

Self-Esteem and Academic Performance of 4th Graders in two Elementary Schools in Kingston and St. Andrew, Jamaica

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Abstract: In 2005, 62% of pupils who sat the 4th grade literacy and numeracy examination attained mastery, which increased to 67% in 2009 from 50% in 2001. No study has examined the role of self-esteem on the academic performance of Jamaican 4th graders. The main objectives were, 1) evaluate the influence of self-esteem on academic performance, 2) determine factors that account for changes in self-esteem, and 3) examine factors of academic performance. The sample for this research was one hundred and twenty (120) respondents. Multiple regression techniques were conducted to identify variables explaining performance, with self-esteem being among the variables. A p-value ≤ 0.10 was used to indicate statistical significance. There is a positive correlation between self-esteem and academic performance ($r_s = 0.611$, $P < 0.0001$). Four variables emerged as statistically significant factors of self-esteem-academic performance, age of respondents, gender and parental behaviour, which explain 64.4% of the variability in self-esteem. Boys had a lower self-esteem ($b = -3.911$) than their female counterparts. Self-esteem is the most influential factor that account for academic performance. Of the nine variables used, four emerged as explaining academic performance, which explained 73.6% of the variability in academic performance. The emerging findings and knowledge gleaned from this work present a critical guide and a framework for policy practitioners to implement measure that can effectively address low performance among 4th graders.

Key words: Academic performance, Jamaica, parental involvement, preparatory school, primary school, self-esteem, teachers' behavior

INTRODUCTION

For some time now, there is a public discourse that something is fundamentally amiss with the educational system in Jamaica. The justifications for such a discussion is based on the low performance of students on the Caribbean Examination Council's examinations (CXC), Grade Six Achievement Test (G-SAT - formerly Common Entrance Examination), Advanced Level Examinations, literacy and numeracy rate of the populace and the number of students who are literate on leaving secondary schools. Statistics revealed that between 2000-2009, less than 40% of Jamaicans annually have failed CXC mathematics (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2000-2011). On disaggregating the CXC mathematics results, there is a clear disparity between the passes of those students in traditional compared with those in non-traditional (currently upgraded high) schools. Pupils who attended non-traditional high schools performed poorly compared to their traditional high school counterparts (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2000-2010). In 2007, a study conducted by Powell and colleagues, using a probability

sample of one thousand, three hundred and thirty eight (1,338) Jamaicans, found that school and education was listed among the top three national problems in the country (Powell *et al.*, 2007). The problems in the educational system, therefore, have surpassed corruption, poverty, cost of living, health care and governance, indicating people's dissatisfactions with the performance (or lack) among students who attend schools.

(Abbot 1993 in Bourne, 2004) posited that Jamaica is one of the countries in the Third World and the Western Hemisphere with the highest failure rate in the Principles of Accounts Examination at the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level. It may seem surprising that the performance of our students is that low; but the failure rate for mathematics and English language is even lower than for accounts (Cambridge University, 1991-2004; Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 1989-2000). In 1991, statistics revealed that 65.0% of Jamaicans have at most primary level education, with 94.5% having at most secondary level education (Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 1999). In 2001, 70% of children in primary and all-age schools were literate, (Statistical Institute of Jamaica,

2002) and in 2007 at most primary level education was 32.9% and 81.6% with at most secondary (Boxill *et al.*, 2007).

Even before sitting CXC or CAPE examination or attending post-secondary education, the low performance of Jamaicans pupils at the primary level warranted a modification of the curriculum. It was poor performance of primary (including preparatory) schools students that saw the introduction of the grade four (4) literacy examination and a modification of the Common Entrance Examination [currently Achievement Test (G-SAT)] that was used to place students in the academic oriented secondary educational institutions (or traditional high schools). In 2005, 62% of pupils who sat the 4th grade literacy and numeracy examination attained mastery, which increased to 67% in 2009 from 50% in 2001 (Roxborough-Wright, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2009). On disaggregating the results by typology of schools (primary and preparatory), it was revealed that preparatory schools' students had a level degree of mastery (71%) compared to primary schools' pupils (67%) (Ministry of Education, 2009). The percent of students receiving mastery at one public school (St. Michael Primary) was as low as 31% (Ministry of Education, 2009), indicating that the Jamaican educational system has failed the pupils.

The contemporary educational system in Jamaica was framed from the British system. The grammar schools (traditional high schools) were established to train pupils for further studies as well as supply 'high quality' labour to the productive sectors. Statistics showed that less than 15% of the population has had post-secondary level education and the majority has had at most secondary level training (Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 1999), which means that the problems which emerged in the primary level continued and reflected in the low post-secondary attainment.

According to Bourne (2004): In Western civilization, examinations have been used as the method of assessing peoples' aptitude and abilities. That social reality means that there is skewness towards examination results in quantifying academic performance. Within this construct, the yardstick for evaluating an individual's knowledge reservoir, skills level and competence in performing a particular task is normally an examination. As such, for an individual to be considered an authority within any field, s/he is expected to have successfully sat various examination(s). Consequently, the formal education is the metre used for assessing future social development, and this plays a determining role in even success. Hence, this criterion, according to many stakeholders, in judging competence is crucial evidence that is used to evaluate

learned skills, knowledge, expertise and standards to which teachers are assessed and must apply within the classroom. As such, this determines to a larger degree that aptitude, which would be a classroom phenomenon (Bourne, 2004).

Bourne's perspective highlights the emphasis that is placed on examination in evaluating the performance of students (from basic or pre-school to university). Empirical evidence has established an association between self-esteem and academic achievement (Auer, 1992; Benham, 1993; Klein and Keller, 1990; Solley and Stagner, 1956). It can be deduced from the aforementioned works that failure on examinations further deteriorate the self-esteem of young children, particularly those who had low esteem in the first place. Stipek (1984) posited that children enter school expecting to be successful and feeling good about themselves, and they are not concerned about achievement outcomes. The socialization of children places emphasis on performance, which denotes that over time they will be cognizant of their social role and grades will become a part of the focus.

With the continuous measurement of performance, particular academic, pupils with low self-esteem could be destroyed long before reaching secondary level education. The manner in which children are given feedback on their performance during the development, their cognitive development would be the difference between future failure and excellence, particularly of the social background and transferred self-esteem. Importantly, children will come to accept the emphasis of external valuation for achievement that is common in the school system (Stipek, 1984). It can be deduced from Stipek's work that both academic performance and interpersonal relationship are influenced by self-esteem over the cover of daily interactions.

With studies establishing that self-esteem influences academic performance (Auer, 1992; Benham, 1993; Klein and Keller, 1990; Solley and Stagner, 1956), does self-esteem offer an explanation for the low academic performance of 4th graders in Jamaica? Self-esteem is focused on feelings of personal worth and the level of satisfaction regarding one's self, suggesting that self-esteem is shaped by self-concept. Self-concept is the totality of a complex, organized and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be true about his/her personal existence (Purkey, 1988). This concept of self impacts the academic performance of students (Purkey, 1970). Self-concept and self-esteem of children are framed by parental upbringing, which offers some explanation for academic performance.

There exists great deal of research that concluded that family support is a major influence of self-esteem. One

study analysed group data of the family structure, function and support of nine hundred and thirteen (913) mothers and their one (1) year old children (Yabiku *et al.*, 1999). Parenting (including guardianship) plays an integral part in the development of self-esteem in children, later success on examinations, life and general well being. One scholar provided a particularly compelling view of self-esteem that offers justification for quality of life, performance on examination and life satisfaction (including happiness). According to Brandon (1994) self-esteem has two interrelated aspects, self-efficacy and self-respect. Self-efficacy relates to the sense of personal efficacy or confidence in one's ability to think and act. Self-respect speaks to an affirmative attitude towards one's right to live and to be happy. In a succinct manner, self-esteem is the disposition to experience oneself as component to cope with challenges of life and to be deserving of happiness. Most people's feelings and thoughts about themselves fluctuate based of their daily experiences. This encapsulates examination scores, social interaction (including romantic relationship) and general quality of life. Brandon opined that people with poor basic self-esteem that the "ups and downs" in life may make all the difference in the world (Brandon, 1994).

An extensive search of the literature found no research that has examined self-esteem and academic performance of 4th graders in Jamaica. The current work will fill the gap in the literature. The objectives of the present work are:

- Academic performance is determined by particular demographic characteristics and self-esteem among some 4th graders in two Corporate Area primary and preparatory schools in Jamaica
- Self-esteem is influenced by social and psychological factors as well as academic performance among some 4th graders in two Corporate Area primary and preparatory schools in Jamaica.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Self esteem has long been considered an essential component of good health. It is a widely used concept both in popular language and psychology. Self esteem is a set of attitudes and beliefs that a person brings with himself/herself to the world. It includes beliefs as to whether he or she can expect success or failure. How much effort should be put forth into activities, whether failure at a task will "hurt" or "benefit" the individual and whether he or she will become more capable as a result of difficult experiences to cope in life is embedded in one's self-esteem (Brandon, 1994; Coppersmith, 1981). One of the areas in self-esteem research is the relationship between self esteem and academic achievement (Purkey,

1970). Simply put, the low (or high) can be attributed to the role of self-esteem. A group of academic researchers examining self-esteem found that it interfaces with mortality salience. They opined that:

Self-esteem confers resilience against the psychological threat of death, and therefore the findings provided direct support for a fundamental tenet of terror management theory regarding the anxiety-buffering role of self-esteem (Schmeichel *et al.*, 2009; 1077)

Schmeichel and colleagues' work emphasized the role of self-esteem in life, life survival and holds the key in understanding how cognitive development can be enhanced or harmed by self-esteem, which is a justification for the performance. According to Baumeister *et al.* (2003), self-esteem is strongly associated with happiness, confidence, and a moderate relationship with academic performance. They also found, that individuals with high self-esteem are likely to do better on the jobs and with particular tasks (work performance) than those with low self-esteem (Baumeister *et al.*, 2003, 36; Campbell and Fehr, 1990; Brockner, 1983; Tharenou, 1979). Other studies have disagreed with the correlation between self-esteem and performance (Wallace and Baumeister, 2002). In fact, Wallace and Baumeister (2002), using arithmetic problem with varying degree of challenges, found that the students' self-esteem did not affect their performance which had already been established on a test of nonverbal intelligence (Baumeister *et al.*, 1993). However, other empirical studies have established a statistical correlation between self-esteem and academic performance (Wylie, 1979; Hansford and Hattie, 1982; Simon and Simon, 1975). Other studies have found statistical correlation between self-esteem and academic performance; but, they noted that this was weak (Davies and Brember, 1999; Kugle *et al.*, 1983). Howerton *et al.* (1994), when further as they found that self-esteem can predict grades and school achievement. Clearly there are different sides to the discourse on self-esteem and performance (including academic achievement). Self-esteem seems to hold some explanation for academic performance, which means that it is worth exploring in details.

