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AUTHOR: Shawna Conway

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MASTER OF ARTS

Brian Lawler  
THESIS COMMITTEE CHAIR  
SIGNATURE  
DATE  

Amy Holtz  
THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBER  
SIGNATURE  
DATE  

THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBER  
SIGNATURE  
DATE
The Relationship Between Perceived Social Status and Academic Performance

Among Fourth Graders

Shawna Conway

California State University San Marcos
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Abstract

Could how fourth grade students feel about their social status be affecting their academic performance? This relationship was examined because if perceived social status is a known factor in academic performance, this knowledge could assist teachers in her/his teaching strategies. This research studied the relationship between perceived social status (the place one believes he/she is located in a social hierarchy) and academic performance (how well a student is accomplishing his or her tasks and studies) of fourth grade students from a North San Diego County Elementary School. Twenty-eight student participants completed a survey regarding their social status. Their report cards were also obtained to measure their academic performance through the use of GPA. Correlational action research design was completed to examine the relationships between GPA and each question from the survey. Correlation is defined as a statistical test to determine the tendency or pattern for two (or more) variables or two sets of data to vary consistently. Results suggested that a moderate positive correlation existed between students’ self-concept as good students and academic performance, especially in boys. Results also suggested that the higher boys GPA, the less likely they would want to have fun with their friends when they were frustrated with school.

*Keywords*: social status, academic performance, GPA, correlation
Chapter 1

Introduction

Think about your work place. Is your work performance related to how liked or disliked you feel by your peers? Personally, I work better when I am comfortable in my environment. If my peers liked me, I would work better because I would feel comfortable, secure, and happy. Could the feeling of being liked or disliked by elementary students’ classmates determine whether they have a positive or negative academic performance? The problem is that social status might be a factor in children’s academic performance. I am curious about the relationship, if any, between how students feel about their social status and if it affects their academic performance. Children seem to mature a great deal between early elementary school grades and middle school “Fourth grade is often when children are truly coming into themselves and are more engaged in the world around them. They can demonstrate a striking level of competence,” explains Lori Landau, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and Parenting Coach (Faulkner, 2006, p.1). The goal of this research is to recognize the possible existence between perceived social status and how that relates to the students’ academic performance at a fourth grade level. With this information, we as educators will be better equipped to support our students’ successes and struggles.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of my study is to learn if there is a relationship between students’ perceived social status and their academic performance. Bellmore (2011), studied academic performance and social status in a longitudinal study (students 4th to 8th grade) that particularly examined the effects of peer rejection/unpopularity and students’ Grade Point Average (GPA). Results implied that peer status during elementary school negatively impacted middle school performance. The
issue at hand is that students’ academic performance may be suffering due to how they feel about their social status and I would like to address this said problem. Having the data from my research may be valuable if/when students’ grades are suffering and could improve their educational successes. If we, as teachers, know of any negative factor that relates to students’ academic performance, we can work to decrease or eliminate this factor. Research shows negative effects on academic performance over time or transferring over to students’ next school year, but it does not show the effects on what is happening at their school currently. My research will help build upon previous studies by providing a snap shot of what is currently happening in the fourth grade, not over time. My research question is: Are students’ perceived social statuses related to their academic performance? My hypothesis is that the more liked students feel by their peers, the better their academic performance will be, and the less liked students feel by their peers, the poorer their academic performance will be. My reasoning for this hypothesis is that if students feel comfortable, secure, and happy then I believe they will be able to be more attentive to their studies without worries of rejection or feeling disliked.

**Preview of Methodology**

To answer my research question, I will be conducting quantitative research by using a survey to collect numerical data and viewing students’ academic records to describe the relationship, if any, between these two variables. This is an action research project drawing upon a correlational design because I am collecting data with the intent to improve how well students learn and I will also be measuring the amount of association between two variables (Mertler & Charles, 2010). In this study, students will complete a brief survey that asks questions pertaining to how they feel about their social status. Following the survey, I will then compare these
responses against students’ grade point average (GPA), a measure of academic performance, to determine, if any, correlation exists.

