
The Relationship between the Academic Self-concept of Turkish ELT Students and their Reading Skills

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between the Academic Self-concept of Turkish English Language Teaching students and their reading skills. The study is conducted on 55 first grade English Language Teaching university students including males and females and taking Reading Skills Course in a foundation university, İstanbul, Türkiye. The quantitative data is collected through three different tools. The first data related to the academic self-concept of students is obtained from Academic Self-concept Scale by Liu and Wang (2005) consisting of two sub-scales; academic confidence and academic effort scales. The second data related to students' Metacognitive Reading Strategies is obtained from Metacognitive Reading Strategies Questionnaire (Taraban, Kerr and Rynearson, 2004). Lastly, reading skills of students' were assessed through the exam scores taken in the Reading Skills Course which evaluates their reading comprehension. The findings showed that there is a relationship between the students' academic self-concept and their reading skills. The results are discussed in relation to the literature.

Keywords: Academic self-concept, reading skills

Türk İngilizce Öğretmenliği Öğrencilerinin Akademik Benlik Kavramları ile Okuma Becerileri Arasındaki İlişki

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türk İngilizce Öğretmenliği öğrencilerinin Akademik Benlik Kavramı ile okuma becerileri arasındaki ilişkiyi araştırmaktır. Çalışma, İstanbul'da bir vakıf üniversitesinde Okuma Becerileri dersini alan, kız ve erkek olmak üzere 55 İngilizce Öğretmenliği birinci sınıf öğrencisi üzerinde yürütülmüştür. Nicel veriler üç farklı araçla toplanmıştır. Öğrencilerin akademik benlik kavramına ilişkin ilk veri Liu ve Wang (2005) tarafından geliştirilen ve akademik güven ve akademik çaba olmak üzere iki alt ölçekten oluşan Akademik Benlik Kavramı Ölçeği'nden elde edilmiştir. Öğrencilerin Üstbilişsel Okuma Stratejileri ile ilgili ikinci veri ise Taraban, Kerr ve Rynearson (2004) tarafından geliştirilen Üstbilişsel Okuma Stratejileri Anketi'nden elde edilmiştir. Son olarak, öğrencilerin okuma becerileri, okuduğunu anlamayı değerlendiren Okuma Becerileri Dersi'nde alınan sınav puanları aracılığıyla değerlendirilmiştir. Bulgular, öğrencilerin akademik benlik kavramları ile okuma becerileri arasında bir ilişki olduğunu göstermiştir. Sonuçlar literatürle ilişkili olarak tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Akademik benlik kavramı, okuma becerileri

1. Introduction

For students, self-concept is one of the most crucial components in their language learning process. According to Marsh & Shavelson (1985), a person's self-concept is how they see themselves in relation to others and their experiences in life. The ideas, feelings, and experiments that a person has about himself or herself constitutes his/her self-concept. Self-concept makes up a person's self-construction, self-identification, gender identity, past, present, and future selves, as well as self-evaluation, academic motivation, academic accomplishment, and academic self-concept. Academic self-concept (ASC), one of the key components of self-concept, is comprised of many sub-domains. ASC encompasses individual convictions, ideas, and perspectives on cognitive capacities and scholastic accomplishments. Additionally, ASC has a big impact on academic success (Burden & Snowling, 2005). Additionally, ASC is regarded as a crucial factor impacting academic accomplishment. It relates to a student's view of his/her own academic ability (Marsh & Martin, 2011). Studies reveal a robust correlation between an individual's self-perception in learning settings and their level of academic achievement (Marsh, 1992; Marsh & Craven, 1996). Academic accomplishment influences ASC, and ACS influences academic achievement as well. The grades and test results represent academic accomplishment (Howcroft, 1991). The accomplishment of a student's, teacher's, or institution's short- or long-term objectives is known as academic achievement. According to Baadjies (2004), a teacher's primary goal is to have high accomplishment levels from their pupils. According to Brennen (in Baadjies, 2004), accomplishment is perceived as an activity that results in something related to students' advancement in academic contexts. Furthermore, academic performance is demonstrated by test scores (Harackiewicz et al., 1998). In educational situations, being successful comes from academic achievement.

Cognitive processes during reading has become a popular subject among teachers who want to improve the ideas of lifelong learners (Baker, 2002). Understanding what you read is even more important when attending to university since you will be required to read and comprehend course books that cover a variety of ideas. The primary distinction between attending to a high school and university is that university students get less help and supervision when it comes to remembering and comprehending what they read (Simpson & Nist, 2002). Thus, it is thought that active students who take responsibility for their own education are crucial to the effectiveness of their educational experiences, particularly for those who are at university age. One may argue that a key factor in students' performance is their understanding of metacognitive techniques, which will facilitate their learning from course materials and improve their processes of interpretation.