Theories on self esteem: The most broad and frequent cited definition of self esteem within psychology is Rosenberg's (1965), who described it as a favourable or unfavourable attitude towards the self. Self esteem is generally considered the evaluative component of self concept, a broader representation of the self that includes cognitive behavioural aspects as well as evaluative or effective ones (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1991). Wilson (2002) suggested that basic self esteem is a standard by which a person judges her/himself, an estimate, a feeling, and an emotion. This self evaluation is the single most

significant key to behaviour, which affects the thinking processes, emotions, desires, values, and goals. Brandon (1994) stated that to understand a person psychologically, it is vital to understand the nature a degree of self esteem. His definition is a synthesis of earlier interpretations. Brandon (1994) noted that there are two strands of self esteem that is competence and worthiness, but emphasized that the relationship between the two strands as another factor in understanding self esteem. He reiterated that self esteem "is the conviction that one is competent to live and worthy of living" (Brandon, 1994). He further posited that to understand a person psychologically, it is vital to understand the nature and degree of self-esteem as his definition is a synthesis of earlier interpretations. Brandon (1994) suggested that *The Six Pillars of Self Esteem*, which formed the foundation of self esteem are: 1) the practice of living consciously; 2) the practice of self acceptance; 3) the practice of self responsibility; 4) the practice of self assertiveness; 5) the practice of living purposefully, and 6) the practice of personal integrity.

The literature on self esteem promotes the outlook of self esteem as a construct that explains a person's ability to adapt to the environment. The inner balance and stability which each person achieve is directly related to their emotions, social relationships, and behaviours (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991; Brandon, 1969; Rosenberg, 1979).

James (1983) in his *Principle of Psychology* defined self esteem as being the sum of an individual's successes divided by what they think they ought to achieve. Self esteem can be increased by achieving greater successes and maintained by avoiding failures. Raised self esteem can be argued, also be achieved and maintained by adopting less ambitious goals. Self esteem was therefore defined as being competence- oriented but also opens to change. Alexander (2001), the founder of the Self Esteem Network in Britain, viewed self esteem as a syndrome, and as a set of indicators for well-being. The core of self esteem is an "unconditional appreciation of oneself" meaning an appreciation of both an individual's positive and negative potential in its fullest sense. Alexander also distinguished between 'trait' self esteem which reflects confidence or ability in a particular area, such as work or sport, and 'global' self esteem which is intrinsic worthiness regardless of what particular abilities or qualities an individual may possess.

Coppersmith (1981) in his study on the antecedent of self-esteem, suggested four major factors which are important in the development of self esteem:

- The treatment and acceptance received from significant others in life
- A person past success
- The value and aspiration which modifies and interpret a person's experiences
- How a person responds to devaluation

Self esteem is described by Coppersmith (1981) as a process of integration, where the individual becomes a member of the group and internalizes ideas and attitudes as a mirror image, via key figures and by observing actions and attitudes. Self esteem is a form of self protection since any loss of self esteem brings a feeling of distress. Since the presence of anxiety can minimize our self esteem, defenses allows the maintenance of an idealized image. This philosophy is supported by Diaz (1984) who posited that the events and the people which surrounds the individual have a direct relationship with the development of self esteem.

Additionally, recent research has examined the concept of protective factors in a wide range of adolescent risk behaviour and, increasingly, to understand adolescent's behaviour. One such protective factor is self esteem which refers to the positive or negative regard in which an individual holds him or herself. There is widespread recognition of self esteem's importance for resilience and personal well being in a variety of diverse contexts (Gecas and Seff, 1990; Rosenberg, 1979). Self esteem is important for personal well being because it motivates behaviour. Rosenberg (1979) suggested that the motivation to achieve and maintain self esteem is the most powerful in the entire human repertoire and motives. Even individuals with low self esteem are motivated to maintain that level of self worth and not feel any less worthy.

Although many scholars who study self esteem emphasized that low self esteem impairs effective decision-making (Tice, 1993), recent reviews and commentaries (Baumeister, 1996; Gecas and Seff, 1990) stressed that self esteem cannot be considered a panacea that protects youth from all manner of risk. (Baumeister, 1996) proposed that high self esteem is more a result than a cause of success behaviour. Similarly, Gecas and Seff (1990) suggested that self esteem must be combined with other positive characteristics for it to have salutary effects. Notwithstanding, Pearlin *et al.* (1981) postulated that dimension of self concept, such as self esteem are psychological resources upon which a person can draw to deal with problems.

Self Esteem and academic achievement: The relationship between self-esteem and academic performance has been well documented in the literature. Different studies have reached the conclusion that self esteem and academics are positively correlated (Bankston and Zhou, 2002; Lockett and Harrell, 2003). Similarly, Wylie (1979) found a positive correlation between self esteem and academic performance ($r_s = 0.30$) as students with greater self-esteem had higher grade point average. Another study, conducted by Carr *et al.* (1991) found self-esteem to be a significant predictor of reading awareness as pupils with higher self-esteem were more able to read and reading ready compared to those with lower self-esteem. They had used pre-and-post test, and found

greater score among those with higher self-esteem. Like Car and colleagues, Kugle *et al.* (1983) had found earlier, that direct relationship between reading achievement and self-esteem ($r_s = 0.18$). However, when they controlled for ethnicity, the association between self-esteem and reading achievement disappeared.

From a standard achievement test, using 3,001 British pupils, Davies and Brember (1999) found a weak positive correlation between self-esteem and better academic performance, indicating that positive self-esteem is good for academic performance. Even before Davies and Brember's work, Simon and Simon (1975) had found a positive correlation on IQ test and self-esteem ($r_s = 0.33$), which means that feeling good about one's self will mean a greater score on an IQ test. Purkey (1970) found that self esteem is positively related to some components of success, academic or verbal performance. Like other studies, Purkey work showed that a positive concept of self is highly likely to directly influence better scores on particular test. He concluded that there is a continuous interaction between self esteem and academic achievement, as the pupil thinking better of himself/herself transfer this positive self-image into challenging issues and difficult things can be tackled with more ease. Hence, the desire to succeed is greater and the willingness to confront challenges is transferred to problem-solving and reading. Covington (1989) reported that as the level of self esteem increases, so does the level of academic achievement scores but as the level of self esteem decreases, achievement declines. He concluded that self esteem can be modified through direct instructions which can lead to achievement gains.

However, there has been conflicting reports showing positive and negative relationship between self esteem and academic performance. Van Tuinen and Ramanaiah (1979) researched the prediction of academic performance of specific and global self esteem in undergraduate students. He reported that specific self esteem was a significant predictor of actual performance on concept attainment tasks, whereas global self esteem was not an adequate predictor. Yogev and Ilan (1987) produced a conflicting report that self esteem was generally not related to educational aspirations, but the relationship was important to some student's feeling competence. The differences in the reports can be attributed to differences in the conceptions and definitions of: general and specific self concept, self concept and self esteem. However, other studies supported the relationship between high self esteem and academic achievement in school age children (Purkey, 1970).

There are many critiques to the "self esteem perspective" in the academic field. Some argued that when self esteem is pursued in the context of making students feel good about themselves, this misconception can lead to indiscriminate praise and the assumption that one should protect his or her student from failure (Baumeister, 1996; Learner, 1996). These theorists suggested that students who feel good and are satisfied

with their work do not necessarily achieve or develop habits that lead to success. These criticisms are justified. There is little evidence that students who are indiscriminately praised and protected from failure do in fact develop genuine self esteem

In fact, others argued that there is a distinction between genuine self esteem versus narcissism or self – aggrandizement. Katz (1993) suggested that there is a clear difference between the two as genuine self esteem has little to do with the feelings reported by students. In fact, feelings have unconscious self beliefs, formed over a life time, reflecting our perceptions of our abilities, our lovability, and how we attribute causality for the events in our lives. These unconscious self –perception have been molded, often deeply, into our being and therefore can only be altered by significant and repeated new experiences that reconditions our hearts and minds.

Self esteem development in children: Cooley (1902) contributed the theory of the "looking glass self," which states that people see themselves through the eyes of others. Interestingly, Rosenberg (1965) posited that as early as age five (5) or six (6) years old children role playing abilities are sufficiently developed to enable them to consider the perceived judgments and reaction of others. However, they are unable to make sophisticated social comparisons or reflected appraisals at least until age seven (7) or eight (8). What matters most to children is that they feel they matter to their parent, that is they feel that they are of value to their parents, and that they think their parents care about what happens to them. Rosenberg (1965) also found that students who believed that their parents lacked interest in them had much lower levels of self esteem. He stated further that when children enter school, the self portrait consists of a social exterior and their judgment of themselves in seven dimensions: Physical appearance, physical abilities, peer relation, parent's relation, reading, math, and school subjects. There is also some evidence that by 4th grade that they have a perception of their character, their personal responsibilities, as well as the other dimensions.