**Significance of Study**

My study is important because research on fourth-grade students does not exist in the realm of perceived social status and GPA. I would like to examine fourth-grade students to gain a snap shot of what might be happening at this time in their lives. This age seems to be a very important year. “While preoccupation with peers and the need to fit in remains strong at this age, the fourth-grade child is often even more concerned with measuring up to her own demands on herself. She is now being graded in school, not to mention being casually assessed by her peers and family members. The fourth grader may begin to exhibit a preoccupation with competition and ‘being the best,’ either academically, in sports, or in some other skill or hobby in which she has an expressed interest,” (Faulkner, 2006, p.1). Could the competition of receiving the best/highest grades be influenced by students’ perceived social status? This study can possibly improve education by informing teachers of a possible factor(s) pertaining to their students’ academic performance.

In addition to no research consisting of fourth grade perceived social status and academic performance, the significance of my research examines a possible negative factor in academic performance. According to Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, and Toblin (2005) frequent victimization by peers was tied to poor academic functioning (academic functioning was based on GPA and achievement test scores). Their study also provided further evidence that peer group victimization is correlated with academic difficulties through the mediating influence of depressive symptoms. Results show a large possible negative impact of victimization by peers on children’s academic functioning. Though I do not know the extent to which these students
were neglected or victimized in this study, I still wonder if this issue could be prevented if teachers are made more aware of it resulting in students receiving better academic performances.

In summary, I will be conducting research to learn if how students feel about their social status could be a factor, negative or positive, in their academic performance. Being that humans place strong emphasis on social relationships, this issue will not go away; therefore, it should be addressed. Much research has examined this relationship or similar ideas. However, I find it necessary to complete my own research to learn if there is a relationship between students' perceived social status and their academic performance in a fourth grade class at Green Elementary School (pseudonym) in North San Diego County, California. In the next chapter, I will discuss the background literature or research that is related to my study.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Various factors contribute to academic performance, such as: amount of sleep each night, adequate nutrition, receiving the proper instruction from their teacher, and many more (O’Neil, Welsh, Parke, Wang, & Strand, 1997). There may also be multiple other factors that can help shape students’ academic performance. Through the course of my research, it is my hope to examine if other factors could affect academic performance. They include, but are not limited to: social status (accepted/rejected, liked/disliked, popular/unpopular), group of friends, and self-confidence.Personally, I would like to examine the relationship between elementary students’ feelings of being liked or disliked by their classmates and their academic performance. Being grounded in literature, my research is designed to question if students perceived social status is related to their academic performance. After researching multiple studies, these were the main themes that emerged: the relationship between students’ academic performance and their perceived social acceptance/rejection, their friends/peers, and their own self-confidence.

Social Status and Academic Performance

I am curious to find out if students’ peer acceptance/rejection status plays a role in their academic performance. According to O’Neil et al. (1997), it seems that children are at risk for adjustment problems if it is difficult for them to get along with their peers. In their study, a total of 345 students in Southern California participated in a study that assessed their social acceptance each year from kindergarten through second grade. These elementary students were interviewed and asked to nominate three classmates that they “like to play with most” (positive nominations) and three classmates that they “really don’t like to play with” (negative nominations). Information was also collected by these researchers to assess each student’s
academic performance through the review of their cumulative school record. O’Neil et al. used a standardized procedure made to assess demographics, school attendance, achievement test information, and disciplinary contacts. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used in this study to examine the differences in the students’ first and second grade academic performance who were labeled as popular, average, neglected, controversial, or rejected in kindergarten. ANOVA was also used to examine the differences between the students that were stably rejected, transiently rejected (being rejected for a short time), and stably accepted. Results indicated that lower levels of social acceptance in kindergarten were predictive of deficits in classroom social skills and work habits in the first and second grade. These results also suggested that students with lower levels of social acceptance were predictive of lower academic performance, as assessed by grades and standardized achievement test scores in the first and second grade (O’Neil et al., 1997). I expected to find similar results in my research.

Similar to O’Neil et al. (1997), Bellmore’s (2011) research positively related social status and academic performance. Bellmore studied 901 students in a public school district in northeastern United States for five years, from 4th through 8th grade. Inside their classrooms, student participants completed group-administrated peer nominations and then a self-report. During testing, teachers rated their students’ social and academic functioning on a separate instrument. Each summer, school records were collected to show the students’ GPA from the previous year. This research indicated that students are potentially at risk for lower a GPA if they are being rejected in middle school. Also, if students were rejected in elementary school, even if they are no longer being rejected in middle school, they are still at risk for a lower GPA. Findings also suggested that peer status during elementary school impacted middle school academic performance.
School plays an important role in children’s social development in conjunction with their academic achievements. Flook, Repetti, and Ullman (2005) interviewed students once per year in fourth, fifth, and sixth grade; their teachers from each grade also completed questionnaires. The results supported the idea that students who were not accepted in their own fourth-grade classroom were predicted to have lower academic self-concept and more internalizing symptoms the following year. This also predicted lower academic performance when they reached sixth grade. By keeping this idea in mind, teachers can shape their teaching strategies accordingly.