During the reading comprehension process, demonstrating the appropriate use of reading strategies requires a solid grasp of metacognitive reading strategies. Senemoğlu (2007) defines metacognition as being cognizant of one's own learning process in addition to knowing about and understanding a subject. Flavell (1979) defined metacognition as the act of reflecting on reflection, considering oneself, controlling one's thoughts, and being aware of one's own knowledge gaps. Choosing thinking techniques, organizing, evaluating, and contrasting new and old knowledge are a few examples of basic metacognition processes (Dirkes, 1985). The creation of learning objectives and the development of efficient, self-sufficient learning abilities are made easier by metacognitive strategies (Vaidya, 1999). Students who possess metacognitive awareness are better at using information, concentrating their attention, motivating themselves to study, understanding the content of texts, and creating links between what they already know and what they learn (Paris & Jacobs, 1984).

The use of metacognitive strategies, along with deliberate preparation and organization of learning tasks, promotes awareness of the challenges students face and the strategies they employ to overcome them. By emphasizing observation, practice, and evaluation of how these issues are addressed, educators can improve the learning process (Ashman & Conway, 1993). The ability of reading comprehension is a complex talent that is essential for academic achievement. Students use a variety of techniques to understand texts, and metacognitive reading techniques are important ones. Self-control, observation, and assessment of one's cognitive processes while reading are all components of metacognitive methods. Reading performance is also influenced by ASC, which is associated with how pupils view their own potential and talents in the classroom.

In this study, the relationships among students' reading scores, ASC and metacognitive reading strategies were explored. While much research has examined the overall impact of academic self-concept on performance, there is limited understanding of its specific effects on reading skills, particularly among Turkish university students in English Language Teaching (ELT) Department. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the link between ASC and reading proficiency, which is vital for both academic success and lifelong learning (Koda, 2007).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the ASC of pre-service ELT teachers, focusing on their metacognitive reading awareness and reading skills in relation to various factors. To explore these relationships, the research questions are formulated as below:

1. Is there a relationship between metacognitive reading strategies and reading scores of students?
2. Is there a relationship between ASC and reading scores of students?
3. Is there a relationship between ASC and metacognitive reading strategies of students?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

This study was conducted with 55 first-year university students, both male and female, enrolled in a Reading Skills Course at a foundation university in Istanbul, Turkey. It was applied at the end of the fall term to students, in the 2022-2023 academic year.

2.2. Instruments

In this study, quantitative data was collected through three different tools. Firstly, The Academic Self-concept Scale by Liu and Wang (2005) was used to gather information on students' ASC. It had two subscales, each with ten items: (a) academic confidence and (b) academic effort. Both favorably and negatively worded questions were included in the items to avoid pupils giving the same answers. The scale included items for both academic effort and confidence. Items for academic effort were numbered as 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, and also those for academic confidence were numbered as 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19. The Academic Self-concept Scale (Liu & Wang, 2005) showed validity and reliability with 0.89 and 0.71 cronbach's alpha (α) values.

Secondly, the data about students' cognitive reading strategies is obtained from Metacognitive Reading Strategies Questionnaire (Taraban, Kerr and Rynearson, 2004). Initially, the scale's language validity investigations were carried out, and once linguistic equivalency was determined, validity and reliability evaluations were done. The scale was consistent with its original form, according to the factor analysis. The scale's internal consistency coefficients were .81 for the whole scale; .78 for the sub-dimensions of analytical strategies; moreover, .82 for the sub-dimensions of pragmatic strategies. The findings showed that the scale is a valid and trustworthy measuring instrument (Çöğmen & Saracaloğlu, 2010). To get estimates of internal-consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for Component 1 ($\alpha = .85$), Component 2 ($\alpha = .75$), and the overall collection of 22 variables ($\alpha = .84$). These findings prove that the scale's overall internal consistency and its subscales were high (Taraban, Kerr, and Rynearson, 2004).

Thirdly, reading skills of students' were assessed through the exam scores taken in the reading skills course which evaluates their reading comprehension. In Reading Skills Course, "Blass, L., Vargo, M., & Wisniewska, I. (2016). *21st century reading: Creative thinking and reading with TED Talks*. National Geographic Learning." was used as a course book. The exams were administered based on the book's system. Students' reading exam scores were derived from the book's own assessment tools. As a procedure, initially, the Academic Self-Concept Scale by Liu and Wang (2005) was administered to the students. Next, the Metacognitive Reading Strategies Questionnaire (Taraban, Kerr & Rynearson, 2004) was given. Finally, the students' exam scores from the Reading Skills Course, which assessed their reading comprehension, were considered. All scores were then analyzed and evaluated.