Low self-esteem youngsters are three times as likely as those with high self-esteem to report average or below average expectations of being successful at their adult work. They are more apt to express negative attitudes towards school and their classmates. Adolescents tend to be highly introspective and self-conscious. Their thoughts often center on their fears, desires, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations. Their feelings about self vary considerably. Rosenberg (1965) further stated that in one extensive study 60% percent of adolescents had feelings that were unpredictable; 29% had stable self-feelings, and 11% were unstable or oscillating. Most had positive feelings in some situations and negative feelings in others. By the end of 8th grade more that one-third had consistently high global self-esteem. Thirty-one percent experienced reasonably high self-esteem and a modest gain in feelings of self-worth over the past two (2) years. One-fifth (12%)

reported a decline in self-esteem after entering Junior High School and 13% had low self-esteem throughout Middle School. Those with declining self-esteem had more psychological symptoms, fluctuating academic records, diminished peer support and increased depression. Findings showed that young people gained greater stability in self-feeling, fewer disruptions, and milder fluctuations as they leave adolescence.

Scarr and Thompson (1994) proposed that children's academic and social competence can be predicted mainly by their family background, it may be anticipated that parents' psychological support in children's educational expectancy would be the most influential among all other sources of support. However, early adolescents' relation with peers provides them with experiences unique in shaping their personalities and beliefs. The time adolescents spend with peers is only rivaled by their parents (Hartup, 1983). Moreover, some researchers have suggested that the teacher is unlikely to be more influential than other facilitators of change (Hattie, 1992) because in the school setting, the teacher is the most salient source of feedback for a student's academic proficiency. In fact, it contends further, that the teacher is the most powerful source of reinforcement in the formation of academic self esteem and development of academic behaviour. Therefore from the literature of self concept and person-environment, both personal expectancy in educational achievement and perceived support from significant others would have significant positive impact on self esteem, interest in schoolwork and overall academic performance.

Teacher's impact on students' via self esteem on academic achievement: In study done by Simon and Simon (1975), they discovered that children's self esteem experienced a self- fulfilling prophecy related to poor performance. This they said occurred when a child's parents and/ or teacher developed a negative view of the child over time. This view was supported by Berk (2003) who concluded that the child will personally adopt that view for him or herself and perform accordingly. Similarly, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1966) demonstrated that the teacher's expectancies significantly affect students' performance and gains in IQ scores. Moreover, a large scale study composed of one thousand, five hundred and thirty- nine (1,539) children demonstrated that teacher's underestimation of students' academic achievement potential significantly predicted future achievements. (Madon *et al.*, 1997)

Similarly, Marchesi and Martin (2002) postulated that the key element for the pupil's personal and academic development is the value given from teacher to pupil and vice versa are usually reciprocal, highlighting additionally the personal relationship. These same authors found that the teacher's expectations have significantly influenced student's results. For them, the teachers' assessment is mediated by two variables: 1) the student's intelligence, that is, the greater the intelligence, the better the academic

results and the better the reciprocal appreciation between teacher and student, and 2) family support for study also makes the student value his teacher highly (Castejon and Perez, 1998). Other studies found positive relationships between the teacher's motivation and that of the student (Atkinson, 2000). Teacher- pupil relations are also mediated by the teacher's attribution of poor performance to the student (Georgiou *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, children whose potential is underestimated by either parents or teachers may experience low self esteem and perform cognitively at a level lower than they are capable of. This might occur as a result of the manner in which teachers communicate and encourage students, as teachers provide more attention and positive feedback to those students for which high expectations are held.

Parents income impact on self esteem via academic performance: It is argued that social class is mediated in a cultural level, which in turn determines family expectation, values and attitudes regarding education. In other words, motivation to succeed depends more on the parents' level of learning than on their level of income (Llorente, 1990). Other studies indicated that the most influential family components on performance are not socio-cultural or economic, but rather those pertaining to the affective or psychological dimensions: that is, although good academic preparation is provided by the parent, and a positive cultural environment, favour scholastic performance, it is the affective and rational variables which stands out the most as factors that contributes to better performance.

The influence of the family's educational environment is defined by the parenting style or help that the child receives from the family; this is determined by elements of the family context, like the dynamics of communication and psychological relationships, attitudes towards values and expectations (Marchesi and Martin, 2002). They postulated further that parents' expectations have a notable influence on academic results, even when controlling for initial knowledge and socio economic context.

Castejon and Perez (1998) found indirect relationships with performance and students' perception of how much importance his or her parents assigned to studying at home. Other studies showed that the level of family cohesion (Caplan *et al.*, 2002) and family relationships (Buote, 2001) proved themselves capable of predicting performance. The parenting style is also influential both in students' educational process as well as in family- school relations; research such as that by Moos and Moos (1976) demonstrated that positive family environment favors the development of well-shaped, mature, stable and integrated subjects, and an unfavourable family climate promotes non- adaptive, immaturity, and lack of balance and insecurity.

Peers impact on student's self esteem and academic performance: Peers' influence on the child's

development occurs by similar mechanisms as those used by adults: reinforcement, modeling and direct teaching and skills. Interaction with peers also promotes acquisition of social competencies such as controlling aggressive impulses and the expression of prosocial behaviours. In relation to academic performance, the sociometric status of the student's influences performance both directly and indirectly, since it is influenced by intelligence (Castejon and Perez, 1998). Other research also shows that positive correlation exist between performance and peer relationships (Buote, 2001), while Montero (1990) demonstrated in another study that students failing in school are those most rejected by their group class.

In summary, the literature provided a platform upon which a study on academic performance of 4th graders in two primary level schools (including all-age and preparatory) can be examined. Unlike the literature this research is different as it examines more variables and in a single work evaluates students, parents and teachers in order to frame a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The literature has shown two sides to the discourse on the influence of self-esteem, teachers and parents on academic performance.

METHODOLOGY

Historically, scientific inquiry was based on logic, precision, general principles, principles of verification, the standard of rigor, gradual development, "search for truth" and proofs (Balashow and Rosenberg, 2002). The proofs were critical to the pure sciences before the establishment of laws, principles, theories and apparatuses. Traditionally, science therefore, was guided by positivism (Polgar and Thomas, 2008; Crotty, 2005). Positivism holds itself to:

- The collection of quantitative data
- Separation of the researcher from the research process
- Objectivity
- Measurability
- Generalizability
- Repetition

Thus, when the social science was born, the researchers embodied inquiries using the same approaches as the pure sciences. It follows that what was known about human behaviour had to be discovered through positivism and/or logical positivism. Social sciences like the natural sciences, was guided by logic (the study of valid forms of reasoning), metaphysics, the fundamental finds of things that really exist and the justification of knowledge (epistemology) which saw experimentative research been widely used to conduct inquiries. Science therefore was about the study of truth and not meanings (Balashow and Rosenberg, 2002). Why people do things, (i.e., meaning) was not important in research it was rather

about the discovery of truth and not merely empirical research.

While empiricism is responsible for plethora of germane and critical discoveries that have aided humans' existence, it fails to explore potent things about people. Peoples' behaviours are not predictable, stationary, and while some generalizability exist therein, the 'whys' (meanings) are still unasked with the use of empirical inquiry (or objectivity and measurability). Qualitative inquiry mitigates against some of the inadequacies of objectivity, provides rich data on humans' experiences, and aids in a total understanding of people (Balashow and Rosenberg, 2002; Silverman, 2005; Neuman, 2003; Kuhn, 1996; Berg, 2001; Burnham *et al.*, 2004; Goel, 1988) Thus, qualitative inquiry should not therefore be seen as an alternate paradigm to quantitative inquiry, but as a member of the understanding apparatus. This supports Schlick (1979) argument that we cannot know the truth without knowing the meaning.

Max Weber (1949, 1974, 1981) was the first to argue that an 'Interpretivism' approach can be employed in the examination of social phenomenon, read also (Haralambus and Holborn, 2002). Weber opined that why human behave the way they do is lost in quantitative methodologies (or positivism). He therefore, forwarded the use of subjectivity (feels, beliefs or meanings) in social inquiry (Rabinow and Sullivan, 1979).

One scholar (Kuhn, 1996) argued that science not only embodies objectivity, logic, precision and general principles as humans are social beings (Kuhn, 1996). As such, we must understand the meaning behind their behaviour which cannot be found by the use of objective methodologies. This gives rise to the use of subjective methodologies. One such subjective methodology which is long established in the literature is phenomenology (Crotty, 2005; Silverman, 2005; Neuman, 2003; Berg, 2001; Burnham *et al.*, 2004; Goel, 1988; Hakim, 1987; Booth *et al.*, 2008; Babbie, 2007). Phenomenology is one of the methodologies in qualitative research that evolved from revolution of science. It focuses on a particular issue. The current work examines a phenomenon (Performance of Grade 4 children in two selected primary and preparatory schools in the Corporate Area) and within the context of meanings, the researcher believes that this is best fitted for the work. This will be accommodated with particular methods:

- Case study
- Document analysis
- Statistical analysis
- Interviews
- Narrative (Babbie, 2007; Neuman, 2003; Burnham *et al.*, 2004; Booth *et al.*, 2008; Silverman, 2005).

The current work is a descriptive study (Davis, 2005; Polgar and Thomas, 2008) which examined a single phenomenon, using a mixed methodology approach (Neuman, 2003; Babbie, 2007). Based on the type of

research, the researcher reviewed documents, interviewed teachers, used a survey approach as well as narrative in order to comprehensively understand the phenomenon. This research is a case study. According to a scholar, "Case Studies involve in-depth contextual analyses of similar situations in organizations, where the nature and definition of the problem happens to be the same as experienced in the current situation" (Sekaran, 2006). This Case Study which focuses on a single phenomenon has three tenets-the students, parents and teachers. Clearly a problem exists in Jamaica where policy makers have been restructuring curriculum in order to address the low literacy and numeracy in the primary (including preparatory) school system. The examination of this phenomenon will provide pertinent information that will guide future policy and research. Babbie (2007) asserts that this type of research is generally done for three main purposes firstly, to satisfy interest and the need for more information on the topic. Secondly, to determine the viability of embarking on different types of research and this might be more costly.

Instrumentation: Questionnaires were the choice of reaching the targeted population as a result of the relative ease of distribution and return. According to Babbie (2007) a questionnaire is a collection of questions or items included on a document which is designed to solicit feedback that is suitable for an investigation or study. It is also believed that this method is more efficient and less time consuming which also allows for greater control over the administering and data collection process. The questionnaires sought to cover areas such as the demographics of sample, self-esteem, performance, and information on parents as well teachers. Three different questionnaires were administered to selected sub-sample -students, teachers, and parents.

