidence and motivation (Andersen & Cross, 2014). Teachers play a pivotal role in providing students with appropriate feedback that does not promote maladaptive beliefs about learning and performance (Anderman & Patrick, 2012; Jones & Shindler, 2016; Rattan et al., 2012; Wiesman, 2012; Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Achievement goal orientation. According to Wolters et al. (2013), despite the conceptual similarities between achievement goal theory and attribution theory, the empirical research directly connecting the two social cognitive frameworks is limited and outdated. Wolters et al. sought to fill this gap in educational research by investigating direct associations between the achievement goals students employ and their attributions for academic achievement in a study of high school students enrolled in Algebra II. Self-efficacy for mathematics was included among the variables examined. The findings produced what Wolters et al. described as revealing a mixed set of relations between the students' achievement goals and their attributions. After accounting for self-efficacy, prior achievement, and enrollment in honors algebra, achievement goals made no further contribution to variations in the students' inclinations to ascribe success to increased time and effort and ascribe failure to either ability or task difficulty. At the same time, these

three attributions were closely connected with the students' sense of self-efficacy (Wolters et al., 2013).

Students who believed deeply in their capacity for success were strongly inclined to espouse attributions that would sustain those beliefs, such as attributing their success to ability (Wolters et al., 2013). They were equally inclined to reject beliefs that could diminish their confidence, such as attributing failure to ability or task difficulty. These attributions reflect the type of self-serving bias that preserves self-esteem and self-concepts (Enlund, Aunola, Tolvanen, Lerkkanen, & Nurmi, 2017). Notably, students higher in self-confidence tended to reject effort as explanation for their success (Wolters et al., 2013). An additional finding was that the students' perceptions of their personal competence proved superior to prior performance in predicting their attributions, which is consistent with Bandura's (1997) conceptualization of self-efficacy.

Of all the types of achievement goals, performance approach goals displayed the strongest association with attributional styles (Wolters et al., 2013). Specifically, students who sought to display high proficiency to their peers were most likely to endorse self-serving attributions, ascribing success to ability and failure to external causes beyond their control. According to Wolters et al., (2013) this pattern supports the perspective that a performance-approach goal orientation reflects an "ego-involved" type of motivation (p. 314). However, although it may have a self-protective effect, it does not necessarily lead to enhanced effort or engagement.

Albert and Dahling (2016) observed that despite recognition among educators of the importance of fostering students' positive academic self-concepts, the existing research offers minimal insight into individual characteristics that predict strong academic self-concept and performance. Their research focused on internal locus of control and goal orientation as major influences on academic self-concept. In research conducted with 158 undergraduate students, locus of control and learning goal orientation emerged as significant predictors of academic self-concepts (Albert & Dahling, 2016). Moreover, high internal locus of control enhanced the positive association between learning goal orientation and academic self-concept. Academic performance was assessed a year after the study, with findings showing that academic self-concept positively impacted GPA and mediated the association between learning goal orientation and academic performance. As with the first analysis, the relationships were strengthened by the presence of high internal locus of control. Albert and Dahling acknowledged that their predominately female participants at a small select institution were not representative of the full spectrum of learners. Nevertheless, these findings are aligned with the theoretical foundations that inspired Weiner's (1985) interest in attributions and achievement goals.

Implications

The mean percentile-rank score for academic self-confidence on the AEC for the students at the study site are lower than all other indicators, and lower than the national average (school principal, personal communication, October, 2017). The purpose of this

qualitative case study was to explore academic self-confidence in a sample of students at a private high school in New Jersey to help understand why self-confidence scores were low. I expected to provide information on low self-confidence scores among students. From this research, a professional development plan was to be created for teachers. This professional development plan was developed based on what was learned as a result of the qualitative data that was collected. The data drove the development of the professional development plan. This professional development plan is focused to provide teachers strategies they need to increase academic self-confidence in the students. Alternate deliverables driven by study findings include a curriculum plan designed to help enhance students' academic self-confidence and a policy position paper recommending the implementation of policy to develop strategies to enhance students' academic self-confidence.

If the project is successful in creating the change for which it was developed, then it could be used in other settings to create positive changes for students. These changes could potentially impact academics and social-emotional well-being.

Summary

There is a substantial body of educational research, including seminal theories that are still being followed today, which are devoted to illuminating the relationships of students' self-beliefs to academic performance (Bandura, 1997; Bong et al., 2012; Dweck, 2000). Nevertheless, these relationships involve a complex interaction of factors and confusion persists in discerning the precise influences of self-concept, self-efficacy,

and self-esteem (Bong et al., 2012). Self-esteem is the least precise of the three and the most subject to variations in culture. Given its domain specificity, self-efficacy consistently demonstrates the strongest relationship to academic performance (Bong et al., 2012; Sander & Sanders, 2003, 2006; Wolters et al., 2013).

Sander and Sanders (2003, 2006) and Stankov and colleagues (Stankov, 2013; Stankov et al., 2014) theorized that confidence could be a better predictor of academic performance than self-efficacy. Although they had somewhat different theoretical perspectives, Sander and Sanders (2003, 2006) and Stankov et al. (2014) all served strong correlations between confidence and self-efficacy. The overall findings show that academic confidence and self-efficacy may play complimentary roles in influencing academic performance. Other studies have explored the relationships of attributions and goal orientation to academic performance in conjunction with self-efficacy (Albert & Dahling, 2016; Wolters et al., 2013). Despite the various perspectives and specific self-constructs examined, the overarching conclusion is that students' self-beliefs are decisively related to academic performance. Therefore, it is especially important to understand why the students have low academic self-confidence on the AEC exam compared all other social indicators.

Section 1 contains evidence of the local problem, the theoretical framework, and a review of the literature related to academic self-confidence and academic performance. Section 2 will contain a description of the study's methodology, including the research

design and approach, data collection and data analysis procedures, assumptions, limitations, scope, and delimitations. Section 2 will include the results of data analysis.

Section 2: The Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore perceptions of academic self-confidence in a sample of students and teachers at a private high school in New Jersey. The qualitative case study approach was selected to facilitate understanding of how academic self-confidence can be improved in the learning environment. According to Creswell (2013), a qualitative methodology is best suited to studies that require exploratory research methods to be used. Qualitative methods are appropriate when little is known of the concepts of interest (Tracy, 2013), such as in the case of this problem. Qualitative research enables the researcher to develop a thorough understanding of the various reasons, motivations, and viewpoints underlying a subject of study (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative methods were appropriate for this study because of the ability to provide researchers with insight to explore problems, to enhance the development of new ideas for research, and to help researchers to align the study at hand to the research questions (see Creswell, 2013). Finally, qualitative methods facilitate an examination of phenomena in their natural setting through the lens of participants' experiences and meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2013) posited that qualitative methods are the appropriate method for in-depth investigations, as they enhance the ability of researchers to uncover trends in social settings through participants' thought patterns and opinions. This level of detail is vital to developing a comprehensive understanding of academic self-confidence among participating students.

To develop an in-depth understanding of the low academic self-confidence levels exhibited by students at the study, I implemented a case study design to explore the phenomena of interest from multiple angles. Case study is the preferred approach when the researcher intends to study a single bounded case and the researcher has little control over the events (Yin, 2014). Case study research affords researchers flexibility in their approach, specifically because it allows data collection through a variety of means (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). The use of data collection from multiple sources allows for data triangulation, which enhances the rigor of the study (Yin, 2014). This approach facilitated the examination of the phenomenon of interest through student and teacher perception towards self-confidence, their suggested ways of improving academic self-confidence, and the perceived relationship between self-confidence and academic performance. Research was conducted with approval from Walden University Institutional Review Board (approval # 05-18-18-0502189).

Several qualitative designs were considered for this study; however, a case study approach was deemed the best suited for this research. Narrative analyses typically focus on developing chronologically detailed accounts of participants' stories. The primary focus of a narrative analysis is the contribution of stories to impart knowledge and share history (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I was concerned with gathering data from participants to address the connection between academic self-confidence and academic performance. Participants' responses related to questions specifically developed to address this topic were sought, and participants' stories would not have contributed the

depth and breadth of information related directly to the research. Therefore, a narrative analysis was not well suited to this study.

Grounded theory studies typically use inductive processes to generate theory grounded in the data (Moustakas, 1994). Themes emerging from a constant examination of the data eventually contribute to the development of a theory related to the research questions (Moustakas, 1994). Because this study focuses on gaining insight into the perspectives of teachers and students using qualitative methods to explore the influence of academic self-confidence on academic performance, and not on developing a theory, a grounded theory approach is not well suited for this study.

Within ethnographic studies, researchers become immersed in a culture or group as participant and observer focusing on aspects such as relationships, rituals, and language use (Tracy, 2013). This level of immersion is conducted to develop greater cultural understanding (Tracy, 2013). An ethnographic approach is not appropriate because the goal of the study is not to focus on the culture or group, but to focus on the concepts of academic self-confidence and academic performance.

Finally, a phenomenological study primarily centers on accessing participants' lived experiences and perspectives (Tracy, 2013). Phenomenological studies are intended to glean understanding related to the essence of participants' experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This differs from case study research with its focus on the how and why of a phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Because this research was intended to study how

academic self-confidence and academic performance are connected, a phenomenological approach is not suited to this study.

Participants

The location for this study was a private, all-girl high school of approximately 600 students in a state located on the eastern coast of the United States. According to the school's guidance department, all students attend college upon graduation and the majority are accepted to competitive colleges or universities. The school community was predominantly White and middle class.

Sample sizes vary within qualitative research. There is little consensus regarding sample size guidelines and researchers tailor their sample sizes to the purpose of their study (Chung et al., 2014; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Clarke and Braun (2014) suggested a sample size of six to 10 participants for studies bound by a common link between participants. Yin (2014) posited that a sample of at least six participants was necessary for case studies.

In alignment with these recommendations, I recruited 10 participants in each group, 10 sophomore students and 10 of their teachers, for a total sample of 20 participants. Sophomore students and their teachers were selected because of their experience with the AEC assessment. The results from the AEC assessment academic self-confidence scale have been used to illustrate the local problem at the school site.

All sophomore students were invited to participate in the study. Sophomore students comprised approximately 25% of the school population (150 students). I also

recruited teachers who work with sophomore students to participate in the study. I served as an administrator at the school; however, I did not have any supervisory authority over any teachers at the school. In my role as an administrator, I supervised several functions such as technology, maintenance, facilities, and food service. None of these areas included teaching staff; therefore, I had no supervisory authority over any of the teachers at the school. The inclusion of teachers was necessary following the advice of Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, and Ormston (2013), who noted that when studying a problem within learning institutions it is always useful to merge the contributions of students and the members of faculty to increase the credibility of the research.

Through this role, I was familiar with the study setting and I was able to incorporate firsthand knowledge of the population. However, I had no interaction with 10th grade students or teachers because I primarily worked with 12th graders; therefore, the risk of coercion or bias was reduced.

I used purposive sampling for the study. Purposive sampling, a form of convenience sampling, is best suited for the study because it allows for the intentional selection of participants from the school community with experience related to the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2013). Purposive sampling enabled me to select participants from whom I would be able to extract relevant information. Participants from the selected school site included 10th-grade students and teachers of 10th-grade students because of their experience with the AEC assessment. I contacted the

gatekeeper for the school (i.e., the principal) to request permission to contact students and teachers regarding participation in the study.

Access to Participants

The principal for the school community approved use of the school as the study site. The principal is considered the authority and is the initial point of contact for students and teachers. She allowed me to use school e-mail addresses to communicate with teachers and students to recruit them for participation in the study. I recruited teachers via e-mail and students via information session. Following participant recruitment, a researcher-participant working relationship was established before beginning to obtain any further information (see Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012).

Teacher recruitment. An invitation e-mail was sent to teachers of 10th-grade students at the study site explaining the study. The e-mail contained information on the date and time of the focus group as well as details related to the study and their potential participation. Teachers were provided the consent form via e-mail so they could review in advance. Teachers who were interested in participating in the study were required to complete and return the consent form. Some teachers returned the consent form in advance of the focus group via my school mailbox and others brought a signed copy to the focus group.