After reading various studies that seemed to be in support of my hypothesis, I came across similar research that yielded very different results. Asher and Wentzel (1995) completed a study with 423 sixth and seventh-grade students that examined students’ sociometric status—a measurement of one’s social status or how well they are liked/disliked by their peers—and their academic lives at school. Students completed questionnaires during their normal class time. This study’s results suggested that students that are neglected by their peers actually have positive academic profiles. “These students reported higher levels of motivation, were described by teachers as more self-regulated learners, as more prosocial and compliant, and as being better liked by teachers when they were compared with students with average social status” (p. 754).

Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, and McKay (2006), similarly found a negative relationship between social status (popularity) and academic performance. These findings supported the idea that youths who showed higher aggressive behavior and were labeled as popular were connected to having negative academic outcomes. This troubling result draws forth the question, do these youths need to show aggressive behavior and be popular to be connected to negative academic outcomes? I wonder if they would still have the negative academic outcome with only one of those characteristics.
In summary, O’Neil, et al. (1997) found that students who had lower levels of social acceptance in kindergarten can lead to problems in classroom social skills and work habits in the first and second grade. This study also suggested that students with lower levels of social acceptance can lead to negative academic performance. This research has similarities and differences from my research. Data was obtained over time from kindergarten to second grade, whereas in my research, I only collected data one time from participants in the fourth grade. I thought it was interesting for this study to use both grades from students’ report cards and standardized test scores while I only used one measure (report card grades) for academic performance. Bellmore (2011) research also suggested that students are possibly at risk for a lower GPA if they are rejected by their peers and also that peer status in elementary school impacts middle school performance. I examined whether social status was related to academic performance in students’ current fourth-grade year, I did not examine the impact of years to come. Flook, Repetti, and Ullman (2005) study supported the thought that students who were not accepted in their own fourth-grade classrooms would more than likely have lower academic performance. Contrary to the previous studies, Asher and Wentzel (1995) had findings with very different results; students neglected by their peers had positive academic profiles. I have a difficult time accepting these results because I think students surrounded by positivity will produce positivity. Lastly, Schwartz et al. (2006) found a negative relationship between social status and academic performance; these findings do not support my hypothesis, which was perceived social status would positively relate to academic performance.

**Academic Performance and Friends**

The relationships children form with their peers in their middle school years may be particularly important toward academic performance. This does not only include relationships as
in friendships students have outside of the classroom, but also academic relationships inside of the classroom. Cohen and Lotan (1997) state, “Academic status is of central importance because of its direct relevance to the work of schooling” (p.147). These researchers believe students judge each other in the classroom by how “smart” they are and decide which classmates they want to work with and which classmates they don’t want to work with.

Risi, Gerhardstein, and Kistner (2003) agree that children need to receive an education because it is important not only for their own success, but for them to contribute positively in society. Can children’s group of friends be a factor in their academic performance or their education career? These researchers compared children’s peer relationships (social preference, aggression, and withdrawal) with their educational outcomes. A total of 525 students in grades three to five participated in this study. Students were interviewed and asked to identify three students they “liked most” and three students they “liked least.” The authors described the analysis by stating, “The number of liked-most and liked-least received by each participant was divided by the number of potential nominators and then standardized by grade level. Standardized liked-least scores were subtracted from standardized liked-most scores to form social preference scores” (p. 353). The student’s school district used the Comprehensive Assessment Program to review academic achievement. Findings from a one-way ANOVA indicated that lower social preference, elevated aggression, and withdrawal were all associated with lower graduation rates; however, aggression was the only factor that seemed to predict outcomes. The findings of Cook, Yingying, and Morgano (2007) supported the thought that peer attributes in the school domain affect individual school performance outcomes. I am curious if some children are highly influenced by their peers at school in terms of correlation to academic performance, but possibly not by peers or friends from outside of school.
Another consideration may be the amount to which children are influenced by what they watch and hear in their surroundings. This may be important when examining students’ school friends because a great deal of time is spent at school. Ladd and Oden (1979) researched third and fifth grade students to find out the relationship between peer acceptance and children’s ideas about helpfulness. These students were interviewed after watching three cartoons; one showed a child being teased by peers, another showed a child being yelled at by a peer, and the last one showed a child having a schoolwork problem. Children suggested helpful behaviors and nominated helpful classmates. Students nominated for their helpfulness were found to be highly related to peer acceptance and friendship.