3. Findings

When examining the results of the study, the following findings emerged: Normality Test. To begin, the research started with an analysis of descriptive statistics to identify the key characteristics of the participants. Subsequently, skewness and kurtosis values were calculated to assess whether the scale scores adhered to a normal distribution (see Table 1). It is crucial to highlight that according to prior research by Tabachnick, Fidell & Ullman (2013), values within the range of +1.5 to -1.5 for skewness and kurtosis are considered appropriate for a normal distribution. The

findings revealed that all scales, including sub-dimensions used in the study, fell within this range, indicating compatibility with a normal distribution. As a result, parametric tests were administered for further analysis.

Table 1.

Skewness and Kurtosis Values of the Metacognitive Reading Strategies and ASC Scales

	AS	PS	ASC	ACNF	AEFF	MCRS
N	55	55	55	55	55	55
M	3.750	3.506	3.222	3.102	3.342	3.684
SD	.585	.987	.207	.233	.360	.594
Skewness	-.885	-.475	-.555	.370	-.186	-.685
SE	.322	.322	.322	.322	.322	.322
Kurtosis	1.394	-.608	-.067	-.391	.537	1.297
SE	.634	.634	.634	.634	.634	.634

The table presents the skewness and kurtosis values for the metacognitive reading strategies and ASC scales based on a sample of 55 participants. The average scores range from 3.102 (ACNF) to 3.750 (AS), indicating generally positive self-assessments across scales. Variability in scores is highest for the PS scale (0.987) and lowest for the ASC scale (0.207). Most scales show negative skewness, suggesting a tendency for scores to cluster towards the higher end, except for the ACNF scale, which has positive skewness (0.370). The AS scale shows a leptokurtic distribution (1.394), indicating a sharper peak, while the PS and ASC scales are more platykurtic, suggesting a flatter distribution. Overall, the results indicate a positive bias in self-concept and metacognitive strategy use among the participants.

3.1. Descriptive Statistics of the Participants

Based on the analysis of responses to the demographic questionnaire, it was determined that 56.4% of the survey participants were female while 43.6.7% were male. In terms of time spent reading, the most common response was "less than an hour," with 43.6% of participants selecting this option. In contrast, only one participant, or 1.8% of the total, reported reading for more than three hours. For a detailed summary of participant demographics, please refer to Table 2.

Table 2.

Demographic Frequency of the Participants

		Frequency	%	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	F	31	56.4	56.4	56.4
	M	24	43.6	43.6	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	
Reading Time	I do not read	7	12.7	12.7	12.7
	Less than an hour	24	43.6	43.6	56.4
	1 hour	9	16.4	16.4	72.7
	2 hours	14	25.5	25.5	98.2
	3 hours or more	1	1.8	1.8	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 shows a detailed summary of participant demographics according to their gender and reading time.

Research Question 1

The first research question seeks to determine whether there is a relationship between metacognitive reading strategies and students' reading scores. In order to find an answer to this question, a correlation test was administered to inspect if there was a relationship between participants' metacognitive reading strategies and their reading scores. Table 3 shows the respective results.

Table 3.

Relationship between Metacognitive Reading Strategies, its Sub-dimensions and Reading Scores

	M	SD	Grade	AS	PS	MCRS
Grade	87.49	8.41	-	.069	-.100	.004
AS	3.22	0.21	.069	-	.435**	.913**
PS	3.10	0.23	-.100	.435**	-	.764**
MCRS	3.34	0.36	.004	.913**	.764**	-

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

It was discovered that there was no statistically significant correlation between reading scores and metacognitive reading strategies for either of the two sub-dimensions of the Metacognitive Reading Strategies Scale, $r(55) = .004$, $p > .01$. Furthermore, no significant correlation was discovered between the pragmatic strategies (PS), $r(55) = -.100$, $p > .01$, and the subdimensions of the metacognitive reading strategies (MCRS), analytic strategies (AS), $r(55) = .069$, $p > .01$ (see Table 3).

Research Question 2

The second research question aims to determine whether there is a relationship between ASC and students' reading scores. To find out if there was a connection between participants' reading scores and the ASC they used, another correlation analysis was carried out. Table 4 shows the respective results.

Table 4.