Student recruitment. An invitation e-mail was sent to parents of 10th-grade students at the study site explaining the study. The e-mail contained information for the student information session that was held to discuss the study and their child's potential

participation in the study. Parents were invited to this information session so that they could learn about the study as well. The information session occurred after school hours, and students staying after school had the opportunity to use regularly scheduled after-school buses.

At the meeting, the students and parents were provided an assent form to sign as well as a consent form for their parents to sign. The students were required to return both forms to the school to participate in the study. Students interested in the study were required to complete and return a consent form, as well. Students and their parents or guardians returned their consent and assent forms to my secretary.

Establishing a Researcher-Participant Relationship

Smith (2015) highlighted that 56% of qualitative studies have been deemed unreliable because evaluation findings indicated that researchers failed to establish a working researcher-participant relationship before engaging participants in the study. To help enhance reliability, I conducted separate introductory meetings with each group of participants to establish rapport and familiarity within the context of the study. During these meetings, I explained the purpose of the study, the role of the participants, the basis of participation, and the role of the research in improving learning and teaching experiences. The meetings occurred outside of instructional time and took place in a room large enough for each group of participants. I explained and provided the consent forms to everyone in attendance. Aside from the informational aspect of the meeting, I used this time to allow participants to connect with me as the researcher and an impartial

part of the study. I encouraged participants to contact me if they had questions or concerns. I also assured participants that this study and the information shared during participation in the study were separate from our interactions as administrator, teachers, and students.

Ethical Considerations

I conducted this study with consideration of the participants by enacting measures to protect the rights and data of participants. I provided an informed consent form to potential participants during the informational meetings. Students and parents were required to complete their respective informed consent and assent forms to make a joint decision that participation in the study was appropriate. Students returned both of the above forms to me prior to participating in the focus group. Teachers reviewed and completed the informed consent form once they decided to participate in the study. The informed consent form described the purpose and process of the study, participants' right to withdraw from the study without negative consequence, participants' right to confidentiality, and how the data will be safeguarded (see Ragin, 2014).

Prior to conducting the focus group, I reminded participants, as noted in the consent forms they signed, that they could withdraw from the study at any time. I provided contact information to participants so they could contact me with any questions relevant to the study. To protect the participants, I assigned a unique numeric identifier to obscure their identity. This was done to provide confidentiality for participants. Participants were informed of the minimal risk to participation related to sharing

confidential information and were assured that their information will remain private. Following data collection and during data analysis, participant data files (i.e., audio recordings and transcripts) were and remain securely stored on my password protected personal computer.

Role of the Researcher

I am an administrator at the research site; however, I did not teach any students nor do I maintain any direct influence over the students or faculty. I was not the direct supervisor of any faculty member that participated or provided anecdotal information in support of this study at any time; however, because of my role as an administrator I did maintain indirect influence over study participants. Because of this indirect influence, I ensured participants that there was no coercion to participate in the study and I would not penalize any individuals who opted not to participate or to leave the study early.

By establishing a rapport and connection with participants, I hoped to reduce any coercion, as noted above. I asked follow-up questions that were related to the research question to validate the initial responses to increase detail in response. To support participant engagement, the focus groups occurred in informal, nonintimidating spaces. Creswell (2013) discussed researcher bias as being a major concern during research; therefore, I was careful to not expect any answer and I attempted to set aside any bias I had so that study participants were unaware of my personal beliefs.

Data Collection

I conducted the focus group using focus-group guides that I developed for students (Appendix C) and teachers (Appendix D). The student focus-group guide contained questions that had been drafted to align with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965). The RSES contains questions that have been adopted to help participants begin to think about the phenomenon of interest and examines their conceptualization of academic self-confidence. According to Thomas, Silverman, and Nelson (2015), focus groups help researchers to acquire information from participants who are more comfortable in group activities. The questions were limited to make the sessions enjoyable and efficient.

The focus groups were conducted outside of school hours in a private, safe, and comfortable environment; specifically, a conference room to promote an environment in which participants felt that they could express their honest opinions in response to the focus-group questions. Participants were afforded the opportunity to engage in a naturally evolving conversation where I asked questions and allowed participants to freely and openly share their thoughts. Participants identified themselves using their unique identifier prior to answering questions. I asked for permission to audio record the focus group from all participants. I transcribed the audio recordings for data analysis. I used an identical focus-group approach for both student and teacher participants.

Focus-group data. Data were collected from teachers using a focus group. The teacher focus-group session provided an open, informal space to discuss teachers'

perceptions of students' academic self-confidence and how teachers believe they can influence students' academic self-confidence. I conducted the teacher focus group using questions I developed. I posed follow up questions during the focus-group sessions to allow participants to clarify their responses. The focus group lasted approximately 1 hour.

I conducted the focus group for teachers using a teacher focus-group guide consisting of questions that I developed (Appendix D). The focus-group questions are aligned with the research questions and have been developed to guide the focus group sessions while allowing for in-depth probing and follow up by the researcher. These questions explored perceptions of self-confidence. The principal validated the teacher focus-group guide by providing feedback on the appropriateness, relevance, and wording of the focus-group questions. The principal was familiar with the target population; therefore, she was able to provide feedback regarding how the questions would be interpreted. Feedback was accepted regarding how questions could be improved, including feedback on the general phrasing of the questions. The principal was not included in the study sample.

Data were collected from students using a focus group. The goal for the focus group was to provide an open, informal space to discuss academic self-confidence. Students responded to researcher-developed focus-group questions, and questions that had been modified from the RSES. I posed follow-up questions during the focus group sessions to allow participants to clarify their responses. During the focus-group session,

participants were allowed to freely express their perceptions related to academic self-confidence. The focus groups lasted approximately one hour. Students who participated in the focus group had the opportunity to utilize regularly scheduled after-school buses.

I conducted the focus group for students using a student focus-group guide (Appendix C) consisting of questions I developed and questions that have been modified from the RSES, which contains 10 items assessing individuals' positive and negative feelings of self on a 4-point Likert scale (Rosenberg, 1965). The RSES is publicly available for use. Items from the RSES have been modified to elicit open-ended, qualitative responses from students related to academic self-confidence. The questions developed explored the students' perception of self-confidence and its correlation with academic performance.

Instrumentation

Validity and reliability had been assessed for the RSES through several studies. Because the scale only consists of one factor, Cronbach's coefficients of reliability for subscales could not be calculated. Chung et al. (2014) calculated a mean reliability coefficient over time of 0.88. Silber and Tippett (1965) and Shorkey and Whiteman (1978) established test-retest at 0.85 and 0.63 for a 2-week and 7-month interval, respectively. Martín-Albo, Núñez, Navarro, and Grijalvo (2007) conducted an assessment of the validity of the RSES on a sample of university students. Confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the scale consisted of one factor (Martín-Albo et al., 2007).

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data using Clarke and Braun's (2014) framework for thematic analysis (TA). Stake (1995) stated that qualitative data analysis may comprise direct interpretation of statements or categorical aggregation to determine a common meaning. In general, Stake stated that qualitative data analysis centers on parsing data into meaning units and putting it back together in a manner that makes meaning of participant data. To understand the case under study, I analyzed the data in context to define meaning units that I aggregated into categories using TA.

Clarke and Braun's (2014) TA approach is composed of six stages: (a) familiarization, (b) generating initial codes, (c) creating initial themes, (d) reviewing themes against data, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) writing the final report. Prior to beginning data analysis, I entered the data into NVivo 11. I stored the focus group transcripts and RSES data in NVivo. Following this step, I engaged with the data by rereading the focus group transcripts. Once I completed this familiarization phase, I began coding of the data. This consists of a line-by-line review of the transcripts to ensure that no significant codes or statements have been missed (Nassaji, 2015). Statements, words, or phrases deemed significant were identified and labeled with a code summarizing the code's content.

I then began the third phase of TA, creation of initial themes. I created themes from the focus group transcripts by considering the codes, examining relationships between codes, and clustering these codes into themes. Once the list of codes was

created, I reviewed the list to ensure no themes could be combined and consolidated. I then reviewed the list of themes against the data to ensure that the list of themes solely reflected participant data. I then finalized the names of the themes and drafted the final report of the results.

Limitations

Despite the choice of qualitative research design being able to allow for examination of issues in depth, the quality of this study might be heavily dependent on the skills of the individual researcher, thus allowing for personal biases to influence credibility. One factor that is a limitation with respect to the data collection was limited time. Some participants needed to leave close to the end of the focus group and could not fully participate. Other participants were more verbal, and I had more data as a result of their comments and not enough from others. It would have been ideal to have had multiple focus groups so that the research questions could have been explored in greater detail. Additionally, the use of focus groups in the research method may have affected the quality of generalizations due to social desirability. This means that the participants may have been more likely to provide the most suitable and socially acceptable answers to the questions to sound informed to the interviewer. Although interviews are most susceptible to bias, bias is not inevitable (Petty et al., 2012).

Data Analysis Results

I conducted one focus group with students and one focus group with teachers using the guides that I developed for students (Appendix C) and teachers (Appendix D).

The student focus-group guide contained questions that were drafted to align with the RSES. The RSES contains questions that were adapted for the current research study to help participants begin to think about the phenomenon of interest and examine their conceptualization of academic self-confidence. I asked a limited number of questions to make the focus-group sessions enjoyable and efficient. Focus-group sessions were held after school hours in a conference room. This was a safe, comfortable, and private environment for the focus group participants. Participants were afforded the opportunity to engage in a naturally evolving conversation where I asked questions and allowed participants to freely and openly share their thoughts.

I used an identical approach in each focus group to gather the data. I began each focus group by reminding the participants that they were participating in a research study I was conducting in fulfillment of the Doctorate in Education requirements at Walden University. I also informed all participants that I wished to audio record the focus-group discussion and requested their approval. All participants consented to the audio recording. At that time, I reminded the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time and that any data I had previously collected from them would be destroyed. No participants withdrew from the study at the time that I made this reminder. A total of 10 teachers and 10 students volunteered to participate in the study; however, two of the students did not show up for the focus group. I assumed that these students withdrew from the study. No data had been collected from these students, so no data were destroyed. Finally, I identified each participant with a unique identifier; a letter. I

asked that if they referred to themselves or others in the room, to use the letter so that their comments and the comment of others remains private and confidential in the audio recording. Following the focus groups, I transcribed the audio recordings for data analysis.

Qualitative Findings

I sought to answer four research questions in this project study:

1. How do students perceive academic self-confidence as an influence on academic performance?
2. How do teachers perceive academic self-confidence as an influence on academic performance?
3. What do students perceive as ways to improve their academic self-confidence?
4. What do teachers perceive as ways to improve students' academic self-confidence?

The results of TA, which I conducted on the transcript of the focus group with students and teachers, yielded a total of five themes. Two of these came from the student focus group and three came from the teacher focus group. The two themes from the student focus group were (a) developing confidence and (b) set for success. The three themes from the teacher focus groups were (c) student academic performance, (d) creating a positive space, and (e) student confidence. Table 1 shows the relationship between the several of the questions and some of the themes that were revealed.

Table 1

Relationship Between Research Questions and Themes From Student Focus Group

Research Question	Theme
1. How do students perceive academic self-confidence as an influence on academic performance?	(A) developing confidence (B) set for success
3. What do students perceive as ways to improve their academic self-confidence?	(A) developing confidence

Themes Derived from Students' Responses

As noted previously, students were de-identified using a letter. Students were identified as *Student A, B, C,* etc. This is reflected in the following student responses.

Student Theme A: Developing confidence. Theme A contained five subthemes: my academic performance, applying myself, interest in subject, people surrounding me, and poor academic performance does not define me. In this theme, students shared their perspectives on their academic self-confidence and those factors that impact this confidence. Factors that impact their self-confidence ranged from external factors such as their peers to internal factors such as how well they apply themselves toward their academic success. This theme partially addressed RQ 1, How do students perceive academic self-confidence as an influence on academic performance? and RQ 3, What do students perceive as ways to improve their academic self-confidence?