The student's questionnaire comprised of thirty-four (34) close-ended questions. The average completion time was 10- 20 min. The open-ended questions are those in which the respondents were asked to provide their own answer to the questions and the space was provided to write in the answer. The close- ended questions are those where the respondents were asked to select an answer from among a list provided by the researcher (ie tick or circle). These type of questions were more frequently used as they provided greater consistency of responses and are more easily processed. These questions were typed and administered to respondents for completion. A trial testing of the questionnaires was done with some volunteers to identify likely ambiguity, grammatical errors, sentence structuring and ease of reading for respondents. From the trial testing, necessary corrections were made, and then the questionnaires were administered to the actual sample (Babbie, 2007).

Teacher questionnaire: The instrument (questionnaires) comprised of seventeen (17) open-ended and close-ended questions. The average completion time was 10-15

minutes . The open-ended questions are those in which the respondents are asked to provide their own answer to the questions and the space is provided to write in the answer (Items 4; 7-to-9). These will provide valuable narrative for the work, and pertinent insights to meanings, actions and behaviour. On the other hand, the closed ended questions are those where the respondents are asked to select an answer from among a list provided by the researcher. These types of questions are more frequently used as they provided greater consistency of responses and are more easily processed. These questions were typed and administered to respondents for completion. A trial testing of the questionnaires was done with some volunteers to identify likely ambiguity, grammatical errors, sentence structuring and ease of reading for respondents. From the trial testing, necessary corrections were made, and then the questionnaires were administered to the actual sample (Babbie, 2007).

Sample and sampling method: The sample for this research was one hundred and twenty (120) respondents, with a non-response rate of less than 5%. The eligibility and inclusion criteria were 1) being teachers of the 4th grade (from primary and preparatory schools-n = 30), 2) parents of 4th graders (n = 30) and 3) 4th grade students (n = 60). The targeted population excluded Ministry of Education personnel (Education officer), Bursars, Principals and Vice Principal (except they teaching a grade four class), pupils of grades 1-3, 5 and 6, administrative staffers, ancillary staffers and only included the aforementioned categories of people. The sample was parents, teachers and pupils who attend two primary and/or preparatory schools in the parishes of Kingston and St. Andrew (Rosa Mount Preparatory and Eva-Dean Primary schools-pseudo names) and were from varying economic backgrounds.

Non probability sample was used to find the respondents for the current study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample. The researcher selected the two schools based on the purpose of the study, and being familiar with at least a teacher and a parent at each location. The sample size was selected due to the time constraints and the difficulty of not having a population of all students during this time. Without having an access to a population of 4th graders in July, it was difficult to use any probability sampling technique to draw a sample. Hence, purposive sample technique was used by the researcher. A purposive (or judgmental) sampling technique was adopted in the study. According to Babbie (2007) sampling methods are referred to as either probability or non-probability. Non-probability method is based on personal judgment about some appropriate characteristics of the sample members. The researcher, knowing a few people who were teachers and parents, contacted and informed them of the interest, which resulted in seeking approval from the principals of the two named schools. Such an approach is purposive and non-probability in nature.

Effective use of purposive sampling techniques requires that the researcher utilizes his/her special knowledge or expertise of the subject that is largely representative of the population (Babbie, 2007). The researchers are *cognizant* of the structure and population of primary, all age and preparatory schools in the Corporate area, particularly Eva-Dean Primary and Rosa Mount Preparatory Schools-pseudo names. This structure is of such that each is headed by a principal, with vice-principal senior and junior teachers, administrative and ancillary staffers (including security guards).

DOCUMENT REVIEWS

The researcher reviewed written documents such as Ministry of Education Report, articles on self-esteem, performance, class report, statistical reports on the performance of grade four students in Jamaica. Both the Ministry of Education Report and the statistical reports outlined the performance of grade four students across Jamaica, and these were classified by parish and school type-primary, all age and preparatory schools. The review was to determine the performance of students, policies implemented by the Ministry of Education, and plans of the Ministry of Education, the extent to which the plans were working, issues of inequality in academic performance among 4th grade students and identify some causes. A major reason for the document review was to assist in triangulating and validating information obtained in the interview and surveys. Once scholars opined that interviews “rarely constitute the sole source of data in research” (Bryman, 2001), which was the rationale for multiple methods and approaches.

Statistical analysis: The close-ended questions from the items from the questionnaire were stored and retrieved in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences for Widows, version 17.0 (SPSS Inc; Chicago, IL, USA). Multiple regression techniques were conducted to identify variables explaining performance, with self-esteem being among the variables. A p value ≤ 0.10 was used to indicate statistical significance. Where collinearity existed ($r^2 > 0.75$), the variables were placed independently in order to determine whether to retain it in the final model construction (Polit, 1996). Outside of the OLS, descriptive statistics were done to provide pertinent information as well as bivariate analyses (including Chi-square, Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation). The open-ended questions were analyzed using a narrative and thematic approach (Silverman, 2005).

The results (data) were presented in tables and figures such as pie charts.

Operationalization of variables: Self-esteem is measured using Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Appendix). Questions 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 were reversed coded, and these were summed with questions 1, 3, 4, 7, and 10.

Gender is a dummied variable, where 1 = boys (male) and 0 = girls (female).

Distance from school which was a Likert scale question (Question 3) was coded into a dummy variable -1 = close to school (less than 1 ½ miles), 0 = far from school (1 ½+ miles). Self-esteem is coded based on the Rosenberg’s Foundation stipulations. Scoring: SA = 3, A = 2, D = 1, SD = 0. Items with an asterisk are reverse scored, that is, SA = 0, A = 1, D = 2, SD = 3. Sum the scores for the 10 items. The higher the score, the higher the self esteem. The scores range from 0 to 30.

School type was re-coded as a dummy variable -1 = Preparatory and 0 = otherwise.

With whom do you live was re-coded as a dummy variable -1 = guardian and other, 0 = otherwise.

Age cohort was re-coded as 1= younger ages (8-to-9 years) and 0 = otherwise (10-to-11 years old).

Occupation (questions 5 and 6) was re-coded as a dummy variable -1 = professional and 0 = otherwise.

The question, ‘Do your parents shout at you?’ was re-coded as 1= all the time and most times, 0 = otherwise.

The question, ‘Does your teacher shout at you?’ was re-coded as a dummy variable -1 = always and most times, 0 = otherwise.

Academic performance is the average scores for the final term of 2011 (June).

Ethical concerns: This study dealt with human subjects (teachers, parents and students), which is the justification for ethical issues. Among the ethical issues in social research (or natural) is the protection of the subjects (participants or respondents) as well as ensuring that the participants are never harmed, socially, psychologically or politically because of the study (Babbie, 2007; Neuman, 2003). The considerations of these ethical issues were necessary for the purpose of ensuring the privacy as well as the safety of the studied individuals. Among the ethical issues that were considered in the research process was consent before engagement in the study, relating the purpose of the work, ensuring confidentiality and secrecy. The respondents were advised that they could withdraw from the study at any point during the process. They were asked not to place their names on the instrument or any other personal identifier.

Limitations to the study: This study utilizes non-probability sampling technique which means that the results are:

- Non-generalizable
- Non-predictable
- Specialized to the respondents
- Non-repeatable.

However, these methods still provide insightful, rich and critical information about the studied phenomenon.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents by primary and preparatory schools

Characteristic	Preparatory (n = 17)		Primary (n = 15)	
	n	%	n	%
Gender				
Boy	11	64.7	4	26.7
Girl	6	35.3	11	73.3
Age cohort				
8 - 9 Years old	4	23.5	5	33.3
10 – 11 Years old	13	76.5	10	66.7
Distance from school				
½ Mile	5	29.4	4	26.7
1 Mile	2	11.8	2	13.3
1½ Miles	3	17.6	2	13.3
2 Miles	-	-	2	13.3
2+ Miles	7	41.2	5	33.3
Resides with				
Mother, only	5	29.4	6	40.0
Father, only	1	5.9	1	6.7
Aunt	1	5.9	2	13.3
Guardian	1	5.9	5	33.3
Both mother and father	9	52.9	1	6.7
Occupation - Mother				
Trades' woman	2	11.8	-	-
Home maker	2	11.8	-	-
Farmer	1	5.9	-	-
Professional	6	35.3	9	60.0
Service attendant	2	11.8	-	-
Business woman	3	17.6	1	6.7
Unemployed	1	5.9	-	-
Other	-	-	5	33.3
Occupation – Father				
Trades' man	1	5.9	4	26.7
Business man	9	52.9	8	53.3
Service attendant	2	11.8	-	-
Professional	2	11.8	2	13.3
Unemployed	2	11.8	-	-
Other	1	5.9	1	6.7
Perceived academic ability-bright				
Yes	16	94.1	13	86.7
No	1	5.9	2	13.3

Like Kuhn (1996) and Max Weber (in Haralambus and Holborn, 2002) have indicated, research is equally informative even when it is qualitative and non-probability sampling technique is utilised to collect the data.

FINDINGS

Table 1 displays information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the student participants. Of the 32 pupils in this study, 53.1% were from preparatory schools and the others are from the primary schools. Most of the pupils who attended preparatory schools resided with both biological parents (52.9%) compared with those who attended primary schools (6.7%). The majority of the students who attended primary schools, mothers were professionals (60%) compared with 35.3% of those in preparatory schools. Most of the students in both preparatory and primary schools indicated that their fathers were businessmen, 52.9 and 53.3% respectively. Seven per cent more students who attended preparatory schools indicated that they were bright (academic performance) compared with those in primary schools (86.7%).