Another thought that I am curious about is at what age do children become aware of physical attraction or the appearance of their peers and want to incorporate it into the group of people they spend time with. According to the research conducted by Boyatzis, Baloff, and Durieux (1998), physical attractiveness is a positive influence in children’s social status. For example, students that receive positives ratings for their appearance were more likely to be rated as popular. Attractive partners were significantly more popular than unattractive partners, regardless of their grades, high or low. There is a difference between children being unpopular and children being disliked by their peers. The research done by Gorman, Schwartz, Nakamoto, and Mayeux (2011) indicated that children tend to be more likely accepted by their peers if they were well liked. Unpopularity was associated with reports of loneliness, relational victimization, and low numbers of friends. Disliking was associated with low academic performance. Do students’ grades suffer due to the discomfort of not having friends or being disliked by their peers?
In summary, academic and non-academic relationships, positive and negative influences, and physical attractiveness are all related to students’ social acceptance and academic performance. These factors are important to keep in mind while conducting my research because they could be reasons why students do not have many friends, have chosen the friends they do have, or achieve the academic performance they have.

**Academic Performance and Self-Confidence**

Gullo and Ambrose (1987) agree that an important factor to review when looking at students’ academic achievements was their own confidence in themselves and social acceptance. They completed a study exploring if there was a relationship between children’s perception of their competence and their acceptance by their peers and their academic performance. Kindergarten children were asked to rate their acceptance and each child was also given the Metropolitan Readiness Test for researchers to examine their academic performance. There were significant negative correlations between children’s ratings of perceptions of peer acceptance and academic performance. This translates to the higher the rating of perceived peer acceptance, the lower the academic performance and the lower the rating of perceived peer acceptance, the higher the academic performance. Findings supported the idea that kindergarten children are not very good predictors of their own academic performance. These results do not connect with my inquiry of students’ grades slipping because they are disliked. However, this study did inform my research design by viewing the correlation between children’s perception of self-confidence and acceptance by their peers with academic performance. In a separate study, it was found that parental support, student conscientiousness, and student enjoyment of school are positively related to academic achievement (Beran, Hughes, & Lupart, 2008). This finding seems to
support the thought that being confident, happy, and having positive support will result in a better academic performance, which seems justifiable.

In summary, Gullo and Ambrose (1987) believe it is important to examine students’ self-confidence when looking at students’ academic performance. My teaching experiences seemingly support this belief and lead to the present study asking students thoughts about the way they view themselves. Beran, Hughes, and Lupart (2008) findings suggested that being confident and happy will lead to a better academic performance. Again, this aligns with my hypothesis informing the decision to craft questions in the social status survey asking students both about how they felt about their academic performance and how they felt about their social status.

**Conclusion**

Through the course of my literature review, three major themes seemed to contribute to academic performance: social acceptance/rejection, friends/peers, and student’s own self-confidence. Research has shown that social status can both positively and negatively impact academic performance, students’ friends are related to academic performance, and students’ self-confidence can be positively and negatively be related to academic performance. The main factor I was interested in researching was fourth-grade students’ perceived social status and how it related to their academic performance. I did not find any research regarding this relationship for current fourth-grade students; therefore I believed it should be done. This is a grade where students have much growth in maturity because they are no longer the young kids on campus, but they are not in middle school quite yet. Much research has examined this relationship or other ideas similar to this relationship with different age groups. I completed my own research to find out if there is a relationship between how students feel about their social status and their
academic performance in a fourth-grade class at Green Elementary School in North San Diego County. In the next chapter, discussed the methods of conducting my own research.
Chapter 3

Methods

My study examined whether perceived social status could be one factor that may have positive or negative academic performances for fourth-grade students. Is perceived social status related to their academic performance? In this chapter, I explain the research design and the methods used to perform the research.

Design

There were a few methodologies drawn upon in this study. This was an Action Research study, drawing upon quantitative methodologies, in particular correlational design, to consider the relationship between perceived social and academic performance of fourth-grade students. All three methodologies are important in understanding this research.