My academic performance. Students tied their academic performance to their self-confidence as they spoke during the focus group. For example, some students shared

that performance on an exam led to an increase or decrease in self-confidence. For others, their self-confidence impacted their performance. They described the relationship between performance and self-confidence as bidirectional. As Student C shared,

> I feel like if you do poorly on one test, you kinda get in your mind that maybe this isn't the subject for you, or you go into the next test feeling less confident. So, then it may influence your academic performance and reflect on your grades.

Two students also connected ideas of self-confidence, performance, and self-respect when they spoke during the focus group. Possessing high levels of self-respect was a factor that impacted the relationship between academic performance and self-confidence. Student A described,

> When you have respect for yourself, just like when you have respect for someone else, you accept the fact that everyone makes mistakes. So, say if I don't do well on a test, or just out of school anything that I don't succeed at, . . . you're human, everything doesn't go perfectly.

Similarly, Student D stated,

> If you don't have good self-respect for yourself, whenever you get a bad grade you kinda just keep on bringing yourself down and eventually you kinda lose the motivation to do better because at some point you're gonna reach, you're not gonna feel like you can achieve anything.

Applying myself. Three students described how they improve their academic self-confidence by applying themselves in school. Overcoming obstacles and challenging

themselves were both important for increasing their levels of self-confidence. Student E said, "I'd say I can increase my academic self-confidence by applying myself the most no matter what I'm being thrown into when it comes to my academics and knowing that I am putting my best effort forward no matter what." Student B expressed a similar thought, elaborating on how she has increased her self-confidence during the school year. She said,

> I started out this year not on a good note and now at the end of the year, . . . I've noticed how I've been able to do the work and put in the effort and been able to overcome all the hard obstacles that I have, so I'm really proud of myself and I think that this satisfaction is allowing me to do better.

Student A felt that by purposefully challenging herself, she raised her self-confidence. She said, "Something that helps increase confidence is challenging yourself, so choosing to take the harder classes and then, say, if you get an 85 in the hard class, you still took the harder class." For her, getting a B rather than an A in a hard class was an important measure of success and contributed to feelings of increased self-esteem.

Interest in subject. Two students described the impact that enjoying a class makes on their self-confidence. Student F stated, "I think genuine interest in the class helps you want to study more instead of forcing yourself to study [when you don't want to]." She linked the desire to study more because of class enjoyment to improved confidence and, thus, performance. Student B thought that confidence and interest in the class improved her performance. She shared,

> I also think that my confidence in the class itself, in the subject matter, also affects how I perform on tests. If I'm generally good at a class . . . I will be better prepared and feel better about myself going into a test or a similar . . . situation like that. But if the class is not my favorite then I won't be so sure of myself.

People surrounding me. Four participants discussed in the focus group the important impact of peers, classmates, and teachers on their self-confidence. Peers and classmates had both positive and negative impacts on students' self-confidence. Student A said, "I feel like positive energy is produced by positive people, so I just make sure to surround myself by my friends that encourage me," which helps her maintain a positive attitude. On the other hand, Student A said that she has had friends who are self-confident and "think they're better than me," and she felt that these friends were just using her to make themselves feel better because her grades were not as good as the grades of those friends.

For these students, surrounding themselves with positive people was important for improving and maintaining high levels of self-confidence. "It's important to surround yourself with the right type of people to have a good supporting community," said Student D.

In addition to peers and classmates, teachers played an important role in developing and maintaining students' self-confidence. "Teachers have a huge impact," declared Student A, continuing, "If your teacher is encouraging and tells you oh, you can do it . . . that is a huge confidence booster because it just shows that the work I'm putting

in this thing has paid off." Teachers also impact students' self-confidence by the levels of enthusiasm that they show. If a teacher is enthusiastic about the subject and about teaching, students felt that this helped improve their self-confidence, but if a teacher was burnt out, they felt like this also reflected on them and their self-confidence and desire to do well in a class. Student C described,

> I think that the teachers also impact it by how much, how enthusiastic they are about the subject they're teaching too, because if a teacher's there and she's teaching this subject and she's really just bored or she's just tired and done by the end of the year, I mean, it reflects on us too and it definitely makes us not want to study as hard.

The students in the focus group also described how the ways in which teachers hand back exams and assignments, and how teachers present class averages and high and low scores for exams and assignments, impact their self-confidence and that of their classmates. Student F said:

> I had one teacher who, whenever we have a test she writes down the highest grade, the lowest grade, the median, the average on the board and she said that she does it so that we know it you got a 50 but the highest grade was a 70, then you're not that bad. But the thing is, if you were the one who got the lowest grade it really puts a damper on your self-esteem. So, I think, or even just if a teacher's handing a paper out and their facial expression just exposes your entire average to the whole class,

> that shows that they're disappointed in your and that just makes you feel like you can't do better.

Student D said in response to Student F,

> There's this specific teacher that, whenever they hand back tests or quizzes, just by, everybody can tell by their expression or their voice, how they say your name and hand the paper, it just tells all about your grade and also kind of what they think about you.

In addition to the influence of teachers' actions in the classroom on self-confidence, teachers also played an important role in students' self-confidence by showing students that they believed in students' abilities. As Student B relayed,

> When teachers have positive things to say to you about your performance it is a great booster because if the teacher believes that you can do it and that you are successful and stuff like that, then that makes me personally believe that I can do it.

Student A said,

> I agree with Participant B [because] I have had one teacher who halfway through our first quarter of my class with her, she started praising me for my work and then complimenting me a lot and just her showing how proud she was of my work raised my confidence and that is now one of my best classes, just because I know my work isn't going unnoticed.

Further, Student C agreed with Student A:

> I also think that teachers, especially some of my teachers, they can help by helping me after school or during my free [periods] and if they tell me oh, you understand this topic from what they're getting from working with me, then I feel definitely more confident about everything.

Poor performance does not define me. Five participants were clear during the focus group that their grades and their academic performance did not define them as people. They expressed this in two ways. First, they described how their grades may not accurately reflect their abilities as students. Student D said that "you can get a good grade on a test or quiz, but that doesn't mean you necessarily know how to apply it entirely, you could just memorize a bunch of facts," while Student B said, "you could do poorly in a class, but also work very hard and your performance could also not reflect about how hard you're working or the effort that you're putting in." Student D also said, "I would say that how much effort I put into actually studying or trying to pay attention in the class because some aren't as good test takers as they are as kind of understanding while in the classroom." Student A contributed that "what you learned and what you're taking out of the lesson, I feel like that's more important."

Second, students knew that a bad grade did not define them. "I feel if I do poorly on a test and my classmates find out about it then I feel bad about myself, even if it's not . . . it's just a test, it doesn't define me," said Student F. Other students shared this sentiment. Student A said, "I don't get that upset about it when I get awful grades or just

not great grades and so I feel there's so many other things that matter to me more than how I'm doing in school." Student D said of her generally high levels of self-confidence,

> I've gotten bad grades on tests and quizzes, but I don't really think that affects my self-worth in general because I'm already pretty confident with myself and a grade is just a letter or a number and it won't change my life.

Student E contributed that she has a teacher this year who has reminded students that they are more than their grades. She said, "I had a teacher who stopped the class to give us a pep talk about how our grades don't define us and how we are more than just what our output is academically." Moreover, she thinks that teachers should impress this upon their students more frequently, saying,

> I feel students should be told that their grades and their academic performance output doesn't define who they are as a person because people have so many other qualities and I feel like students aren't reminded about that enough because [there is] so much stress and pressure put on school and college.

Student Theme B: Set for academic success. All participants shared statements leading to the creation of this theme, which partially addressed RQ 1, How do students perceive academic self-confidence as an influence on academic performance? Students talked about the factors that they believe impact their academic performance and success, and about their academic abilities more generally. Three subthemes emerged within this theme: measured by how well I do, motivation to perform well, and factors that impact my academic performance.

Measured by how well I do. Three students shared their definitions of academic success, and they felt that this was measured by the class performance. As Student F stated, "I think academic performance is how you do in school, but relative to yourself. So if you've always done really poorly in a subject, but you get an 80 or a 75 then it's still good for you."

Students A and D also thought that academic performance was simply their grade. Student D said, "Academic performance is measured by your grades in the class," and Student A said, "When I think of my academic performance, I don't think of what I learned, I think of how I did." She continued, "I think it's just your grade. You're graded how you technically did and how many you scored right on the test or how well you answered the essay question."

Motivation to perform well. Despite that students believed that academic performance was measured by their grades, and that recognition that their performance did not define them, they noted myriad factors that motivated them to perform well. Student A was motivated by the knowledge that hard work pays off. Doing well on an assignment after performing poorly, by her own standards, gave her the motivation to continue working hard. She said,

> This year in history I would get 90s, which isn't that great I don't think, for myself, at least in history. But then toward the end of the year I started getting much higher grades and I think the second I got one 95, from then I just kept going and I think it was my mindset.

Student A was also motivated by an overall positive environment and sense of community at the school. She said that when she is in a motivating environment she feels motivated to do well, but if she is surrounded by people who are less willing to work hard, she notices that she loses her motivation. Further, she described,

> In the past 2 or 3 weeks with the senior videos and everything like that, I've just really liked school a lot more 'cause I've been realizing how great of a school our school is. And so I'm more motivated to try harder and to study because I realized how lucky I am to be going to this school. And then, because of that, my grades have been higher and then my, just, outlook on school in general.

Students D and E shared an interesting factor that motivated them to perform well, which was when their teachers underestimated them. "I don't like being underestimated by teachers," Student D said. She elaborated,

> I've had a teacher in the past who was, I don't, kind of, immature and stopped an entire class just to bring attention to me 'cause I was resting my head on my hand and the rest of the year he kind of thought of me as lazy and not good at that subject and so in turn, I think, I mean, I know I might react differently than other people, out of spite I did well in that class and I got a good score on the test.

Student E felt similarly motivated by spite when teachers have told her that she is not performing well academically. She said,

> I had one teacher tell me why didn't I do as well as the other 23 students in this class on a test. So out of spite, I performed really well on the following test

> because I don't like being underestimated and compared to others because not everyone is the same, so we shouldn't all be treated the same.

Factors that impact my academic performance. Students discussed several factors that they believed played an important role in their academic performance and success. Many of them connected their academic performance to their levels of self-confidence. Student F described the complicated relationship that she experiences between her self-confidence and academic performance. While she recognized that there should be a correlation between confidence and performance, she did not always feel like this was the case. Student F said,

> I like to think that the more confident I am the better I'll do, but I don't think that's actually the case because I think I tend to do better on tests where I'm not confident at all 'cause it's like the crippling fear pushing you to do better in a way.

Student A perceived a positive relationship between her levels of self-confidence and her academic performance. She stated,

> Sometimes I'll just be having a really good week and I'll feel confident in myself and just how all those tests that I took that week and how much I learned from what I studied, it's usually higher than other weeks [when] I'm not feeling as confident.

Student A provided an example of this, sharing:

> This year, especially toward the second half of it, I've been much more proud of my grades and how I've been doing and because, just, I started off the second

> semester doing better than I'd ever done in the year and a half I've been in high school.

Student C shared how she improved her academic anxiety to improve her performance and self-confidence. She described feeling overwhelmed each time she sat for an exam and could not shake the feeling that her anxiety would "impact my grade." She said, "And then when I finally realized I need to study this, I need to ask more questions," she saw that her grade improved, and she felt more confident in her academic ability.