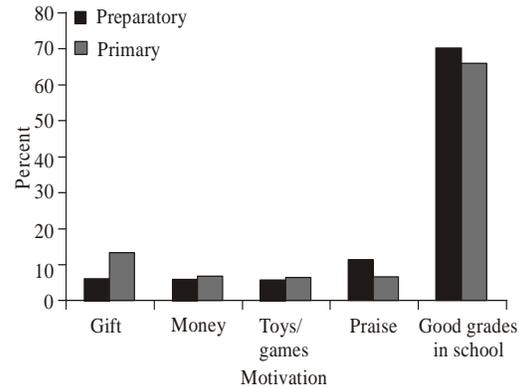


Fig. 1: Student response to big motivated

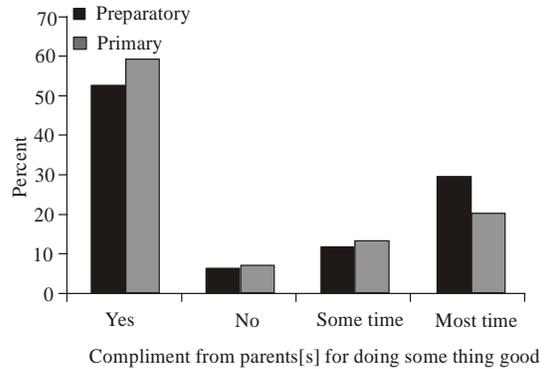


Fig. 2: Complement from parents to student for doing good deed

When the students were asked to explain “What makes you think that way [are you bright]”, the responses ranged from:

- High scores
- Effort
- Reasoning ability
- Potential
- Parental encouragement
- People’s perspective.

One pupil who responded no to the question perspective. One pupil who responded no to the question “Do you think you are a bright girl or boy? Gave the reason that “Because people tell me I am [a] dunce.”

When the pupils were asked ‘What motivates you as a person?’ the responses are represented in Fig. 1. The majority of pupils in both school types were motivated by the grades they received in schools.

Ninety-four per cent of the pupils indicated that they are compliment by their parent(s) for doing something good. Only 25% mentioned that they are compliment most times. Figure 2 presents the disaggregates of the responses of the pupils on “When you do something good; are you complimented by yours parent(s)? Marginally

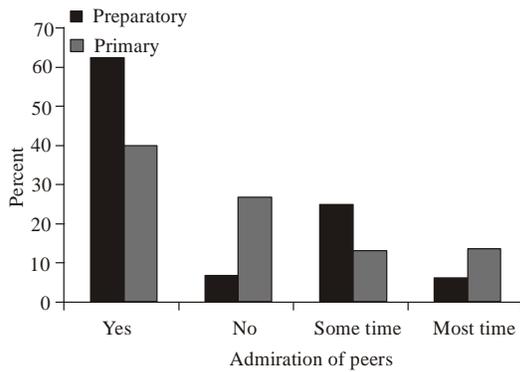


Fig. 3: Admiration of participants by peer

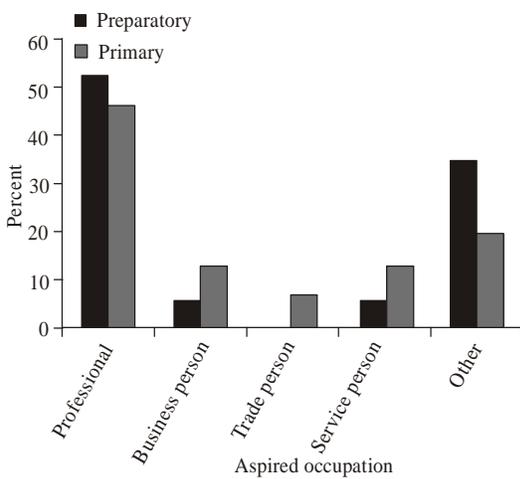


Fig. 4: Aspired occupation of students

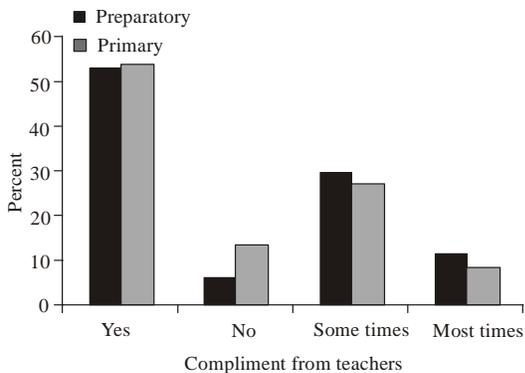


Fig. 5: Compliments to student from teachers

more of the students in primary schools indicated some times compared with their preparatory counterparts, with the reverse being the case for most time (Fig. 2).

Figure 3 displays pupils' responses on the admiration of their peers. Clearly, substantially more pupils who attended primary schools indicated that they are admired by their peer compared with those in preparatory schools.

Table 2: Selected variables on participants

C	Preparatory (n = 17)		Primary (n = 15)	
	n	%	n	%
Feeling after low performance				
Down	5	29.4	7	46.7
Self-pity	0	0	1	6.7
Depressed	1	5.9	2	13.3
Work harder	6	35.3	2	13.3
Motivated to do better	5	29.4	3	20.0
Feeling after doing something wrong				
Like crying	0	0	3	20.0
Do not care	2	11.8	2	13.3
Feel guilty	12	70.6	6	40.0
Feel sad	3	17.6	4	26.7
Feel good	0	0	0	0
Does you teacher shout at you?				
Always	0	0	1	6.7
Most times	4	23.5	1	6.7
Sometimes	11	64.7	10	66.7
Occasionally	0	0	0	0
Never	2	11.8	3	20.0
Feeling after doing something good				
Very happy	6	35.3	7	46.7
Somewhat happy	1	5.9	1	6.7
Happy	3	17.6	5	33.3
Great	7	41.2	2	13.3
Don't feel anyway	0	0	0	0
Frequency of class participation				
Always	7	41.2	3	20.0
Most times	7	41.2	3	26.7
Sometimes	3	17.7	8	53.3
Occasionally	0	0	0	0
Never	0	0	0	0
Confidence in class performance				
Very confident	7	41.2	5	33.3
Somewhat confident	5	29.4	2	13.3
Confident	4	23.5	7	46.7
Doubtful	1	5.9	0	0
Not confident	0	0	1	6.7

Fifty percent of the pupils indicated wanting to be a professional, with 28.1% indicated Other. Substantially more students in primary schools indicated wanting to be service providers and trades' person compared with those in preparatory schools. Six per cent more pupils of preparatory school want to be professionals compared to those in primary schools (46.7%) (Fig. 4).

Of the sample of students (n = 32), 9.4% indicated that they were not complimented by their teachers. Fig. 5 presents a disaggregation of the pupils' responses. Marginally more pupils who attended preparatory schools indicated being complimented most times by their teachers (3.1%) compared with their primary school counterparts (8.7%).

Table 2 presents information on selected variables of pupils. Substantially more students who attended primary schools indicated feeling down after a low test performance (46.7%) compared with those in preparatory schools (29.4%). The majority of pupils in both types of schools indicated that they have been shouted at (sometimes) by teachers. Almost 65% of those in preparatory schools mentioned sometimes compared

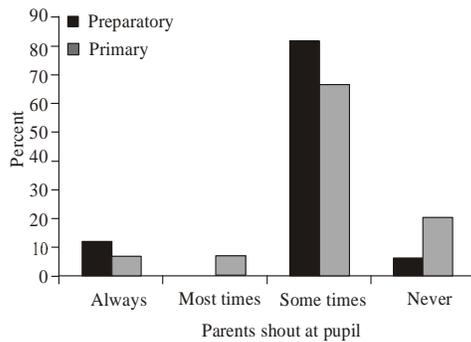


Fig. 6: Frequency of parents shouting at their children

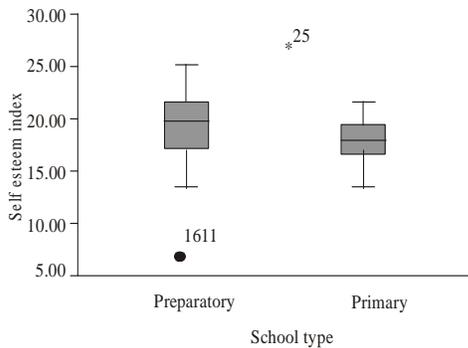


Fig. 7: Self-esteem index by school type

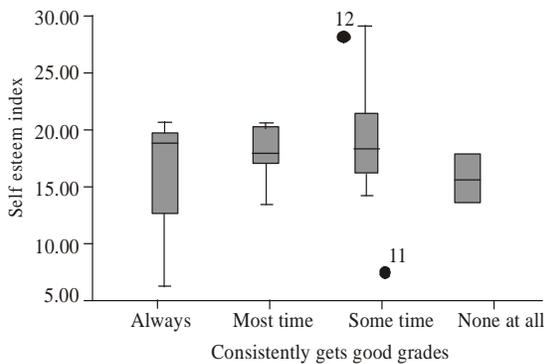


Fig. 8: Self-esteem index by consistently getting good grades (pupils)

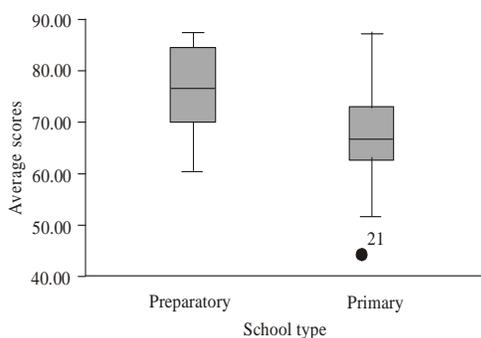


Fig. 9: Academic performance (average score) by school type

Table 3: Pearson's correlation of self-esteem index and average scores (academic performance)

		Self-esteem index	Average scores
Self-esteem index	Pearson correlation	1	0.611**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	32	32
Average scores	Pearson correlation	0.611**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	32	32

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

with 67% of those in primary schools. A preponderance of pupils in preparatory schools said they were frequently shouted at their teachers (23.5%) compared to their primary school counterparts (6.7%). Pupils in preparatory schools were more confident in their class performance (41.2%), unlike their primary school counterparts (33.3%). Two times more pupils in preparatory schools mentioned that they frequently participated in class (always) compared to those in primary schools (20%).