Action research was used because the research in this study was done with the objective to improve how well students learn. “Action research designs are systematic procedures used by teachers (or other individuals in the educational setting) to gather quantitative, qualitative (or both) data about and subsequently improve the ways their particular setting operates, how they teach and how well their students learn” (Mills, 2011, p. 617). My study’s goal was to find out if perceived social status affected academic performance among fourth-graders at Green Elementary. If I learned social status was a factor, I (and other educators) could keep this thought in mind while developing teaching strategies to improve students’ learning.

Quantitative data was used in analyzing the data collected. Creswell (2012) defined quantitative research as an inquiry approach useful for describing trends and explaining the relationship among variables found in the literature. To conduct this inquiry, the investigator specifies narrow
questions, locates or develops instruments to gather data to answer the questions, and analyzes numbers from the instruments, using statistics. From the results of these analyses, the researchers interpret the data using prior predictions and research studies. The final report, presented in a standard format, displays researcher objectivity and lack of bias. (p. 626).

Quantitative research was conducted by using a survey to collect numerical data and view students’ academic records to explain the relationship between these two variables.

Correlational research describes the data collection and analysis methods used in this study. “Correlation research designs are quantitative designs in which investigators use a correlation statistical technique to describe and measure the degree of association (or relationship) between two or more variables or sets of scores” (Creswell, 2012, p. 619). This type of design was used to measure the amount of association between two variables, perceived social status and academic performance.

**Participants and Setting**

The participants in this study were 28 fourth-grade students. Of these students, there were 17 girls and 11 boys aged from nine to ten years old. There was a wide array of ethnicities represented in this classroom including: Latino, Filipino, Caucasian, Jewish, African, Pakistani, German, Korean, Indian, Persian, and Pacific Islander. One student was an English language learner and three students received speech services provided by the school.

Participating students completed the survey in their classroom at Green Elementary School in North San Diego County, California. Green Elementary School had approximately 37 teachers and 913 students in grades from kindergarten to fifth grade and was located in a suburban neighborhood. Students race/ethnicity was identified as 64% White, 16% Hispanic,
14% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 6% Black, American Indian/Alaskan, or are of two or more races. Enrollment by gender was approximately 50% boys \((n = 452)\) and 50% girls \((n = 461)\).

Green’s exceptionally high overall academic performance level was reflected by the California Academic Performance Index (API). This number ranges from 200-1000; Green Elementary’s API was 905.

Participants completed the survey in less than ten minutes on a Friday morning at 10:00 A.M. after their Flag Ceremony.

**Instruments**

The instrument I used to collect data was a survey of my own design. I developed this survey with the intent to understand how students felt about their social status and how they felt about their academic performance. Based on the literature review I was inspired to create my own survey questions as I thought they would be the best possible tools considering there was not a standard research assessment for my study. The objective was to assess how each student felt about their social status, if they felt liked, disliked, or neutral. I created several different types of question responses, which include: yes or no, open ended, and Likert-scale questions (see the survey in Appendix A). “The use of children’s ratings in drawing empirical research conclusions and making clinical decisions assumes that the Likert-type rating scales are appropriate for use by children and that the ratings they produce are valid” (Chambers & Johnston, 2000, p.33). I also used students’ most recent report cards to view their GPA.

**Procedures**

I began the study by visiting the students’ classroom and introducing myself as a California State University San Marcos student and researcher, and former teacher at their school. I verbally explained the study to the students while they reviewed the assent form I created for them. I
clearly stated in one sentence, what my research goals are and why I have selected their class to be a part of my study. I then described the procedure of my research: collecting their thoughts via one brief survey, and viewing their report cards. I then shared that upon completion of their survey I would be reviewing their report cards. I also discussed with them what information I hoped to learn and what minimal discomforts they might encounter while answering the survey questions. Lastly, I made it clear that the survey is not required for a class grade, and they can end the survey (withdraw) at any time. The students’ teacher also provided her students with a small incentive (class money) to bring the parental consent form back to class. It did not matter if the parent’s allowed their child to participate or not, they just needed to respond (yes or no). I then provided students with the consent form for their parents to sign should they chose to allow them to participate in my study.