Students E and B recognized the important role that their teachers play in their academic performance. Student E described her experience with the teacher of a difficult class, and said that based on this, she felt that teachers of the more challenging classes should provide more encouragement. She relayed,

> I still went into this class with a really positive attitude, thinking we're gonna be fine, it's all right, we're gonna be fine. So, we get to the class and then the teacher was not as encouraging as you think a teacher would be in a difficult course. So, I started to feel sort of negative about the class and then continuously through the year it seemed, just the teacher became less and less encouraging. So, that really affected me in the class because I ended up not doing too well in the class because it feels like the teacher is just putting pressure on us to do well in this class, and not really giving any encouraging words of the fact that we can do well in the class, and talking about our ability to do well in the class.

Student B also felt that teachers of challenging classes should provide more encouragement and support. She described her experience with the teacher of a subject she found personally challenging, stating that her teacher's encouragement made a profound impact on her performance. Student B said, "If the teacher is generally a nice person, and if they're encouraging and stuff like that, then I find myself getting better grades even if it's a class I don't like." She continued, "And I think that the reverse is true, that if you have a bad teacher or you don't like the students in your class, then you won't perform as well in that class."

Themes Developed From Teachers' Responses

Teacher Theme C: Student academic performance. Teacher Theme C contained three subthemes: students demonstrate academic performance, natural ebb and flow in students' performance, and students think academic performance defines them. Teacher Theme C partially addressed RQ 4, What do teachers perceive as ways to improve students' academic self-confidence? as Table 2 shows. Teachers described the ways in which students demonstrate their academic performance, and those factors that they believed impact students' performance. They also discussed their beliefs about students' ability to separate their academic performance from their identity, which was in sharp contrast to what students described about themselves.

Table 2

Relationship Between Research Questions and Themes From Teacher Focus Group

Research Question	Theme
2. How do teachers perceive academic self-confidence as an influence on academic performance?	(E) student confidence
4. What do teachers perceive as ways to improve students' academic self-confidence?	(C) student academic performance (D) creating a positive space (E) student confidence

Students demonstrate academic performance. Teachers held varying opinions about how students demonstrate their academic performance in the classroom. While Teacher H said that students show their academic performance "orally, not under the pressure of a test." Teacher H also said that students "can do it during a test." Teacher C provided a different opinion, stating that academic performance "is a summation of everything they do over the long haul." Teacher C continued, "It really does have to be over time because you can't take a snapshot of one week and then assume that that's really how they are going to perform consistently." Teacher G agreed with Teacher C, stating, "It's more so a measure of growth over time as opposed to just from one test to the next. Because they may have a period within that long period of time that they kind of fluctuate."

Natural ebb and flow in students' performance. Teachers also observed a variety of factors that they believe contributed to increases or decreases in their students' academic performance. Overall, Teacher G felt that ebbs and flows in academic

performance were perfectly normal and stated that "it's a little unrealistic to think that [student performance] would only go in one particular direction." Teacher G continued, "I would be almost, no concerned, but I would be surprised to find it just moving straight up or straight down." Teacher J agreed with Teacher G on this point. Teacher J said, "I think occasionally you get someone who's fairly consistent. I don't think that's the norm as much as that's kind of the exception to the rule. But I think because there's so many environmental [factors that impact student performance]."

Teacher B felt that if a student has problems with her academic performance, catching this early is helpful. Teacher B shared,

> I've had a couple students who have been on a steady increase since the beginning of Quarter 3 because they kind of found a pattern, a studying pattern, that worked for them, and made them much more confident and helped for the rest of the year.

Student think academic performance defines them. Four teachers described their concern that their students showed difficulty separating their academic performance from their identity, despite that the findings from the student focus group indicated otherwise. As Teacher D put it,

> I think that students can self-identify with their performance sometimes. They see themselves as, "I'm not good at this subject. I'm a good science person. I'm a bad English person." And they self-identify themselves with their performance and then that sort of plays into either how they participate in class, or how they

study for an exam, or what they feel what their capability is before they even truly attempt it.

Teacher E saw the same thing in students and thought that students do not "perform to the best of their ability because it's all sort of, I don't think they're learned yet how to compartmentalize different parts of themselves." Further, Teacher E explained that students "haven't learned yet how to say I'm a good individual, good person" in a way that separates them from their grades or academic ability.

Teacher B noticed that this inability for students to separate grade from self occurs in course-placement levels. Teacher B said that students in college placement (CP) and high honors classes seem to identify themselves with those classes. Teacher B stated:

> I've had kids be in a CP course and they're like, "I'm going to get the grade. This is the year that I'm going to move up." And they will, because they want that and they push themselves and they think they're better than what they're labeled as and they push forward to show you that. And then I think that you also have some [students] that, sometimes, they're like, "Well, I was labeled as a CP student. I'm not expected to get 90s and so I'm cool with my 70 average. I'm passing and that's all that's really expected of me so I'm okay with that." So, I think it kind of . . . I think it depends on the student, I guess, and what their motivation is. That if they think they're more worthy, or sometimes, it makes them feel less worthy.

Teacher G agreed with Teacher B and raised an important point:

> Well, what are we really telling them at the end of the day if they're still in the same level that they started freshman year? I think we strive so much to tell them to try to grow and to give them that feedback, but sometimes it's okay to be in CP from freshman to senior year. There's nothing wrong with that, but everybody, myself included, because I'm an alum of the school, everybody thinks there's a problem with that.

Teacher Theme D: Creating a positive space. Teachers also shared the ways in which they have observed students creating positive learning environments for themselves. Teacher F has noticed that students "sometimes encourage each other," and this participant found that heartening. Teacher G provided an example of this during the focus group. Teacher G shared,

> This year I had a very specific example. It was my first year having a homeroom and they came up with a motto for every quarter. And it was just so cute, and they wrote it on the board and we kept it up all quarter, and every quarter I would bug them to make the new one and they stuck with it throughout the entire year. They made one for every single quarter. [They used] inspirational phrases like, "strive," you know how they say, surviving not thriving as, like, a joke. So, they said, "striving to thrive," instead of surviving, not thriving. So, they kind of took something that was . . . sometime that was really, classic Debbie Downer statement and they turned it around and made it positive and it was really cute.

Teacher D shared a similar experience in which her students worked together to create a sense of camaraderie amongst themselves. Teacher D reported,

> I guess the majority of these girls were all in this one class that had a test coming up. And I guess what they've been doing in class is one of the girls kind of makes up, like, a, I don't know, like a story time kind of activity and she got up in the front of the room and she started telling the story . . . She started telling the story and she was so energetic about it and [the other students] were chiming in and I thought to myself, like, "I would feel so good if I was that student who was standing up in front of the room giving the story." If I were one of the other girls who was getting that beneficial explanation from a peer and if I felt confident enough to just say, "Yeah, I know that part," or, "Wait, wait, stop, start over, I don't understand, tell it again."

Teacher J felt that as students cultivate friendships with one another, they also create positive spaces for learning. Teacher J described this in terms of its impact on students' academic performance:

> Certainly, in freshman year, when they come. Many of them don't know anyone. They know just a few, but by the time they get to the first holiday, usually it's the Thanksgiving weekend, they come back in and I see it with the sophomores as well, and they're so excited to see one another. You would think they had been gone for the summer or something. They're hugging each other and they're

> saying, "Oh my gosh! It's so good to see you!" But then, as they get to be more enthusiastic, and by sophomore year, they start to develop more friendships.

While the teachers described students creating such positive learning environments, they also believed that part of their responsibility was to create these spaces for students as well. Teacher C, for example, felt that students "thrive on positive reinforcement" and that providing this, especially for exams and other stressful assignments, was important. Teacher C said,

> You can really shift [students'] energy even in the class. It's like, if they come back and they're like, "I'm really stressed. I didn't do well on a test," you can actually help harness their energy. It's like, "Look, well you had an off day. But that's not how you usually perform." And that refocuses [the student] . . . So there is, I can understand their day is affected, but you can also manage it a little bit. You can harness how they're feeling and then say, "Okay, well, everybody has an off day. I have off days, too. But that's not the norm." And then you build them back up and then you can really see the shift in them visibly.

Teacher Theme E: Student confidence. Three subthemes emerged in Theme E: displays of self-confidence, barriers to building confidence, and strategies for building confidence. This theme and its associated subthemes partially addressed RQ 2, How do teachers perceive academic self-confidence as an influence on academic performance? and RQ 4, What do teachers perceive as ways to improve students' academic self-confidence? Teachers spoke about the ways they know that students are self-confident

based on their classroom behavior. They also discussed those barriers that teachers and students must overcome to build students' self-confidence. Finally, they shared their strategies for building self confidence in their students.

Displays of self-confidence. Four teachers shared that they know if a student is self-confident based on physical displays in the classroom. Teacher F knows a student is confident in herself if she raises her hand and answers questions frequently. Teacher H looks for head nodding during class discussions to indicate students' self-confidence. Teacher B indicated that students will sometimes come in for an exam and tell this participant that they are prepared and ready for the exam, and this participant believes that this is a display of the student's self-confidence.

On the other hand, Teacher G shared a different perspective insomuch as that this participant has observed students with high levels of self-confidence who do not necessarily show physical displays of this confidence in the classroom. In this case, this participant described a student who displays academic confidence but appears to lack in social confidence. Teacher G stated:

> You don't necessarily have to raise your hand and answer a question all the time to show that interest and engagement and confidence in the classroom. However, I think that [my student] lacks that little bit of confidence that would prompt her to raise her hand when she clearly knows the answer to something. So, she might be a confident student, but there's still a little bit of room for growth, I think, because something is holding her back from . . . she knows the answer, I know

> she knows the answer, but she's still not finding that little edge in her to raise her hand and say it out loud.

Teachers also discussed their students' nonphysical demonstrations of academic self-confidence. Teachers G and E see students display this confidence by their ability to make learning connections throughout the course material. Teacher G said that "academic self-confidence has a lot to do with one's ability to make connections from classroom, to home, to homework assignment . . . then back to the classroom." They continued, "I notice when a student is not confident, I think that they don't know, for example, how to study for that test." Teacher E sees self-confidence displayed through connections made in students' writing. Teacher E said,

> You can see that in their writing, or their answers on their tests, where they're making connections between history, between historical periods, or in literature between different works that you read. To me, when I say, "Oh wow, she's confident," I think to myself, "Wow, we didn't even talk about that in class necessarily, but she made that connection. She brought it in. And she's not afraid of maybe being off base a little bit or making a new connection."

Taking initiative and taking risks were other ways that teachers noticed students displayed self-confidence, similar to what Teacher E described. Teacher I said that students are "willing to try something before they ask every question that could possibly be asked," and Teacher J said, "[Students] often will go and find information beyond what we've done in the classroom to further share their interest and their excitement

about what the topic actually is." This student initiative shows teachers that they are self-confident in their abilities. Teacher C has noticed that confident students "want to answer questions." Further, "They're not reluctant to make a mistake," said Teacher C, continuing, "If they do make a mistake, they're open to criticisms." Teacher A shared a way to address students who are afraid of participating in class due to lack of self-confidence. Teacher A said:

> I notice that they're worried about the wrong answers. And I had a couple of students that are like, "I don't want to participate because I think I'm wrong." And I said, "What's going to happen to you if you're wrong?" Like, honestly, if that's the wrong answer, it's the wrong answer. But, you're not the only one that's thinking that maybe the wrong or right answer so let's go through it as to why that may be right or may be wrong.

Barriers to building confidence. The teachers in the focus group observed barriers that both teachers and students face when trying to build students' self-confidence. One such barrier is that students appear uncomfortable approaching their teachers for help when they need it. Teacher I indicated that some students "will never [come to me for help]," and said that teachers should not "run after them." Instead, Teacher I has found it helpful to approach the student once and let them know that they're on the same side, and then that student may not need any further assistance. Participant A also noted the importance of not calling attention to a student who might need help. Participant A shared, "They're kids. They are looking to you as somebody

that's in charge of the class; but yet, they don't want to be called out because they don't want their peers to know that they might need this help."

Teachers also explained the impact that they believe social and academic pressure has on students' self-confidence. Teacher B shared,

> I feel like one thing we didn't really talk about here, but I feel like it's talked about in our school in general all the time, is just the aura of stress and the pressure that the kids have in this school, and I find that they're just always comparing themselves with others. Like, a kid could have a 98 average but the girl next to her has a 99 so she just gets dropped down a peg because they are all competing with each other.