Seventy-five percent of pupils indicated that their parents shout at them sometimes, with 9.4% said always. Fig. 6 presents the disaggregation of the pupils' responses on the frequency of their parents shouting at them. Substantially more children in primary schools have never been shouted at (14/1%) compared to those in preparatory schools.

Figure 7 shows the self-esteem of pupils by school typology. The mean score for self-esteem of pupils in preparatory schools (20) is greater than that of those in primary schools (18). The lower self-esteem quartiles for both groups are the same. However, the upper self-esteem quartile is greater for those in preparatory schools (22 out of 30) compared with those in primary schools (20 out of 30).

Pupils who consistently get good grades had the greatest self-esteem compared with those who had never got good grades (Fig. 8).

The median score for the sample was 74%, with 25% received a score of 64%. Students in preparatory school on average received higher scores (78%) than their primary school counterparts (67%) (Fig. 9).

A moderate positive correlation exists between self-esteem index and academic performance of students, $r_s = 0.611$, $p < 0.0001$ (Table 3). This means that as self-esteem increases, academic performance improves and vice versa.

Table 4 presents variables that explain (or not) self-esteem of pupils in sample. Four variables emerged as statistical significant factors of self-esteem-academic performance, age of respondents, gender and parental behaviour, which explain 64.4% of the variability in self-esteem. Using beta weights, academic performance has the most influence on self-esteem followed by age, gender and parental behaviour. Boys had a lower self-esteem ($b = -3.911$) than their female counterparts (Table 4).

Self-esteem is the most influential factor that account for academic performance (using beta weights). Of the nine variables, four emerged as explaining academic

Table 4: Ordinary least square (OLS) regression of variables that explain self-esteem of pupils

Characteristic	Unstandardized coefficients		B	p- value	CI (95%)		Collinearity Statistics	
	B	S.E			Lower bound	Upper bound	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	6.925	6.684	0.310		- 6.869	20.719		
Academic performance	0.199	0.098	0.490	0.000	- 0.003	0.402	0.506	1.978
Younger ages	- 4.359	2.095	- 0.395	0.048	- 8.683	-0.034	0.818	1.222
Boys (1 = Yes)	- 3.911	1.967	- 0.393	0.012	-7.970	0.148	0.754	1.326
Preparatory school (1 = Yes)	- 1.396	2.136	- 0.140	0.520	- 5.805	3.012	0.639	1.564
Distance from school (1 = Close)	- 0.043	2.277	- 0.004	0.985	- 4.742	4.657	0.693	1.443
Shouting parent (1 = Yes)	3.075	2.896	0.205	0.030	- 2.902	9.053	0.792	1.263
Shouting teacher (1 = Yes)	0.659	2.472	0.052	0.792	- 4.443	5.761	0.780	1.282

R = 0.803; R² = 0.644; F-statistic [7, 24] = 4.423, p<0.002; N = 31

Dependent variable: Self-Esteem index

Table 5: Ordinary least square (OLS) regression of variables that explain academic performance of pupils

Characteristic	Unstandardized coefficients		β	Sig.	CI (95%)		Collinearity statistics	
	B	S.E			Lower	Bound upper	Bound tolerance	VIF
Constant	37.070	8.219		0.000	20.024	54.115		
Preparatory school	5.435	3.428	0.198	0.127	- 1.674	12.543	0.769	1.300
Distance from school	4.515	3.881	0.148	0.257	- 3.533	12.563	0.739	1.353
Mother professional	- 0.860	3.346	- 0.031	0.800	- 7.799	6.080	0.807	1.240
Father professional	- 7.356	5.149	- 0.178	0.167	- 18.034	3.322	0.776	1.289
Shouting parent	- 13.583	4.847	- 0.328	0.010	- 23.635	-3.531	0.875	1.142
Shouting teacher	- 10.227	4.177	- 0.292	0.023	- 18.890	-1.564	0.846	1.182
Boys	7.980	3.561	0.291	0.035	0.594	15.365	0.712	1.404
Younger ages	0.870	4.166	0.029	0.837	- 7.769	9.509	0.641	1.559
Self-esteem index	1.723	0.349	0.624	0.000	0.998	2.447	0.749	1.334

R = 0.858; R² = 0.736; F-statistic [9, 22] = 6.815, p<0.000; N = 31

Dependent variable: Academic performance

performance (p<0.001), which explain 73.6% of the variability in academic performance (Table 5). The findings show that boys were performing better than girls.

Table 6 presents information on the profile of the teachers. Almost 52% of the teachers were from preparatory schools. Thirty-three per cent of the sample indicated that they always teach self-esteem in class. Substantially more teachers in the primary schools do this compared to those in preparatory schools.

Less than 7% of teachers indicated below 15% of the class are at or above the class level (Table 7). Eight-eight per cent of the teachers said that less than 15% of the class is below the grade level; and 87.9% of teachers mentioned that after praising the children, it results in behavioural changes at least most of the times.

When the teachers were asked to give their views on performance and self-esteem among students within their class, many responded as follows:

- Generally, students have a high self-esteem
- Those with low self-esteem are normally withdrawn
- Children perform better when they are not plagued by self-esteem problems
- Those who exhibit higher self-esteem are usually the better performers
- Self-esteem is important for high academic performance

- Social and financial hardship is a barrier to academic performance and high self-esteem
- Self-esteem influences academic performance and assertiveness
- Motivated students will give greater academic performance

Varying reasons were given for the identification of those with low self-esteem. These were:

- Low academic performance
- Less self-expression
- Low level of confidence
- Withdrawal
- Shyness
- Interpersonal behavioural problems

When asked ‘How do you respond to your students when they do something good?’ the teachers wrote the following:

- Verbal commendation
- Applause from peers
- Certificate for good behaviour
- Positive reinforcement-books, goodies, stickers, smiling faces
- Hugs
- Kisses

Table 6: Profile of teacher based on sampled respondents

Characteristic	Preparatory (n = 17)		Primary (n = 16)	
	n	%	n	%
Gender				
Male	6	35.3	3	18.8
Female	11	64.7	13	81.2
Age cohort				
16-25 years	2	11.8	1	6.3
26-35 years	5	29.4	7	43.8
36-45 years	6	35.3	7	43.8
46-50 years	4	23.5	1	6.3
50-59 years	0	0.0	0	0.0
Teaching self-esteem in class				
Always	3	21.4	8	50.0
Most times	7	50.0	6	37.5
Sometimes	3	21.4	21	2.5
Seldom	1	7.2	0	0.0
Never	0	0.0	0	0.0
Identification of low self-esteem				
Outward appearance	5	29.5	6	40.0
Work output	4	23.5	2	13.3
Academic performance	4	23.5	2	40.0
Otherwise	4	2.5	1	6.7
Teachers should be trained to deal with low self-esteem pupils				
Strongly agree	10	58.8	13	81.3
Somewhat agree	4	23.5	1	6.3
Agree	3	17.6	2	12.4
Strongly disagree	0	0.0	0	0.0
Disagree	0	0.0	0	0.0
Students' perception of self				
Winners	5	29.4	8	53.3
High achievers	8	47.1	2	13.3
Role model for their Peers	1	5.9	1	6.7
Leaders	2	11.8	4	26.7
Failure	1	5.9	0	0.0

The responses on 'How do you respond to your students when they do something wrong/bad?' included:

- Reprimand
- Scolding
- Retract reward
- Encourage better behaviour
- Punishment by sending pupil to naught corner
- Encourage improvement
- Pray with them
- Writing lines
- Let the child evaluate his/her behaviour and recommend changes.

Table 8 presents information on selected characteristics of parents, perception of self-esteem and intended occupation of child. It was revealed that no of the parents want their children to be police personnel. However, marginally more of the parents of children in primary schools want their children to be medical doctors compared with those of preparatory pupils. Six per cent more parents of children in primary school had tertiary level education compared with those of preparatory school pupils.

Eighteen per cent more parents of primary school pupils indicated that they always aid in the development

Table 7: Teachers' perception of students in regard performance and self-esteem

Characteristic	Preparatory (n = 17)		Primary (n = 16)	
	n	%	n	%
% of class at or above class level				
5	1	5.9	0	0.0
10	0	0.0	1	6.3
15	1	5.9	0	0.0
20	5	29.4	8	50.0
20+	10	58.8	7	43.7
% of class below class level				
5	8	47.1	8	50.0
10	6	35.3	7	43.7
15	1	5.9	0	0.0
20	0	0.0	1	6.3
20+	2	11.8	0	0.0
% of class with positive self-esteem				
5	1	5.9	0	0.0
10	2	11.8	1	6.3
15	0	0.0	8	50.0
20	5	29.4	1	6.3
20+	9	52.9	6	37.4
Does socio-economic background affect self-esteem?				
Strongly agree	4	23.5	3	18.8
Somewhat agree	8	47.1	10	62.5
Agree	5	29.4	3	18.8
Disagree	0	0.0	0	0.0
Strongly disagree	0	0.0	0	0.0
Does behaviour change after praising a child?				
Always	5	29.4	7	46.7
Most times	10	58.8	7	46.7
Sometimes	2	11.8	1	6.7
Seldom	0	0.0	0	0.0
Never	0	0.0	0	0.0

Table 8: Particular characteristics parents, perception of self-esteem and intended occupation of child

Characteristic	Preparatory (n = 17)		Primary (n = 17)	
	n	%	n	%
Characteristic gender				
Male	4	23.5	4	23.5
Female	13	76.5	13	76.5
Age cohort				
16-25 years	2	11.8	3	17.6
26-35 years	8	47.1	5	29.4
36-45 years	5	29.4	3	47.1
46-50 years	2	11.8	4	5.0
50+ years	0	0.0	0	0.0
Educational achievement				
Tertiary-BSc, MSc, PhD	9	52.9	7	41.2
Diploma	1	5.9	2	11.8
Secondary	6	35.3	7	41.2
All-age	0	0.0	1	5.9
Primary	0	0.0	0	0.0
Vocational	1	5.9	0	0.0
Self-Esteem is				
Feeling good about oneself	11	68.8	13	76.5
Aware of oneself	2	12.5	0	0.0
Personal gratification	2	12.5	3	17.6
Success	1	6.3	1	5.9
Happiness	0	0.0	0	0.0
Intended occupation of child				
Doctor	3	18.8	2	12.6
Nurse	0	0.0	1	6.3
Teacher	0	0.0	1	6.3
Police	0	0.0	0	0.0
Information technologist	3	18.8	2	12.6
Lawyer	1	6.3	4	25.0
Other	9	56.3	6	37.5