One week later, I returned to this classroom to collect the consent forms from participating students and had them complete my social status survey. The class consisted of 33 students, 28 returned consent forms indicating parental understanding of the research intentions and allowing their student to participate, five students did not return the consent form. The students that did not take the survey sat quietly in their seats and worked on any class assignment. After collecting the consents forms, I passed out the survey to each participant. They were allowed as much time as they needed, but most participants finished in approximately five minutes and all participants completed the survey in less than ten minutes. When every participant was finished, I collected their surveys and explained that they may contact me or my advisor with any questions or concerns. They may also talk to their school psychologist, teacher, or principal if they felt any discomfort with the questions asked in my survey.

Following the completion of the survey from the classroom participants, I collected the Fall
report cards for each student from their current fourth-grade teacher. I then viewed their report cards and calculated what I named, for the purpose of this study, their GPA—a measure of their academic performance. Their report cards had 24 academic subjects to which they were graded. Students could receive 1-Unsatisfactory, 2-Need Improvement, 3-Satisfactory, or 4-Excellent. I added up all 24 grades for each student and divided by 24 to determine their overall GPA.

**Analysis**

Survey questions were categorized into four themes. Questions one, two, and three were in the students’ perception of being liked/disliked theme. Questions four and five were in the students’ thoughts on having friends at school theme. Question six was in the belief of being a good student or not theme. Lastly, questions eight and nine were in the time spent with friends theme. Student response data was entered into a spreadsheet and analyzed to measure the impact that perceived social status had on academic performance, and to test for statistical significance. In order to do this, I compared student GPAs with responses to each question in the social status survey I created in order to determine if a relationship existed. The Pearson-\(r\) correlation coefficient was used to find out if a relationship between these variables emerged in this particular population by testing the significance of the correlation between GPA and each survey question. After I conducted the analysis, I searched for the Pearson-\(r\) values closest to positive or negative one. The closer this absolute value of \(r\) is to one, the greater the correlation. The greater the correlation, the more able one is able to make predictions between the two variables tested. “Coefficients of correlation are generally considered to be high if ±0.70 or above, moderate if between ±0.30 and ±0.70, and low if below ±0.30.” (Mertler & Charles, 2011, p. 272). The value of this number demonstrated the strength of the correlations between GPA and each survey question in my research. If the correlation was high or strong, I was able to better support the
relationship.

**Conclusion**

To summarize, twenty-eight fourth-grade students completed a survey answering questions about how they feel about their social status. Their report cards (overall GPA) were used to determine their academic performance. My research inquired whether students’ perceived social status was related to their academic performance through the use of a correlational action research design. I looked at the Pearson $r$ to determine if there was a correlation between each question in the survey and GPA. In the following chapter, I discuss the results from my research.
Chapter 4

Results

The methods for data collection and analysis were designed to help determine whether a correlation existed between perceived social status and academic performance among fourth-grade students at Green Elementary School. This chapter will present in detail the data obtained through survey responses, and present the Pearson r coefficient correlation that emerged from analysis. This correlation will be expressed using graphic representation (scatter-plot graphs) along with a written analysis with an interpretation pertinent to my research question. The organization of data is as follows: raw data, data analysis, discussion, and lastly the conclusion. I will discuss my findings in context of the subheadings provided with a summary of my data in the conclusion.

Raw Data

I administered my survey on a Friday morning to my student participants in their fourth-grade classroom. The survey consisted of nine questions: one open-ended question, two multiple-choice questions, and six five-point Likert-scale questions (survey can be viewed in Appendix A). Question 7, “Tell me 2 things you like about school,” was open-ended and was not included in the below table or analyzed. I did not find a trend in the students’ open-ended responses therefore I was not able to analyze this question quantitatively. Examples included: “I like that you get to learn new stuff” and “the consulting group.” When students were finished, I collected their surveys along with their report cards provided by their current fourth grade teacher. This raw data may be seen in Table 1, namely the survey responses, and the GPA computed from their most current report cards, as reported by their fourth-grade teacher. As a reminder, GPA was calculated by adding all 24 academic subjects (each subject worth 1-4 points) and dividing
that total by 24 to determine students’ overall GPA. The higher the GPA number, the more positive the academic performance was.

Table 1

*Gender, GPA, and Survey Responses*

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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>3.2</td>
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<td>2.8</td>
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<td>2.8</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Gender: 1 = boy, 2 = girl. GPA is the average of levels/scores assigned in a report card, 1-4. Questions 1-2 had response options: yes, neither liked nor disliked, and no, reported above as 3,2,1 correspondingly. Question 3 had response options: liked a lot, liked quite a bit, kind of liked and disliked, disliked quite a bit, and disliked a lot; reported, as were the remaining...
questions, 1-5. Question 4 had response options: always, mostly, sometimes, occasionally, never; Questions 5 and 8 had response options all the time, most of the time, sometimes, occasionally, and never; Questions 6 and 9 had response options strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree. Question 7 was open-ended.