Relationship between ASC, its Sub-dimensions and Reading Scores

	M	SD	Grade	ACNF	AEFF	ASC
Grade	87.49	8.41	-	-.289*	.054	-.1158
ACNF	3.10	.23	-.289*	-	-.0759	.497**
AEFF	3.34	.36	.05356	-.0759	-	.828**
ASC	3.22	.21	-.1158	.497**	.828**	-

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

Results indicated that there was a weak negative relationship between academic confidence (ACNF-Sub-dimension of ASC) and reading scores, as evidenced by a correlation coefficient of $r(55) = .289$, $p < .05$. In other words, students' academic reading grades decreases as their academic confidence goes down. However, there was no significant correlation found between the ASC, $r(55) = -.1158$, $p > .05$ and students' reading grades. Congruent with this result,

no significant relationship was found between the sub-dimension, academic effort (AEFF- Sub-dimension of ASC) and reading scores ($r(55) = .054, p > .05$).

Research Question 3

The third research question seeks to explore whether there is a relationship between ASC and students' metacognitive reading strategies. Finally, to determine whether there was a connection between the participants' stated ASC and metacognitive reading strategies, a more thorough correlation analysis was carried out. The respective findings are shown in Table 5.

Table 5.

Relationship between ASC and Metacognitive Reading Strategies

	M	SD	AS	PS	MCRS
ACNF	3.10	.23	.211	.234	.257
AEFF	3.34	.36	-.076	-.098	-.099
ASC	3.22	.21	.052	.046	.058
AS	3.75	.58	-		
PS	3.51	.99		-	
MCRS	3.68	.59			-

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

The findings indicate that there is no statistically significant correlation between students' ASC and metacognitive reading strategies, $r(55) = .058$, with $p > .05$. Additionally, no significant correlations were found among the sub-dimensions of each scale.

4. Discussion

The study's research questions examined the relationships among students' reading scores, ASC, and metacognitive reading strategies. A thorough review of existing literature reveals the complex interplay between these variables. Previous research emphasizes the significant impact of self-concept on academic success, suggesting that higher reading skills among Turkish university students are associated with a positive ASC, which aligns with this study's predictions (Schunk & Pajares, 2009; Zimmerman, 2000). This connection implies that programs targeted at raising students' self-perceptions of their academic competence may improve their reading comprehension which is a crucial ability for success in the classroom. The findings of certain research, including those by Awad (2007), Cokley (2002), and Lent et al. (1997), demonstrated the relationship between academic success and ASC. Achievement and ASC are said to have a reciprocal connection in which they influence one another often (Marsh, 2006). Additionally, an assessment of a person's talents and performances is based on an accumulation of connected sentiments about the individual (Boersma & Chapman, 1992). Achievement and ASC have a mutually reinforcing effect on one another, and their relationship has improved (Marsh & Martin, 2011). There is a reflexive association between success and failure at school that influences ASC and vice versa (Williams & Burden, 1997). Furthermore, studies carried out in Turkey show a positive link between ASC and academic achievement (Arseven, 1979; Doğusal-Tezel, 1987; Yavuzer, 1989; cited in Kenç & Oktay, 2002). Doğan-Başokçu & Doğan (2005) found that an ASC scale developed by Kuzgun (1994) might be utilized to assess students' academic success.

The majority of pre-service teachers have strong academic records. Cognitively aware students are more likely to be receptive to new information and achieve academic success. According to studies done in this area, pupils with higher cognitive awareness are more daring, willing, and planned during the learning process (Paris et al. 1990, Brown et al. 1986, as mentioned in Karatay, 2011). As a result, proficient readers who possess these abilities are better at applying strategies and continue to use them. These readers also arrange their own reading processes and examine the reading material in the best possible ways. Both high-level readers' reading objectives and their understanding of the tactics

that would enable them to meet these objectives are at the greatest level (Mokharti & Reichard, 2002; Başaran, 2013, as quoted in Kana, 2014). Thus, these students also score highly academically. The deep learning methods and analytical strategies employed by pre-service instructors received positive mean scores. Pre-service instructors typically employ metacognitive reading methods and strategies according to Çöğmen's (2008) study. Furthermore, there is a greater usage of pragmatic strategies than analytical strategies. According to Dilci & Babacan (2011), students in this situation employ pragmatic tactics more frequently and believe that they will succeed. When reading course texts, students apply analytical tools to employ metacognitive processes. They employ the strategies. Furthermore, students who plan, oversee, and assess their reading process employ similar tactics. Conversely, pragmatic tactics rely more heavily on memory. By using these strategies, one can increase their memory capacity and identify key information (Çöğmen & Saracaloğlu, 2010).