Teacher J shared,

> While we're trying to instill this confidence, we're fighting competition. And the competition is coming. I mean the girls are competing amongst themselves for the 98 to the 99, and what the best grade is, and they do share it, they don't keep it to themselves. They're their own worst enemy.

Teacher J felt that this was a societal issue for the students as well, and that for teachers "it's like a losing battle." Teacher J continued,

> It's colleges telling them what has to be the perfect essay. And so then if the essay is not the perfect essay, they're not going to even be considered for anything and then they feel like they're settling for something because they all think they have to go to a specific school. Sometimes it's because it's a legacy thing from their

> family, or whatever it is. But I think that it's societal. It's expectations from just everyone, and then that puts it on them, and they are kids that are carrying such a huge burden, and they have all these people hovering over them in their families, and they don't give them any space.

Strategies for building confidence. Teachers discussed two ways that they help build students' self-confidence. These included building relationships with the students and providing students with the tools they need to succeed. Teacher J pointed out that "not everybody learns the same way, and not everyone responds the same way," and so acknowledging this for each student was important for building their self-confidence. Teacher B teaches a difficult subject in which many students are challenged. One of Teacher B's students was having greater difficult than others at test time, and so Teacher B began setting up extra practice time with this student. This personalized approach helped and Teacher B said, "[My student] has been on an upward trend since the beginning of the third quarter, which has been phenomenal."

One-on-one time also helps teachers show students that they are human and approachable as well. Teacher H said that showing students that teachers are humans helps students see them as "not a robot in front of the room." Teacher E accomplishes this by acknowledging mistakes. Teacher E said, "I am wrong sometimes. I have a typo on a test. You kind of show, I think yourself, that you are the model of things." When students see this, they begin to ask questions or ask for assistance when they need help, because they realize that teachers are people, too.

Teacher C likes to employ the build-break-build model to build students' confidence. Teacher C elaborated:

> Whenever you're creating your curriculum, trying not to establish a glass ceiling. Make the goals achievable, but challenging and giving them an opportunity to repair their work and reestablish those connections say, like the build-break-build model. "These are the things you did very well. These are the things that you really could improve on." And then tell them . . . always finish on a positive to continue their confidence.

Teacher B also provides students with tools for success. Teacher B shows students how to make flash cards to study. "So I'm drilling that in the beginning of the year," Teacher B said of teaching study skills to students. "Our job is to kind of build that gap and give them the strategies and the content [to succeed]," said Teacher B.

Evidence of Quality

To ensure accuracy of the data, I used data source triangulation through the focus groups. Focus groups allow for robust discussions between participants wherein participants can hear and respond to other participants, thereby generating ideas that may not arise from individual interviews (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). In turn, focus groups provide data-source triangulation because participants share multiple experiences and perspectives, and through this process, data trustworthiness is enhanced (Carter et al., 2014).

Summary

In this section, I presented the qualitative research findings from this project study. Students described the ways that they build confidence in their academic performance and success. Academic performance and self-confidence appear to influence one another, in that how well a student performs impacts her self-confidence, but also in that her confidence in her ability impacts her performance. This self-confidence can be enhanced or diminished based on the people who she surrounds herself with. Furthermore, interest in the academic subject can also impact self-confidence. However, clear from the focus group was the fact that the students knew that their grades were not their entire identity; they knew that they were more than their academic successes or failures. The students used a variety of measures to improve their academic performance, from studying harder to surrounding themselves with friends who had a positive outlook on school.

The teachers described the ways that their students showed academic performance in the classroom, ranging from physical cues to demonstrated ability to make connections in the learning material. Importantly, the teachers in the focus group believed that students did not have the ability to discern their grade, or academic performance, from their identity. The teachers saw their role in building students' self-confidence as important. They described building students' self-confidence by spending one-on-one time with students and showing students that they are human. They tried to create a positive learning environment for their students, while also describing the ways in which

they saw students doing this for themselves around the school. In the next section, I will describe the project outcome based on the findings of this research.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Through this study I explored academic self-confidence in high school students. As a result, professional development was selected as the project deliverable since it appears that changes in communication and teaching, as well as a better understanding of teacher and student perceptions, can lead to increased academic self-confidence (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013). The data provided feedback and perspective from both students and teachers that was used to develop a professional development program. In this section, I discuss a professional development program that is focused on teachers' interactions, strategies, and approach with students on a daily basis. The professional development training plan (Appendix A) includes purpose, goals, and learning outcomes for the audience, who are teachers. The plan includes a 3-day hour-by-hour detailed plan related to all aspects of the training so that it can be replicated in another setting.

Description and Goals

A professional development plan has been developed that is designed to be conducted any time during the school year. It would be beneficial to teachers and students to participate in this program at the beginning of the school year and for the same professional development program to be repeated multiple times. This will allow the teachers to master methods that were presented and then return to absorb other strategies.

The professional development has been designed to be a group program that is presented to all teachers. Small group discussions are built into the program, so this can be easily facilitated in this setting. The goal of the small group sessions, and the overall professional development, is to allow for teachers to develop strategies to improve academic self-confidence. There is time built in for reflection, questions, and further discussion.

Rationale

The problem that this project addresses, as discussed in Section 1, is that there was a gap between the academic self-confidence indicator on the AEC exam for students at a private high school in New Jersey and the national average. The data from the ACT showed that the gap has existed over numerous years. Further research was needed at the study site to determine possible reasons why this gap existed and to explore perceptions of academic self-confidence in a sample of students and teachers to help make a positive change. This project provides opportunities for teachers to understand a student perspective. The student focus group data was the source of the student perspective. Teachers will have the opportunity to learn what students feel increases or decreases their academic self-confidence.

Review of the Literature

I conducted a comprehensive search of Walden University's library to locate literature relevant to professional development using Walden University's online library portal. Databases I searched and search tools I used included Academic Search

Complete, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOHost, ProQuest, ERIC, Google Scholar, Lexis/Nexis, and SAGE. The following keywords, and combinations of these keywords, were used to conduct the search: *academic self-confidence*, *case study*, *education*, *professional development*, *qualitative case study*, and *self-confidence*. Articles used for this literature review were mostly peer-reviewed and published within the past 5 years.

In education, teacher professional development remains a crucial component for high quality teaching and can lead to improved student outcomes (Margolis, Durbin, & Doring, 2017). Other research showed that continued professional development is directly linked to numerous improvements in learning community settings (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2016). For example, teachers who are actively involved in research related to their classroom affairs are thought to use approaches aimed at improving their performance and understanding of practice (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2016). While looking at education, and specifically at high school teachers, high school students, and the measure of self-confidence, professional development plans entail the required skills, goals, objectives, and competency development that a teacher needs to accomplish to effectively support the continuous improvement and career development (Perry & Boylan, 2018). According to Zwart, Korthagen, and Attema-Noordewier (2015), professional development plans are created by the professionals working closely with stakeholders to identify the necessary resources and skills required to support the teacher's career goals and the educational system's needs. With this foundational understanding, I explored how to construct professional development and write

professional development plans. While doing this, I connected the findings to professional development, high school teachers, high school students, and how to effectively measure self-confidence.

How to Construct Professional Development

According to Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2016), professional development involves changes both in professional practices and in practitioners' thinking. Practitioners' thinking involves considering the *why* and the *how* of engaging in specific practices. As highlighted by Vanassche and Kelchtermans, professional development should help teachers refine and increase the effectiveness of education strategies and practices. Additionally, it allows teachers to focus on grounded and validated knowledge-bases of teacher and educators' professional situations and responsibilities (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2016). When constructing professional development, educational leaders should not only focus on instrumental knowledge but also consider the normal assumptions related to teacher education. The core reason for this consideration is based on the fact that the normative assumptions are all enacted in practice (Adams, 2014, p. 124).

Additionally, while constructing professional development, it is important to perceive it as a contextualized process of sense making (Deneroff, 2016). This is because of "the particularities of professional working contexts, including structural and cultural characteristics, are reflections that impact the process of professional development" (Deneroff, 2016, p. 218). Therefore, during professional development construction,

structural characteristics represent conditions that relate to student populations, administrative procedures, stable allocation of funding, and formal positions within the process (Eliahoo, 2017). On the other hand, cultural working conditions relate to the collectively shared normative ideas about what comprises good teacher education within teacher training, organizational culture, and the collegial relationships within work environments (Eliahoo, 2017). Professional development is constructed from meaningful interactions between teachers as educators and their professional working contexts (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2016).

Similarly, along with traditional forms of professional development training provided on site, educators have individual opportunities to improve their skills by participating in online communities, remote online courses, and teacher associations (Sobkin & Adamchuk, 2015). As a result, there is an immediate need to explore the key features of professional development to understand the core components that must be included during the construction process.

Principal Features of Professional Development

According to Merchie, Tuytens, Geert, and Vanderlinde (2018), key features of professional development can be divided into two core categories: core features and structural features. These features must be considered while constructing professional development. Core features represent the substance of the professional development initiatives, while structural features are the activities or the design (Merchie et al., 2018). Core features include content focus, pedagogical knowledge, coherent and evidence-

based strategies, and ownership. Teachers must focus on student learning and accurately be informed by evidence of student learning (Desimone & Pak, 2016). Therefore, in the context of high school teachers, focus must be on how to keep teachers apprised of the content they need to effectively meet the educational needs of high school students (Dwyer, 2018).

The pedagogical element focuses on enhancing knowledge and skills to teach content in specific areas. It implies that teachers must consider the student's prior knowledge before imparting a new form of knowledge. For example, when dealing with high school students, the teacher must first understand what the student had learned in previous classes before sharing new knowledge (Freeman et al., 2018).

According to Lesseig (2016), experiences within the professional development initiative must be aligned with the teacher's current reforms, standards, goals, and should be informed by theories and meaningful in-depth research. Learning is a continuous process, and therefore teachers must conduct research to ensure that the information they share with their students is accurate and updated (Liu & Zhang, 2014**).**

It is also important that teachers feel some ownership of their pedagogy in regard to professional development. According to Shaha (2016), it is critical to respond to teachers' identified preferences, interests, and needs during the professional development construction. This is because professional development initiatives are more effective and meaningful to teachers if they are given the opportunity to exercise the ownership of the professional development initiative, its processes, and contents (Shaha, 2016).

Structural features of professional development include duration, collaborative and collective participation, active learning, site or school-based training, and trainer quality. The duration refers to the length and timing of professional development. Professional development initiatives must be created in a manner that they are intensive and extensive, as well as hyper focused on reaching the learning outcomes (Baker, Chaseling, William, & Shipway, 2018). For example, while focusing on high school students, it is recommended teachers create plans that encourage follow-ups throughout the term. In totality, the duration of professional development should consist of 20 hours of contact time between the teacher educator and the student population.

According to Callaghan, Long, van Es, Reich, and Rutherford (2017), effective construction of professional development should be based on collaboration between internal and external stakeholders, peers, and colleagues. For example, teachers can observe one another's practices and approaches and offer feedback. This helps in understanding the areas that require change or improvement in teaching and in professional development.

Professional development is a two-way process that requires inquiry and feedback. Cordingley et al. (2015) highlighted that professional development should be inquiry based and must feature a continuous interplay of practice and reflection on professional and associated academic knowledge. Additionally, decreased resistance to professionalization is experienced by teachers when they are involved in the construction

process as co-creators as opposed to merely being recipients of knowledge (Cordingley et al., 2015).

A study by Desimone and Pak (2016) showed that incorporation of the school-based environment and requirements of professional development strongly impacted the positive implementation of the same. Additionally, professional-development trainers act as facilitators who guide teachers as they engage in the construction of new practices and knowledge (Kennedy, 2016). Therefore, in the construction of professional development, the trainers' knowledge and skills that include the provision of qualitative feedback and supporting self-regulation are vital (Kennedy, 2016). For example, trainers may provide teachers with an understanding of how to boost the confidence and the comprehension of information by their students (Kennedy, 2016). More importantly, trainer feedback in professional development is valuable as it helps teachers in addressing concerns related to their learning characteristics and practices (Kennedy, 2016).