Data Analysis

The next step in the analysis was to determine if correlations existed in the data. I compared GPA with each question from the social status survey (except question 7) to find out if a relationship between the two variables may exist. After an initial analysis of the relationships between GPA and each survey question, I decided to examine the relationship by gender to see if a gender-based trend may exist. After this initial round of analyzing the results, I realized the correlation coefficient $r$ numbers were not as they seemed. Some of the negative correlations should have been positive and the positive should have been negative. This was because the response options labeled 1 as “strongly agree” and 5 as “strongly disagree.” As such, the numbers on the y-axis in the graphs should have 1 on the top and 5 on the bottom. The actual data and numbers were not affected by this initial analysis mistake, therefore the results hold the same strength in correlation, but the positive and negative were backwards.

I organized the results of these questions into four groups based on what the question was asking. The groups are as follows: students’ perception of being liked/disliked, students’ thoughts on having friends at school, belief of being a good student or not, and time spent with friends.

Students Perception of Being Liked/Disliked

There was little or no correlation found between GPA and questions number 1 ($r = -0.05$), 2 ($r = -0.10$), and 3 ($r = 0.20$). Question 1 asked, “Do you feel liked by your classmates?” (yes,
no, neither liked nor disliked). Question 2 inquired, “Do you feel disliked by your classmates?” (yes, no, neither liked nor disliked). Question 3 asked, “On a scale from 1-5 how liked/disliked do you feel by your classmates?” (liked a lot-disliked a lot). In this study, there seemed to be no relationship between academic performance and these three direct questions that asked if students felt liked or not.

**Students’ Thoughts on Having Friends at School**

Questions 4 ($r = 0.22$) and 5 ($r = 0.31$) showed mild correlations with GPA. The relationship between GPA and Question 4, “I think I have friends that I sit with at lunch.” (always-never) is displayed below. The relationship between GPA and Question 5 “I think I have friends that I play with at recess or on my breaks” (all the time-never) is also demonstrated below.

![Figure 1](image.png)

*Figure 1.* GPA and Question 4, “I think I have friends that I sit with at lunch.” This figure shows the relationship between GPA and Question #4.
Figure 2. GPA and Question 4, “I think I have friends that I sit with at lunch.” This figure shows the relationship between GPA and Question #4 while demonstrating the difference in gender.

Figure 3. GPA and Question 5, “I think I have friends that I play with at recess or on my breaks.” This figure shows the relationship between GPA and Question #5.
Figure 4. GPA and Question 4, “I think I have friends that I play with at recess or on my breaks.” This figure shows the relationship between GPA and Question #5 while demonstrating the difference in gender.

Belief of Being a Good Student or Not

Question 6, “I feel that I am a good student in class” (agree-disagree), showed a moderate correlation with GPA ($r = 0.49$). Below are two graphs displaying this correlation. The first graph demonstrates the correlation with a line drawn computing the $R^2$ value. The second graph shows the correlation and also the gender is sorted, girls are blue and boys are red.
Figure 5. GPA and Question 6, “I feel that I am a good student in class (agree-disagree), showed a moderate correlation with GPA.” This figure shows the relationship between GPA and question #6.

Figure 6. GPA and Question 6, “I feel that I am a good student in class (agree-disagree), showed a moderate correlation with GPA.” This figure shows the relationship between GPA and Question #6 while demonstrating the difference in gender.
Time Spent With Friends

Questions eight, if you become frustrated with school, would you like to spend more time with your friends (all the time-never) was mildly correlated with GPA ($r = 0.32$). Question nine, I want to be a better student when I have fun with my friends (agree-disagree), was also mildly correlated with GPA ($r = 0.22$).

*Figure 7.* GPA and Question 8, “If you become frustrated with school, would you like to spend more time with your friends?” This figure shows the relationship between GPA and question #8.
Figure 8. GPA and Question 8, “If you become frustrated with school, would you like to spend more time with your friends?” This figure shows the relationship between GPA and question #8 while demonstrating the difference in gender.