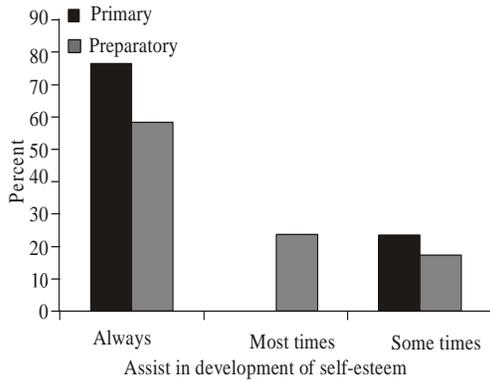


Fig. 10: Assist in the development of self-esteem of child by school type

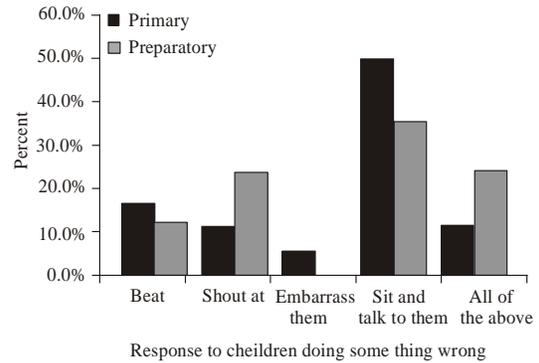


Fig. 13: Parental response to children doing something wrong by school type

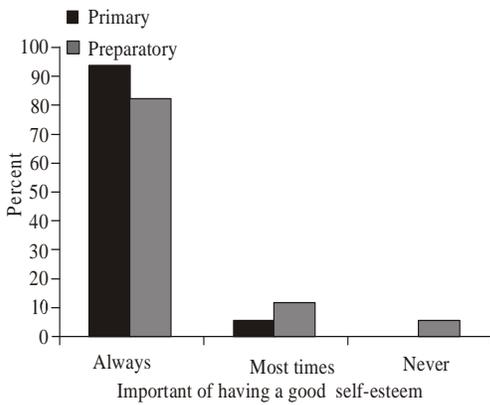


Fig.11: Parental perception: Importance of having a good self-esteem by school type

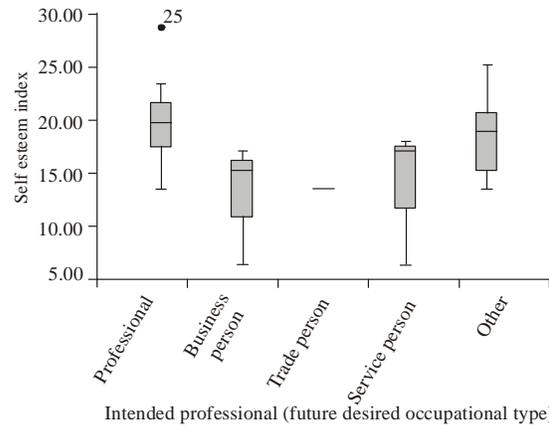


Fig. 14: Future desired occupational type and self-esteem index of pupils

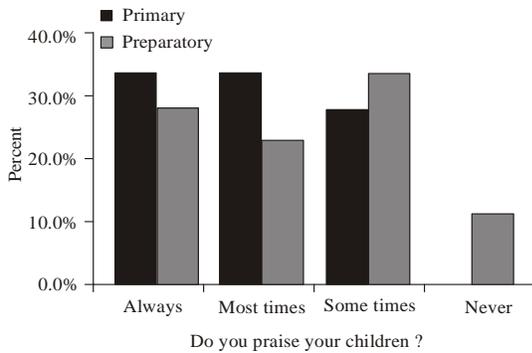


Fig. 12: Comparative praises of children by parents of preparatory and primary schools

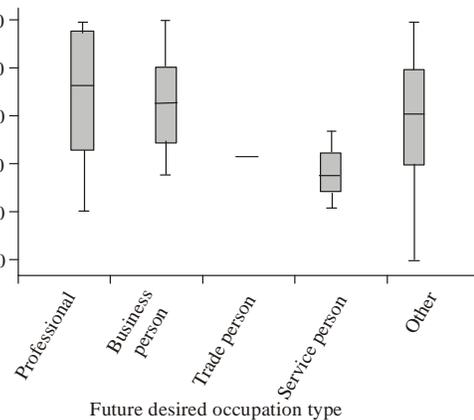


Fig. 15: Future desired occupational type and average scores of pupils

of their child’s self-esteem compared with parents of children in preparatory schools (Fig. 10).

Figure 11 depicts the perception of parents on the importance of having a good self-esteem by school type. Marginally more parents of pupils in primary schools (12%) indicated that they always see the importance of having a good self-esteem compared with those of children in preparatory schools.

Figure 12 displays the parents responses to “Do you praise your children?” by type of school. More parent of children in primary school indicated that they do praise their children at least most of the times compared with those parents of children in preparatory schools.

More parents of children in primary school beat, less shout, more embarrassed, and sit and talk to pupils compared to parents of children in preparatory schools (Fig. 13).

Figure 14 depicts the self-esteem for pupils who desire a particular occupational type. Children who desire to be professional (doctors, nurse, teachers, et cetera) had the highest self-esteem compared to those who want to be business person, trade persona and service attendants.

Pupils with the highest scores are more likely want to be professionals compared to the other occupational types (Fig. 15). Those who indicated a desire to be trade and/or service persons received low grades.

DISCUSSION

Statistics revealed that academic performance of 4th graders in primary schools (including all age) have always been lower than those in preparatory schools (MoE). Even though the national average on the grade 4 literacy test was 67% in 2009, one school's average was 14% (Hillside Primary in St. Thomas), another 0% (Old Pera Primary) and some schools scored below 50% (MoE). The high prevalence of Jamaicans who had not surpassed primary level education is an indictment of the educational system. The Common Entrance Examination has been replaced with the G-SAT examination and signs are still evident that something needs to be done to immediately rectify the low literacy and numeracy among pupils of primary schools (including all age and preparatory).

Research provides an avenue for policy changes by equipping policy makers with evidence, understanding of the issues and a scope of the problem. A Caribbean criminologist, Professor Harriott (2004), opined that crime problem in the region has resulted in extensive public policy concerns as well as quest for solutions. He stated that "While policy should be informed by an appreciation of the problem involving at least an analytic description of it, policy elaboration need not await a definitive analysis of its sources or the causes" (2004, p. 238). Embedded in criminologist's perspective is the value of research in the policy process. Research is not only about policy formulation and intervention programmes; it provides a platform in understanding issues and insights into cause.

Within the context of the general problem of low academic performance in the grade four (4) Literacy Test (Douglas, 2010; Davis, 2004), the recognition that education is the third national problem in Jamaica, low literacy and numeracy among students, the percentage of students performing below the grade level (Ministry of Education and Youth and Culture, 2004) and the correlation between low literacy at the primary level and

future academic performance into the post-secondary level, and the importance of the human capital in the productive process, the researcher believes that the matter must be studied to provide insight into the problem and role of self-esteem in explaining academic performance. The researcher is of the view that self-esteem plays a pivotal role in the life of children, and offers a justification for the disparity between the performance of pupils in preparatory and primary schools. The low performance on the grade four (4) Literacy Test coupled with the high percentage of Jamaicans who have not attained education beyond the primary level, were the primary motivation that stimulated my interest in the topic as well as the inequality between pupils' performance based on typology of schools, which has implications for socio-economic background.

Academic performance of Jamaican students on the grade 4 literacy test has been steadily increasing since 2001. Statistics revealed that in 2005, 62% of pupils who sat the 4th grade literacy and numeracy examination attained mastery, which increased to 67% in 2009 from 50% in 2001 (Roxborough-Wright, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2009). On disaggregating the results by typology of schools (primary and preparatory), it was revealed that preparatory schools' students had a level degree of mastery (71%) compared to primary schools' pupils (67%) (Ministry of Education, 2009). The percent of students receiving mastery at one public school (St. Michael Primary) was as low as 31% (Ministry of Education, 2009). Using the grade 3 diagnostic tests as a precursor to the 4th grade literacy test the results showed that there are fundamental weakness in literacy of 4th graders. In 2004, on the Grade Three Diagnostic Test, 53.1% of pupils mastered phonics, 27.5% mastered structure and mechanic, 39.6% vocabulary, 28.8% study skills and 30.6% reading and listening comprehension (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2000-2011). There is a something fundamental amiss with the performance of Jamaican students, particularly those less than 12 years old. This problem was identified by the Ministry of Education (2009), which resulted in the testing of students before they say the G-SAT. The problem has not abated, which speaks to a justification for having a research on the phenomenon.

The current study found that there is a direct correlation between academic performance and self-esteem, and that self-esteem was the most influential factor explaining academic performance of 4th graders at two Corporate Area primary and preparatory schools in Jamaica. The association between academic performance and self-esteem was equally identified by almost all the teachers, and one teacher said that majority of the times when a child is motivated, he/she will perform better in class. One teacher summarized this aptly saying that "If

you don't believe in yourself, how can you believe that your answers are correct?" suggesting the positive correlation between self-esteem and academic performance. The present study concurs with empirical evidence that there is direct correlation between self-esteem and academic performance (Purkey, 1970; Baumeister *et al.*, 2003; Bankston and Zhou, 2002; Lockett and Harrell, 2003). It should not be surprising that a teacher in the current work said that "Those who exhibit [higher] self-esteem are usually [the] better performers, which concurs with the average grades and self-esteem index. One of the participants in this research mentioned that self-esteem is important for good performance, which has already been forwarded by other scholars and concretized by the correlation from using the Rosenberg's Self-esteem Index and the average performance of grade 4 students.