Therefore, construction of professional development should be a collaborative process that aims to feature both structural and cultural aspects of the teaching environment (Ma, Xin, & Du, 2018). More importantly, teachers must have facilitators who provide support during the construction process (Ma et al., 2018). Facilitators provide constructive feedback, knowledge, and skills critical in powering the success of the professional development (Ma et al., 2018). Also, Ma et al. (2018) pointed out that adoption of peer coaching and personalized learning approaches can improve teachers learning, skill design, participation, and in-practice teaching abilities. Having understood

how professional development is constructed, it is now important to review the process and procedures of writing professional development plans.

Writing Professional Development Plans

Policymakers and researchers in the education sector emphasize that teacher professional development need to be assessed, audited, and evaluated (King, 2014). With much focus on teachers' professional development in modern education systems, it is important to understand the process of writing professional development plans (King, 2014). The core aim is to meet the requirements set forth by the goals in the evaluation method that calls for collaborative engagement of teachers, departments, policymakers, and teachers in conducting focused and systematic evaluations of teacher-educator professional development (King, 2014). The following are the steps of writing a professional development plan.

Step 1: Writing a professional development plan. The first step in writing a professional plan would be to request a self-assessment from professional colleagues. Professional development plans are based on theories of how teachers and students learn (Kennedy, 2016). King (2014) argued that during the process of writing professional development plans, a teacher should involve colleagues to complete an explicit self-assessment of their values, personality, interests, and skills. Additionally, the skills, goals, and interests showcase the impact that the professional development plan will have on the education system (Golombek & Johnson, 2017).

Step 2: Development of assessment on individual skills level. The second step in writing a professional plan involves developing ways to assess individual skills. According to Cordingley et al. (2015), numerous issues are considered by practitioners and policymakers when it comes to shaping an approach towards evidence-informed professional development. Some of these issues include the skills and knowledge harbored by teachers and facilitators. The skills may be external or internal to the learning environment as long as they impact the professional development plan write up. More specifically, the skills may include technical skills, social skills, aptitudes, and attitudes. On the other hand, the social skills are related to how the individual teachers work and associate themselves with colleagues (Cordingley et al., 2015). Moreover, aptitude includes the special abilities: the natural talents for learning or doing that have a direct impact on the professional development plan. Finally, the attitude aspect checks the teacher's point of view, mindset, outlook, feeling, and way of thinking (Callaghan et al., 2017).

Step 3: Assessment of the department's and the education system's needs. When writing a professional plan, it is also important to assess the department's and the education system's needs. Baker et al. (2018) argued that professional development should stem not only from department needs but from teacher needs as well. For professional development to be successfully created, teachers' needs and interests must be considered to address the department objectives in improving students' outcomes (Baker et al., 2018). This implies that teachers' career paths must be actively aligned

with the departmental workforce needs (Baker et al., 2018). That is, individual goals, team goals, the board of education goals, and departmental goals must be reflected (Baker et al., 2018). Therefore, by understanding the goals and requirements of each group, then, it becomes simple for a teacher or a professional to prepare for the creation and write up of a professional development plan.

Step 4: Exploration of development opportunities with colleagues. According to Song (2016), The National Center for Educational Statistics and the U.S. Bureau projected that by 2030, the number of nonnative English speakers enrolling in U.S schools would be over 40%. In recent years, the projections have been confirmed as so many nonnatives are enrolling as English language learners (ELLs). As the population of nonnative speakers continues increasing for ELLs, Song (2016) argued that among the variant influences that are motivating teachers to promote ELLs' academic growth is content. Therefore, while writing up a professional development plan, it is good to explore and consider all professional development opportunities available in the region. Additionally, the professional development plan must apply to students of different backgrounds and be dynamic for a changing student body.

Professional development academies are dedicated to providing professional development training and empowerment, and resources, to teachers as a way of supporting their professional development plans. For examples, teachers may be exposed to training programs that are tailored to curriculum design, hence improving their capabilities and skills in finding available opportunities in the education sector.

Additionally, teachers may be presented with volunteer opportunities that create a new and unique way for educators to develop professional skills. Finally, there are opportunities such as workshops and seminars where teachers can learn and acquire development skills and expertise, such as the use of computer programs to boost teaching and learning processes, including the adoption of whiteboard technologies to boost the delivery of course material to learners.

Step 5: Document, record, and analyze the teacher members' progress. It is important to collect feedback from teachers about their developmental progress. This should be done on an institutional level to assist in identifying what they are doing in the classroom, what skills they need to build, and the problems being experienced while delivering the course materials to the learners. By understanding these, it becomes easy for the teachers to be directed on the simplest way of developing new abilities to improve personal performance and educational department outcomes. By documenting all these elements and steps, the teacher ends up having a workable professional development plan that is critical in powering their performance and the learning of students in the classroom.

Project Description

As the researcher, I will lead the professional development sessions. The administrators at the study site will help facilitate and confirm any details about the local site, such as policies and procedures related to curriculum and instruction. It is also very important that the administrators participate in the discussion. The professional

development will be conducted at the study site in a group setting with all teachers. The use of a large room is necessary and will be provided by the study site. Using a projector, the slides found in Appendix D will be used to facilitate the discussion. Teachers will be provided paper so that they may take notes and write ideas down that result from group discussions. The professional development will take 3 full days as per the schedule found in Appendix D. It is recommended the professional development be conducted in 3 consecutive days. If this is not possible, the amount of time between the 3 days should be limited so that teachers are able to make the connection between the information presented and discussed on each day.

Day 1 will consist of reviewing the study that led to the development of the specific professional development. As a direct result, the participants will gain a detailed understanding of the work and prior research of Maslow and Bandura. These two scholars have been very active in researching and studying topics relevant to the study. Finally, the participants will learn about the data collected. In preparation for Day 2 and Day 3 of professional development, all participants will be provided the data collected. These data will be the basis of the discussions in subsequent sessions.

Day 2 and Day 3 will focus on student perceptions and teacher perceptions, respectively. Many group discussions will take place, with the data in focus, to allow teachers to develop strategies to improve academic self-confidence for their students. These sessions will also allow the teachers to learn what they can improve and also help them understand how they are being perceived by students.

Project Evaluation Plan

The professional development evaluation will be summative in nature using a feedback form that can be found in Appendix B. The evaluation will assess if the session was well planned, the delivery of the facilitator, and, if the content met the needs of the teachers, if they felt that they had the ability as a result of the professional development, to implement what they learned into their daily instruction or classroom environment.

Project Implications

This study provided quality insight into the perceptions of both teachers and students on academic self-confidence at the study site. The project deliverable, in the form of a professional development session, provides real data to the teachers about students so that they can adjust their approach, the words they use, and the strategies they use to help students improve so that the students will have a higher level of academic self-confidence. As a result of these professional development sessions, the teachers should have strategies to help improve student academic self-confidence that they can immediately implement into the classroom. The teachers will be well trained on student perceptions. They will be able to identify statements and actions they take that both positively and negatively impact a students' academic self-confidence. Finally, if teachers are able to implement these strategies in their classroom instruction, the positive impact of a higher level of academic self-confidence could potentially be felt in all aspects of school life; therefore, there will be a positive change to the culture of the institution.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

This section is focused on exploring the project strengths and limitations in addressing the problem in the appropriate literature. A qualitative case study approach was used to explore academic self-confidence in high school students. According to Holloway (2005), a qualitative case study design is commonly used as a socioanthropological research paradigm because of its ethnographic and interpretative nature. Researchers using qualitative case studies strive to examine the entire situation to accurately and holistically understand the complexity of the topic guarantee a conclusion that considers both unique and general factors in the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which was appropriate for exploring self-confidence in high school students.

The study was designed to explore self-confidence from both the teachers' and the students' perceptions. It was also to explore self-confidence, learning, and student performance, taking into account both general and unique factors related to self-confidence and how they influence students' learning and academic performance.

Project Strengths

According to Mobius, Niederle, Niehaus, and Rosenblat (2011), any social issue or challenge can only be addressed by adopting a strategy that simplifies and manages the available local data without compromising the complexity and context of information provided by people on the ground. Therefore, addressing the problem of self-confidence amongst high school students required an approach that allowed me to collect, manage,

and analyze the acquired data without destroying the complexity and context. With this in mind, I adopted a qualitative case study approach to explore the primary challenges affecting students on the ground.

The purpose of the study was to learn from teachers and students about their experiences, their perception of self-confidence, and how they interpret and relate self-confidence to academic performance. A qualitative case study allowed for accurate discovery of issues while providing an accurate representation of the participants' perceptions of self-confidence. To effectively understand self-confidence in high school students, the study required a technique that could generate diverse ways of seeing the local data. Therefore, through use of Bandura's self-efficacy theory and Weiner's attribution theory, the study was capable of reflecting the reality on the ground as opposed to highlighting the researcher's own perception and understanding of self-confidence.

According to a personal communication dated June 15th, 2017, the principal at the site was aware of a gap in practice following a lower mean percentile for academic confidence when compared to the national average and the years 2014, 2015, and 2016. More critically, even the faculty, the administrators, and counselors were aware of the problem. For the project, I implemented methods to discover central themes and analyze the core concerns contributing to a declining self-confidence in high school students. For example, through focus groups, it was possible to address the root of factors resulting in lowered self-confidence. In entirety, the approaches and the techniques were appropriate

in providing information to address the problem of self-confidence decline in high school students and develop professional development.

Project Limitations

As with any project, some limitations were clear as I developed. A key limitation of the professional development plan is that I believe that participants, due to many factors such as age, experience, or academic focus area, will interpret words differently. The focus of the professional development targets the words that the teachers use with students and the impact of these words. Different groups may see the words impacting the students in different ways. Additionally, in some academic areas, some specific language may be necessary, and the students may be interpreting the words in a negative way. This is a challenge that can limit the professional development from being a one-size-fits-all model for the entire group of teachers.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

According to Eddy, Ward, and Khwaja (2017), it is not possible to understand human behavior or a social issue without understanding the framework and the pillars within the subjects to interpret their perceptions, feeling, thought, and actions (Eddy et al., 2017). Therefore, while conducting projects such as exploration of self-confidence in high school students, researchers must adopt approaches that understand and evaluate teachers' and students' frameworks. For that reason, the following is the recommended alternative approach.

Mixed-Methodology Approach

Creswell and Creswell (2018) highlighted that a mixed-methodology approach combines the descriptive and exploratory nature of qualitative approaches with the statistical elements of a quantitative approach. Additionally, it makes sure that an evidence-based aspect of the study is integrated (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For example, through the quantitative approach, the researcher would operationalize variables and effective measure change. In so doing, it makes it possible to compare performance when self-confidence is low and when it is high. Furthermore, it makes it possible to quantify correlations. For example, it becomes simple to understand the factors resulting in improved self-confidence and those adversely affecting it. With this understanding, it is easy to quantify and correlate self-confidence, learning, and student academic performance. Similarly, a quantitative approach can help factors that could be implemented to jumpstart and sustain self-confidence in learners. For example, with a quantitative approach, provision of positive feedback by the teachers and use of teaching techniques that provide equal participation among students could be correlated with improved self-confidence.

Use of a mixed-methodology approach in addressing issues, such as self-confidence, has been supported by Maxwell (2013). According to Maxwell, it is important for a researcher to allow the research questions within a project to define the approach to be utilized. In such a case, it appears that neither qualitative nor quantitative study approaches are considered better or accurate. Following this, it is important to have

a mixture of both to achieve a balance while answering the research questions. For example, in the initial project, it is not possible to answer the question, “To what extent is academic self-confidence correlated with learning and academic performance?” However, by using the mixed-methodology approach, the quantitative aspect could bring about a change of tactic. It could introduce some statistics that could easily measure in the most accurate manner the correlation between academic self-confidence, learning, and students' academic performance.