Reading scores, academic self-concept (ASC), and metacognitive reading strategies are all interconnected when examining the research topics. Students' reading scores are highly influenced by both ASC and metacognitive reading strategies. Moreover, academic self-concept appears to influence the utilization of metacognitive strategies during reading tasks, suggesting a complex interplay between these variables. Students' academic accomplishment, reading proficiency, ASC and metacognitive reading methods are all correlated, as the evidence above shows. However, based on the findings of this study, there is not much of a link between students' reading abilities and their ASC. Prior research indicates that there is a strong relationship between students' ASC and their reading abilities (Paris et al. 1990; Brown et al. 1986; Karatay, 2009; Mokharti & Reichard, 2002; Başaran, 2013; Çöğmen & Saracaloğlu, 2010). When readers use metacognitive reading methods, they read more effectively. Unfortunately, the current study did not demonstrate this. The respondents' reading comprehension skills lagged behind the norm even though they claimed to employ metacognitive reading strategies.

The results of research question 1 indicate that reading scores did not show a statistically significant correlation with any of the sub-dimensions of the Metacognitive Reading Strategies Scale. Moreover, there was no significant correlation found between the two sub-dimensions of the scale such as analytical and pragmatic strategies (see Table 3). In light of the findings of question 2, it can be concluded that as shown by a correlation coefficient, there was a weakly negative association between reading scores and academic confidence (ACNF-Sub-dimension of ASC). In other words, as students lose confidence in their academic abilities, their academic reading scores tend to decline. However, no discernible association was seen between the students' reading grades and their intellectual self-concept. In line with this finding, there was no discernible correlation between reading scores and the sub-dimension of academic effort (AEFF, an ASC sub-dimension). It can be concluded from the results of research question 3 that students' ASC and their metacognitive reading strategies do not correlate in a statistically meaningful way. Similarly, no significant correlations were observed among the sub-dimensions of any of the scales. One of the few studies that challenges the conclusions of past research that indicates a positive relationship between reading comprehension skills and metacognitive reading strategies is this one. This may be because, despite having weak language skills that could hinder their reading comprehension, the respondents tended to score highly on the metacognitive reading strategies survey.

5. Conclusion

Finally, a review of the study's findings suggests that they have significant implications for the teaching and learning practices of university students. Teachers should be aware that academic effort and confidence play a significant role in students' ASC which in turn influences their academic accomplishment, while they are implementing teaching and learning strategies centered on ASC. The study's results support the notion that the respondents are strategic readers who utilize metacognitive reading techniques to a modest extent. It appears that there is an urgent need to incorporate explicit teaching of metacognitive reading strategies in the classroom, even if students can plan, monitor, and assess their reading performance in a somewhat independent manner while reading academic texts. These strategies will help them to deal with the problems they encounter in reading process. Despite the self-reported use of metacognitive reading strategies, the respondents' comprehension of academic literature remains average. This performance may be attributed to the conclusion of the aforementioned study question, which indicated that respondents preferred lighter reading materials over more challenging and lengthy academic texts. Given the respondents' low reading comprehension scores, teachers and researchers may need to broaden their focus beyond just teaching metacognitive skills to improve reading comprehension abilities. In order to improve students' performance, educators must also investigate other cognitive, psychological, social, and linguistic variables and implement the appropriate solutions.

This study offers a multifaceted perspective on the issue, highlighting the lack of a strong association between the findings. It encourages us to consider various factors—linguistic, psychological, social, and cognitive—that influence students' performance and to make necessary adjustments. Additionally, this research contributes to our understanding of the relationship between ASC and reading proficiency among Turkish ELT university students, underscoring the importance of self-concept in enhancing reading competency. As part of comprehensive efforts to enhance reading skills and overall academic achievement, educators and policymakers should consider initiatives aimed at strengthening students' ASC.

6. Limitations and Implications

In this study, there were just 55 students as participants. As a result, it is possible that the results indicate no correlation between students' reading skills and their academic self-concept. The literature's other research demonstrate that a sizable number of people participated in them. Thus, there was shown to be a significant relationship between students' reading abilities and their academic self-concept. It is possible that the 55 students in the study's sample are insufficient to fairly reflect the total population. More trustworthy results would come from a bigger sample size.

7. Suggestions

In conclusion, the relationships between reading scores, ASC and metacognitive reading strategies emphasize the importance of addressing both cognitive and emotional aspects in literacy instruction. To promote optimal reading outcomes, educators should focus on developing students' metacognitive skills, fostering positive academic self-concepts, and providing individualized support tailored to each student's needs.

Note on Ethical Issues

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