Based on plethora of students studied on self-esteem and academic performance, there is no denial self-esteem is good for academic performance. From a standard achievement test, using 3,001 British pupils, Davies and Brember (1999) found a weak positive correlation between self-esteem and better academic performance, and even prior to that study Davies and Brember's, Simon and Simon (1975) had found a positive correlation on IQ test and self-esteem ($r_s = 0.33$), which means that feeling good about one's self will mean a greater score on an IQ test. Purkey (1970) opined that self esteem is positively related to some components of success, academic or verbal performance. Unlike the aforementioned research, this one found a higher correlation between general academic performance and self-esteem ($r_s = 0.611$, $p < 0.0001$). This work goes further, using ordinary least square regression, to show that of nine variables entered into a single regression model, four emerged as explaining academic performance ($p < 0.001$), with self-esteem being the most influential factor (using beta weights). Like the teachers who participated in of this research said, self-esteem is important for good academic performance.

One academic researcher reported that as the level of self esteem increases, so does the level of academic achievement scores, but as the level of self esteem decreases, achievement declines (Covington, 1989), highlighting the direct (positive) correlation between self-esteem and academic performance. The present findings concur with the aforementioned a direction, and proposition of Covington (1989) that self esteem can be modified through direct instructions which can lead to achievement gains was identified by teachers in this research. The teachers who participated in this research identified self-esteem issues with:

- Low performance
- Social isolation
- Social interaction problem with pupil and peer
- Self-expression
- Shyness

From the ordinary least square regression model, four variables emerged as statistical significant factors of self-esteem-academic performance, age of respondents, gender and parental behaviour, with academic performance having the most influence on self-esteem. Not only is self-esteem influence academic performance, the reverse is also true which would support motivation and increased performance.

Although this work disagrees with previous empirical findings on the negative correlation or no correlation between self-esteem and academic performance, and concurs with those that have a positive association, it disagrees with works that offered self-esteem as a predictor. Again, Van Tuinen and Ramanaiah (1979) reported that specific self esteem was a significant predictor of actual performance on concept attainment tasks, whereas global self esteem was not an adequate predictor. Using Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Index and average scores for the last term for some 4th graders, this work found that only 37.4% of the explained variability in academic performance could be explained by self-esteem. Self-esteem could not be said to be a predictor of academic performance for 4th grades, neither is another of the other factors that account for academic performance. Although collectively, the factors that explain academic performance are predictors, singly they cannot be assumed to have predictive explanations. Hence, for this research, self-esteem is a stronger factor than identified in the literature; but with a square r of 37.4%, the researcher could not ascribe predictability to this weak explanation.

Like many other discourse, one side critiques the "self esteem perspective" on the academic field. Scholars have purported that self esteem is pursued in the context of making students feel good about them; this misconception can lead to indiscriminate praise and the assumption that one should protect his or her student from failure (Baumeister, 1996; Learner, 1996). These theorists suggested that students who feel good and are satisfied with their work do not necessarily achieve or develop habits that lead to success. Those criticisms have some merit, which emerged in the present work. This study found that there is a positive association between self-esteem and shouting parents; but a shouting parent and/or teacher detracts from better academic performance. Suggesting that positive reinforcement has a direct link to better academic performance among 4th graders, and negative criticisms have the reverse role on performance compared to positive motivational mechanisms. The young child (pupil) is, therefore, vulnerable to external influences that are likely shape in one way or another self-esteem and academic performance. This work highlights that the positives of self-esteem on performance can be depleted by the parental and teachers' actions, which supports the theorists who believed that feeling good and are satisfied with their work do not necessarily achieve or develop habits that lead to success.

Rosenberg (1965) perspective that as early as age five (5) or six (6) years old children role playing abilities are

sufficiently developed to enable them to consider the perceived judgments and reaction of others helps to explain the parental and teachers' actions on the performance of 4th graders. Although parents mean their children well, shouting is negative affecting their children's performance and the same thing can be said of their teachers. With the majority of teachers developing positive self-esteem in their pupils, other negative behaviour will erode the gains of self-esteem building on performance. One teacher said that "Children perform better when they are not plagued with self-esteem problem" which is true; but academic performance can be depleted by negative reinforcement (shouting, name calling, et cetera) by the teacher and/or the parents. Another teacher mentioned that "Honestly at times I respond in the negative way, but I [have] learn[t] to realize that it's not healthy for the student/students so I have to teach them the right way along with measures for them to continue doing the right and not the bad", emphasizing the teacher's negative action on performance. Hence, not all low performance, therefore, should be ascribed to self-esteem as this may be as a result of external stimuli (such as parental and teachers' actions). There can be a blur of the line of low performance attributable to self-esteem and other stimuli, as one teacher said "The ones with lower self-esteem usually perform poorly", without realizing the demarcation. Rosenberg (1965) helped us to understand the role of other stimuli in self-esteem problems when he opined that students who believed that their parents lacked interest in them had much lower levels of self-esteem. Again, parental involvement as is the case of teacher's involvement could account for the disparity in low and high performers.

Scarr and Thompson (1994) offered the perspective that children's academic and social competence can be predicted mainly by their family background, parents' psychological support and the most influential being other sources of support. Aspects of Scarr and Thompson's work have some potency with this study; but, there are some disagreements between the two studies. In this one, no single factor of academic performance or self-esteem can be said to be a predictor, and social support is not the most influential factor of academic performance. Clearly, the involvement of parents and teachers play a role in academic performance of 4th graders in Jamaica, however, it is self-esteem that is driving the performance among this group unlike the findings purported by Scarr and Thompson (1994). While the social support plays a role in allocating the educational resources, school type, extra classes, functions (museums, swimming, karate classes, et cetera) and is pivotal to the establishment and development of self-esteem, the end product of self-esteem is what account for the better grades of 4th graders is.

Some academic researchers purported that the teacher is unlikely to be more influential than other facilitators of change in academic performance (Hattie, 1992), because

in the school setting, the teacher is the most salient source of feedback for a student's academic proficiency. Undoubtedly the teacher is a facilitator, teaches the curriculum, provides the feedback, re-teach the lesson, and guide academic work, which common sense may have people believe that the teacher is the most influential factor on performance, this research found that parental attitude has influence than that of the teacher's behaviour on academic performance of 4th graders, and that self-esteem play a critical role to all other factors that explain performance. The teachers' role is critical as it relates to the information, correctness of the materials, cognitive thinking on the material, and the child's ability to interpret the materials, but it is the internal concept of self that drives interaction with the intended knowledge, and provides a high competence with the knowledge base.

Empirical studies have identified many other factors that account for better academic performance such as peer relationship (Buote, 2001; (Montero, 1990); family cohesion (Caplan *et al.*, 2002); importance his or her parents assign to study at home (Castejon and Perez, 1998); parents' level of learning than on their level of income (Llorente, 1990); teacher's motivation and that of the student (Atkinson, 2000), and teacher's expectancies (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1966). Rightfully so the aforementioned issues could increase the explanatory power of the current model, but collectively they would only account for less than 26.4% of the variance in academic performance as self-esteem, gender, parent action, and teachers' behaviour account for 73.6% of the variability in academic performance of 4th graders in Jamaica. Clearly, with 26.4% of academic performance still unexplained by the present work, there are other factors that provide some explanations, with self-esteem explaining 37.4% (or 50.8% of the explanatory power of the model) which would indicate that no other factors inside or outside of the current model can be more influential than self-esteem on academic performance.

According to Simon and Simon (1975), children's self-esteem experienced a self-fulfilling prophecy related to poor performance. One pupil in the current research, when asked 'Do you think you are a bright girl or boy?' responded no and gave the reasons as "Because people tell me I am dunce." The child's average for the term was 40% and chose other as her future occupational type. With Simon and Simon's perspective that a child's parents and/or teacher can developed a negative view of the child over time, could explain why the aforementioned participant mentioned that she was complimented by per parents and teachers, but did not select 'sometimes' or 'most times'. Berk's work (2003) supports that of Simon and Simon as he commented that the child will personally adopt that view for him or herself and perform accordingly. Berk is absolutely correct as the identified participant in the current study had low score and would be acting out the perception stereotype of her. The same participant indicated that she was not confident in her class performance; she sometimes got good scores, her

parent call her names and consistently shouts at her. The identified pupil has been demoralized by the parental involvement, and while she sometimes received good scores, she is playing to the general script of a poor performer ('dunce').

On the other hand, another student who attended the same school as the perceived 'dunce' student gave "My parents encouragement" makes her believing that she is a bright pupil. This student had a grade of 72% and that she is mostly complimented by her parents, sometimes by her teacher and wants to be a professional. A positive self-esteem, therefore, extends beyond academic performance and the same can be said of a low self-esteem (Schmeichel *et al.*, 2009, 1077; Baumeister *et al.*, 2003; Campbell and Fehr, 1990; Brockner, 1983; Tharenou, 1979). Baumeister *et al.* (2003) theorized that self-esteem is strongly associated with happiness, confidence, and a moderate relationship with academic performance. They noted that individuals with high self-esteem are likely to do better on the jobs and with particular tasks (work performance) than those with low self-esteem. Self-esteem is not only influential task performance and job performance it is equally affect future occupational desires as was revealed by the current work. Hence, self-esteem is impacting on the student's performance, charting a desired career path, stimulating 'positiveness' about oneself as this is supported by good academic performance.

CONCLUSION

Fourth graders academic performance cannot be drastically change with a fundamental improvement in their self-esteem. While the Ministry of Education continues to formulate policies and identify new approaches to the teaching the curriculum, it has failed to chart a pathway of self-esteem development. The children low academic performance is mirrored on the poor self-esteem, poor supervision from teachers and parents and this is compounded by the infrequent school attendance, nutrition, state of depression among the children and social isolation. The emerging findings and knowledge gleaned from this work present a critical guide and a framework for policy practitioners to implement measure that can effectively address low performance among 4th graders.

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