While looking at the issue of low self-confidence from that perspective, it is crucial to present an alternative definition and solution to the local problem. Self-confidence works in opening doors as well as encouraging students to take risks and express their creativity in classroom affairs (McIntosh & Warren, 2013). According to Downing (2017), a self-confident student is more likely to showcase optimistic and motivated attitude of “I can do” as opposed to “I cannot do” in learning and classroom affairs. With this understanding, the problem of low self-confidence may be approached differently by bringing the parent into the picture. This means that other than just checking on how self-confidence influences learning and academic performance, the project would look at the correlation between parenting and self-confidence, and their impact on learning and academic success. Therefore, the issue of low self-confidence in high school students could be expressed as a problem of low self-esteem.

Alternative Solution to Low Self-Confidence in High School Students

A study by Head (2017) revealed that low self-esteem could adversely affect the motivation and self-confidence of students, hence dampening their interest in learning. Once the learning process is negatively affected, the student loses interest in acquiring new knowledge and experiences, thereby affecting his or her academic performance (Head, 2017). Therefore, parents and teachers could adopt a constructive criticism approach to solving the problem of low self-confidence in high school students (Chua, n.d.).

In most cases, teachers use direct statements to refer to the student once they have failed in a given assessment. For example, after a mathematics class, the teacher may present the results as follows: "Jane, you have completely failed this test." Alternatively, while using constructive criticism, the teacher may present, "Class, a few of you failed the test." Without placing the failed student's name into the context, Jane's self-image is distanced from the adverse personal connotations of a failed test. The approach of constructive criticism works best in preserving the self-image and the self-esteem of the student, thus enhancing their self-confidence. Therefore, by using the mixed-methodology approach, the research would test the correlation between parent and teacher constructive criticism and self-esteem and then evaluate the relationship between self-esteem and self-confidence.

Finally, the researcher could review the link between self-confidence, learning, and student academic performance. By reviewing and evaluating how each factor

influences the other, the mixed-methodology approach provides an opportunity of getting evidence-based solutions that could be utilized in solving the issue of self-confidence in high school students.

From a teacher's perspective, it is critical to understand that a good number of students are struggling with self-esteem related issues. Marzano, Scott, Boogren, and Newcomb (2017) discovered that most students, in order to protect their self-esteem, tend to lower the amount of effort they put forth in certain areas and make little-or-no effort to accomplish anything. These findings agree with my finding that low self-confidence results in poor academic performance. For that reason, teachers should strive to motivate and guard students against any negative attitudes that have the potential of affecting the student's performance (Marzano et al., 2017). Similarly, Benson (2010) highlighted that teachers must collaboratively work with parents to build the self-confidence in students in a manner that encourages them to move and take up bigger and better challenges in their academic life. As a result, sustainable self-confidence in students is achieved. Other evidence-based ways of achieving self-confidence from a teacher's point of view include the following.

Offer opportunities/collaborative learning classroom environment. The best learning approach is the one that provides students with an opportunity to discuss the information they have taken in. More importantly, discussing it with other classmates lets them know the amount of ideas they have and their ability to grasp the content.

Moreover, the discussion provides a good opportunity to learn from their peers in a safe and self-esteem enriching environment (Barkley, Major, & Cross, 2014).

Adopt diverse learning approaches. Each student or learner is unique. More so, different students learn via different teaching methods. Albert Einstein once stated that if a fish's ability is measured or evaluated by its capability to climb a tree, then, it will use its entire life thinking that it is stupid. For that reason, teachers must offer their students a wide array of learning opportunities so that they can effectively fit in their learning styles to help boost academic performance and success (Barkley et al., 2014).

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

From the process exploration, I have learned that in research and development of a project, the researcher must understand the research questions as they carry the purpose of the entire project. The research questions help in retrieving the data that are required in addressing the problem. In addition, as highlighted by Maxwell (2013), taking up a mixed-method approach is beneficial as it provides the researcher with unlimited opportunities to interact with both qualitative and quantitative data. As a result, it becomes easy to test theories, measure correlations, and explains the relationship between one subject and the other. For example, it is now clear that issues of low self-confidence in high school students may be the result of low self-esteem. Therefore, by addressing low self-esteem issues, improvement in students' self-confidence, learning, and academic success may be realized.

Experience is key in every learning process and developing the professional development project helped enhance my growth as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. For example, I became aware of the importance of relying on evidence-based approaches to achieve a dependable solution to various issues. Therefore, as a project developer, I will always consider the explorative nature of the quantitative approach as well as the descriptive element of qualitative approaches in executive projects.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

By exploring the problem of low self-confidence scores in a local setting, I believe the work filled in gaps by providing counselors, administrators, and educators with an opportunity to develop and execute innovative strategies to improve learning and academic performance. Furthermore, it indirectly facilitates a smooth transition of students to higher education and vocational settings. I believe the work is essential as it uncovers the benefits of self-confidence to both students and teachers, hence providing them with an opportunity to build a collaborative team of improving learning and performance in the classroom.

Moreover, I think the project shows the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents in boosting self-esteem and self-confidence of students. It makes the parents understand that they have a role to play in empowering their children towards learning and better performance in learning institutions. To the teachers, the work provides them with a wide variety of approaches that they may utilize in boosting and improving their student's self-confidence. For example, I believe the teachers will now

be aware of the importance of acknowledging student accomplishment and how to support their self-esteem and self-confidence towards excelling in academics. More significantly, it has highlighted the importance of creating a positive classroom environment. From the project, teachers are made to understand how positive attitude plays a role in solving the biggest challenges happening in the classroom environment. I believe that the work could empower teachers, counselors, administrators, principals, students, and parents on the best and unique ways of improving performance by nurturing self-confidence.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Recommendations for Local Practice

The project has great potential for positive social change at diverse levels of society. The literature has shown the importance of professional development in improving learning for both students and teachers. Self-confidence among the students could only be improved by having a transformative approach adopted by the teachers. On the other hand, self-confidence in teachers could be experienced through the creation of professional development plans. Therefore, learning institutions, schools, and centers of high learning must boost and enhance teachers' professional development through the provision of reflective teaching approaches, seminars, and workshops. Empowered teachers have the ability, the skills, and the knowledge to adopt diverse approaches aimed at improving their students' self-confidence. With this understanding, it is now appropriate to review the potential impact for positive change.

As mentioned, students' self-confidence is improved and supported by both parents and the teachers. Therefore, for student self-confidence to be achieved, the teacher must be empowered with information and experience. For example, the school may organize a seminar or a workshop where teachers are taught diverse teaching methodologies. With the information at hand, the teacher can understand the uniqueness of each student in the classroom, hence creating teaching plans that fit the learning needs of every student. For instance, adopting a collaborative learning environment where students can sit in groups and review the course is a collaborative strategy towards improved self-confidence. Students are given the ability to express themselves, learn more, and potentially perform better.

From a social perspective, the family is the smallest unit of the community. Therefore, any positive social change in family matters influences the entire community. At the family level, the involvement of the parents in the learning process of their children is critical in building their self-esteem and self-confidence. As initially mentioned, both teachers and parents should utilize constructive criticism while dealing with an inevitable failure in the society. As a result, all the challenges and unethical behaviors observed with their children are solved. Therefore, utilization of an evidence-based approach to solving low self-confidence has a positive impact on the family, as the child will perform better, hence neutralizing barriers to getting into practice.

In the education sector, the organizational level represents the learning institution or the schools. Therefore, a positive social change will have a complete transformation

of the relationship and well as the behavior of learners. Students will begin performing better as the environment created by the teachers is positive and geared towards academic performance.

Recommendations for Future Research

Policymakers must ensure that the collaborative approach is adopted when creating policies around education matters. More importantly, they must involve the key stakeholders, including parents and teachers, in creating new or amending existing policies. Following this, positive impact on social change is expressed through attitude transformation. With a positive attitude from both the parents and the teachers regarding the policies, students are given the best learning environment, thereby improving their self-confidence and academic performance.

While considering the issue of application, the project focused on diverse evidence-based solutions that could be replicated in other education sectors in the United States as a way of enhancing self-confidence in high school students. For example, schools should focus on nurturing professional development of teachers, as satisfied and empowered teachers have the ability and passion for teaching and supporting the learners towards quality and better academic performance.

As far as methodological, theoretical, and empirical implications are concerned, the project has shown the importance of adopting an all-inclusive methodology such as a mixed-methodology approach. This ensures that both the theories and statistics are considered while creating sense out of the collected data. Also, it makes it possible for

the researcher to understand the unique elements that result in certain phenomena. For example, it has revealed that professional development of teachers has a direct influence on their learning and self-confidence, which is also correlated with student self-confidence and academic performance.

Finally, having seen the impact of the professional development of teachers on students' self-confidence, future research should focus on how school principals could enhance and boost the professional development of teachers. While doing this, the researcher must consider the fact that globalization and cultural diversity has resulted in many United States school experiencing a surge in ELLS. Therefore, the primary focus of future research should be on the role of school principals in enhancing the professional development of teachers and self-confidence of ELLs in the United States.

Conclusion

The study has revealed that student self-confidence is a vital determinant of learning, academic performance, and success. Therefore, because many students are faced with diverse challenges ranging from a change of environment, harassment, bullying, and mental disorders, both parents and teachers must work in collaboration to help boost students' self-confidence. In addition, both parents and teachers may engage the student in self-esteem powering activities aimed at neutralizing the "I cannot do" and supporting the "I can do attitude." More decisively, the teacher must be willing to develop and adopt diverse teaching strategies for their students as each student is unique. However, for teachers to achieve these demands, policymakers, principals, and education

administrators must work together to help the teacher in enhancing their professional development. By taking these steps, the students' self-esteem and self-confidence will be nurtured, thereby potentially resulting in better academic performance.

Finally, as far as carrying out the project is concerned, adoption of mixed-methodology approach has been suggested as an option as it provides a room for testing, correlation, and review of relationships between diverse subjects, theories, and data. In entirety, the project has been a success in revealing diverse evidence-based approaches and interventions that policymakers, school administrators, counselors, parents, and teachers could utilize in improving students' self-confidence as well as sealing off the gaps in learning and academic performance.

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Appendix A: Professional Development Plan

Understanding of Self-Confidence in High School Students

Purpose

This project was designed as the result of findings from my qualitative research to gain an understanding as to why students at a private high school in New Jersey have low academic self-confidence.

Goals

This project has several goals:

1. The main goal of the project is to share the perceptions of both teachers and students on academic self-confidence and how self-confidence can be impacted positively or negatively.
2. Create awareness and identify local strategies for teachers to incorporate improvement of self-confidence into daily instruction and student interaction.
3. This project will provide professional development for faculty to implement the strategies developed.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the professional development, which will last 3 full days, the teachers will be able to utilize the strategies, resources, and materials presented. These teachers will be able to implement what they learned immediately in their daily instruction with the goal of improving academic performance through improved academic self-confidence.

1. **Roles and Responsibilities**

	Researcher	**Teachers and Administrators**
Roles	The researcher will lead training and facilitate discussion.	Participate actively during planning and professional development sessions.
Responsibilities	The researcher will: • Schedule professional development dates and meeting location with administrator. • Serve as facilitator throughout professional development. • Provide copies of materials and handouts. • Present findings of research to all participants. • Collect evaluations and answer questions.	Collaborate and participate in all activities and discussions with a positive attitude and response.

2. **Target Audience:** Any teachers that teach grades 9-12.

Schedule

Day 1: Overview of Study, Understanding of Theory, Review of Data

Day 2: Understanding how students perceive themselves.

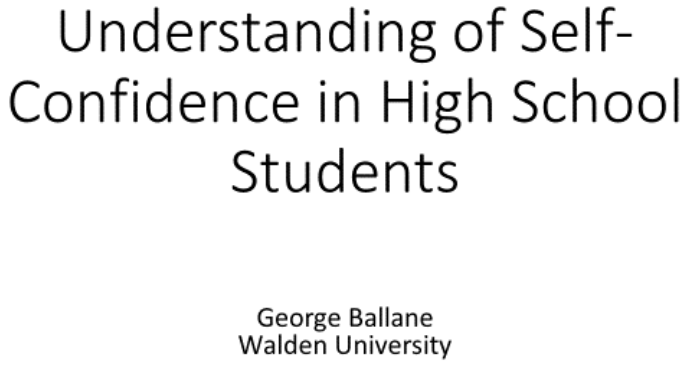
Day 3: Understanding how teachers impact students.

Session	Agenda	
Day 1	9:00 a.m.	Introduction/Objectives/Goals
	9:30 - 10:00 a.m.	Icebreaker
	10:00 - 10:30 a.m.	Overview of Study & Findings
	10:30 - 11:00 a.m.	Break
	11:00 - 11:30 a.m.	Review of Maslow & Bandura
	11:30 - 12:00 p.m.	Q & A
	12:00 - 12:30 a m.	Lunch
	12:30 - 1:00 p.m.	Data Collection Process and Review of study results.
	1:00 - 1:30 p.m.	Review of Study Site Policy and Procedures that relate to the study. Group Discussion
	1:30 - 2:00 p.m.	Preview of Day 2 and Day 3
	2:00 - 2:30 p.m.	Q&A

Day 2	9:00 a.m.	Introduction Understanding of Student Perception
	9:15 – 9:30 a.m.	Takeaways from Day 1 Group Discussion
	9:30 – 10:30 a.m.	Review and Group Discussion on key points of Student focus group data collected.
	10:30 – 11:00 a.m.	Break
	11:00 – 11:30 a.m.	Statements & Strategies Group Discussion
	11:30 – 12:00 p.m.	Group Presentation
	12:00- 12:30 p.m.	Lunch
	12:30 – 1:30 p.m.	How do we change student perception?
	1:30 – 2:30 p.m.	Preview of Day 3
Day 3	9:00 a.m.	Introduction Understanding of Teacher Perception
	9:15 – 9:30 a.m.	Takeaways from Day 2 Group Discussion
	9:30 – 10:30 a.m.	Review and Group Discussion on key points of Teacher focus group data collected.

	10:30 – 11:00 a.m.	Break
	11:00 – 11:30 a.m.	Statements & Strategies
		Group Discussion
	11:30 – 12:00 p.m.	Group Presentation
	12:00- 12:30 p.m.	Lunch
	12:30 – 1:30 p.m.	How do we change student perception?
	1:30 – 2:30 p.m.	Q&A & Conclusion
	2:30 – 3:00 p.m.	Evaluation

Training: Three-day professional development training



Professional Development

- Day 1
  - Overview of study conducted
  - Overview of Theoretical Framework
  - Review of study site policy and procedures that relate to the study.
- Day 2
  - Student Perception
    - Need to understand student perception to understand what teachers need to improve
  - Review of Data Collected
  - Develop clear understanding of student perception and feelings

Professional Development (cont)

- Day 3
  - Teacher Perception
  - Review of Data Collected
  - Develop strategies to integrate into teaching that improve self-confidence.
  - What statements help and hurt student self-confidence and achievement?
  - How to implement into day to day teaching?

Day 1 - Overview

- Overview of Study & Findings
- Theoretical Framework – Maslow and Bandura
- Review study site policy and procedures that relate to the study.

Purpose

- This project was designed as the result of findings from my qualitative research to gain an understanding as to why students at a private high school in New Jersey have low academic self-confidence.

Goals

- The main goal of the project is to share the perceptions of both teachers and students on academic self confidence and how self confidence can be impacted positively or negatively.
- Create awareness and identify local strategies for teachers to incorporate improvement of self-confidence into daily instruction and student interaction.
- This project will provide professional development for faculty to implement the strategies developed.

Learning Outcomes

- Upon completion of the professional development, which will last 3 full days, the teachers will be able to utilize the strategies, resources, and materials presented.
- These teachers will be able to implement what they learned immediately in their daily instruction with the goal of improving academic performance through improved academic self-confidence.

Icebreaker – Mindset – Fixed or Growth

- I stick to what I know.
- I don't like to be challenged.
- Failure is the limit of my abilities.
- I'm either good at it or I'm not.
- My potential is predetermined.
- When I'm frustrated, I give up.
- Challenges help me to grow.
- I am inspired by the success of others.

Icebreaker (cont.)

- My effort and attitude determines my abilities.
- I like to try new things.
- I can learn to do anything I want.
- Feedback is constructive.
- Failure is an opportunity to grow.
- My abilities are unchanging.
- I can either do it or I can't.
- Feedback and criticism are personal.

Overview of Study

- Problem: ACT Engage Results for Academic Self-Confidence was lowest of all other metrics and lower than the national average.
- Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative case study is to gain an understanding of academic self-confidence, academic performance, and learning within a sample of students at a private high school in a state located on the eastern coast of the United States.

Research Questions

- In order to explore the problem and gain an understanding of academic self-confidence, the research questions will enable the collection of qualitative data to support this qualitative study. Using attribution theory as a guide to attempt to understand academic self-confidence, the research questions are developed with a focus on self-confidence.
- 1. How do students perceive academic self-confidence as an influence on academic performance?
- 2. How do teachers perceive academic self-confidence as an influence on academic performance?
- 3. What do students perceive as ways to improve their academic self-confidence?
- 4. What do teachers perceive as ways to improve students' academic self-confidence?

Attribution Theory

- This research is guided by Weiner's attribution theory to facilitate exploration of the construct of self-confidence. The research questions focused on three areas; students' perceptions of academic self-confidence as a factor that impacts their academic performance; teachers' perceptions of academic self-confidence as a factor impacting students' academic performance; and the perceived relationship between academic self-confidence, academic performance, and learning.

Data Collection Process

- Focus groups conducted with Teachers and Students.
- According to Thomas, Silverman, and Nelson (2015), focus groups help researchers to acquire information from participants who are more comfortable in group activities. The questions were limited in order to make the sessions enjoyable and efficient.

Study Findings - Students

- General Findings
  - Optimistic when discussing grades, approach, and learning.
  - Students do not feel defined by their grades.
  - Effort defines who they are.
  - Students are impacted by words of the teacher as well as how into a subject the teacher is.
  - Students recognize how hard a class is and are proud of their effort more than the grade.
  - Ranking, comparing, discussing grades among peers, etc. negatively impacts a students self-confidence.
  - Measure growth test to test.

Study Findings - Teachers

- General Findings
  - Pessimistic approach when discussing grades, approach, and learning.
  - Believe students define themselves by their grades.
  - Believe that student comradery is a significant factor in academic self-confidence.
  - “Energy” in a class is important.
  - View students that take chances are more confident.
  - Measure growth over a longer period of time.

Review of Study Site Policy & Procedures

- Ranking policy?
- Anything in curriculum guide that might impact students?
- Course tracks? CP, Honors, HH, AP
- Weighting of courses
- Testing schedule?
- School / dept requirements for grades?
- Any other policies?

Preview of Day 2 and Day 3

- Day 2
  - All about fully understanding students.
  - Review of data collected.
  - Discussions on strategies to help students.

- Day 3
  - All about fully understanding teacher perspective
  - Review of data collected.
  - Strategies developed…. How do we implement them now that we see both sides?

Q&A & Conclusion

- Questions? Discussion? Comments?

Day 2 - Overview

- Day 2 - Focus on Students.
  - Results from the data collection.
  - What helps / hurts a student self-confidence.
  - How teachers impact student self-confidence.

Student Perception Overview

- Disconnect between teacher view and student view
  - How do we bridge the gap?
- Are students really defined by their grades? Or is it effort and grade is the indicator of their effort?
- What did the students say?

Key Points from Student Focus Group

- Samples from focus group transcript to be read.
- Discussion on these to fully understand student perspective.

Statements and Strategies

- What statements hurt students? (right from transcript)
- How do we say the same thing in a way that increases self-confidence?
- Are there things you may be saying that are unintentionally hurting students? Be open minded here!
- Develop a few things you can say every day that can help improve self-confidence.

How do we change student perception?

- What strategies can we take to change student perspective?
  - Groups develop ideas and share.

Preview of Day 3

- Day 3
  - All about fully understanding teacher perspective
  - Review of data collected.
  - Strategies developed…. How do we implement them now that we see both sides?

Day 3 – Overview

- Day 3
  - What teachers said during focus groups.
  - How can we help students?
  - What strategies can be implemented into daily instruction?

Key Points from Teacher Focus Group

- Samples from focus group transcript to be read.
- Discussion on these excerpts…. Agree? Disagree?

Statements and Strategies

- What are we doing right? Discussion.
- What are we doing wrong? Discussion.
- Now's the time to improve….. Lets implement some small changes every day and test with students.

How do we change student perception?

- Question has been asked a few times….
  - Based on what has been reviewed over the last 2 days… has your opinion changed?
  - Have you developed any ideas of things you will stop?
  - …. Anything you will begin?

Conclusion / Q&A

- Questions? Comments? Discussion?

- How do we move forward now?

Appendix B: Professional Development Evaluation

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
This session was organized and meaningful.				
The facilitator demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the topic.				
The session provided a quality insight into the student perspective.				
We were able to develop strategies to help students during this professional development.				
I will be able to use these strategies in my classroom almost right away.				
Please add additional comments below:				
What are the first changes you will make in your classroom as a result of this professional development?				
What could be done to improve this professional development?				

Appendix C: Research Questions With Associated Focus Group Questions for Students

Research Question 1: How do students perceive self-confidence as a factor that can impact their academic performance?

1. How do you define self-confidence?
2. How do you define academic performance?
3. How do you think self-confidence is connected to academic performance?
4. How much influence do you think self-confidence has on academic performance?
5. Describe your sense of worth as it applies to your performance here in school.
6. What does self-respect mean to you?
7. Do you think the amount of self-respect impacts your performance in school?

Research Question 3: How do students and teachers feel that they can improve academic self-confidence?

8. How do you describe academic self-confidence?
9. How can you increase your academic self-confidence?
10. What role, if any, do teachers play in developing your self-confidence?
11. How does teachers' work to improve your self-confidence during the learning process?

Research Question 4: What is the perceived relationship between self-confidence and academic performance?

12. Share with us how you use positive energy to help you succeed in school.
13. Describe how satisfied you are with yourself as a student? Does your satisfaction with yourself as a student influence your performance in school?
14. Describe an experience where you had a positive attitude regarding school and it influenced how you performed in school?
15. Describe an experience where you felt negatively regarding a class or assignment and it influenced how you performed in the class or on the assignment?

Exit Question:

16. Do you have any other insight to share related to academic self-confidence or academic performance?

Appendix D: Research Questions With Associated Focus Group Questions for Teachers

Questions for Teachers with associated research question.

Research Question 2: How do teachers perceive self-confidence as a factor that can impact a student's academic performance?

1. Describe characteristics of students you believe exhibit academic self-confidence.
2. How do you define academic performance? (Probing questions: Is it learning? High grades? What is your interpretation of academic performance?)
3. How do you think self-confidence is linked to academic performance in your students?
4. How do you believe students' sense of worth influences their performance in school? To what degree?

Research Question 3: How do students and teachers feel that they can improve academic self-confidence?

5. Describe academic self-confidence.
6. How can academic self-confidence be increased?
7. What role, if any, do you play in developing students' self-confidence? Do you see yourself as capable of improving students' self-confidence during the learning process?

Research Question 4: What is the perceived relationship between self-confidence and academic performance?

8. Share with us how you see students' using positive energy to help them succeed in school.
9. Describe an experience where you observed a student with a positive attitude regarding school and it influenced how they performed in school?
10. Describe an experience where you observed a student who felt negatively regarding a class or assignment and it influenced how they performed in the class or on the assignment.

Exit Question:

11. Do you have any other insight to share related to academic self-confidence or academic performance?