Figure 9. GPA and Question 9, “I want to be a better student when I have fun with my friends.” This figure shows the relationship between GPA and question #9.
Figure 10. GPA and Question 9, “I want to be a better student when I have fun with my friends.”

This figure shows the relationship between GPA and question #9 while demonstrating the difference in gender.

Correlations

The closer the Pearson Correlation Coefficient $r$ is to positive or negative one, the greater the correlation. “Coefficients of correlation are generally considered to be high if ±.70 or above, moderate if between ±.30 and ±.70, and low if below ±.30.” (Mertler & Charles, 2011, p. 272).

As you can see below, question 6 has the greatest correlation with GPA.
When looking at the relationship between each survey question and GPA by gender, a couple interesting trends emerged. There was quite the correlation between GPA and question 6 and question 8 in boys. Question 6 asked students to agree or disagree with the following statement, “I feel that I am a good student in class.” Question 8 asked students to choose an option from always-never after reading the following question, “If you become frustrated with school, would you like to spend more time with your friends?” My research suggested that boys who felt that they were good students positively correlated to academic performance. Results
also indicated that the higher the boys academic performance, the less it mattered to them if they had fun with their friends when they became frustrated with school. I do not have enough data to draw strong conclusions from these correlations, but they are still worthy of recognition.

Table 3

Relationship Between GPA and Each Survey Question By Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GPA/Question</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>-0.84</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

The results of the correlational analysis suggest that question 6, “I feel that I am a good student in class,” had a moderate positive correlation with students’ GPA. It seems as though students that feel like they are good students, are good students academically, in particular boys. Also, the results from question 8 indicate that boys that have a high GPA tend to not care if they have fun with their friends when they become frustrated with school. Questions 4, 5, and 9 also had mild correlations, though questions 5 and 8 had a higher correlation than questions 4 and 9.

In conclusion, some aspects of perceived social status are possibly related to academic performance. It seems that students are more often than not better students when they feel like
they are good students. A relationship exists between academic performance and whether or not students spend their free time with their friends. In the next and final chapter, I summarize and discuss my results and provide my own interpretations of the data collected.
Chapter 5

Discussion

This study examined the relationship between perceived social status and academic performance in fourth-grade students at Green Elementary. Whether the relationship was positive or negative, multiple studies I discussed previously had found that how students feel about their social status was related to their academic performance. The reason this study was conducted was because students’ perception of their social status could be a factor in their academic performance. This research may be worthwhile because if a teacher knew factors affecting academic performance, he or she could work to eliminate or emphasize these factors accordingly.

The research question that guided this study was to consider the existence of a relationship between academic performance and how students feel about their social status. Even though I did not find a correlation between academic performance and the three direct questions that examined students’ perception of being liked/disliked, I came across other interesting findings. The main findings suggested that students’ perception of being a good student is positively related to their academic performance, especially in boys. Also, the higher the boys’ GPA the more likely they do not care to spend more time with their friends when they became frustrated with school. The further details of the interpretation of the results in my research, limitations/recommendations, and discussion/conclusion are discussed in this final chapter.

Interpretation

After analyzing the data, results showed that question six had the strongest correlation to GPA. As a reminder, question six asked each student to respond with one answer (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree) if he/she felt like he/she was a good student. The
results from this question and GPA suggested that students that feel that they are good students are probably good students. My research suggests that self-efficacy, students believing in their own academic competence, is a key factor in academic performance. This is important for teachers to be aware of because by honing into students’ emotions and learning to recognize if they feel confident or not could be an indicator on how they are doing in their studies. My research suggests that this could be a key factor in students having positive academic performances. Students with confidence in their academic abilities seem to be more likely to have better academic achievements.

Mild correlations were found between GPA and questions four and five, which were grouped in the students’ thoughts on having friends at school theme. These questions asked students if they felt that they had friends to sit with at lunch and if they felt like they had friends to play with on their breaks/recess. I would recommend that teachers keep a watchful eye out for students that may not have friends to play with on their breaks. If teachers do this and see any “lonely” students, they can try to implement lessons about friendship or provide opportunities for group/partner work to help start and build friendships. In addition to the positive social and self-concept outcomes, the findings in this study suggest this could also help students achieve greater academic success. Another avenue for possible intervention would be to contact the school site’s counselor as they often times have friendship groups centered on social skills that may benefit a student having difficulty making friends at school.

Mild correlations were also found in questions eight and nine, which were grouped in the time spent with friends theme. These questions inquired if students liked to play with their friends when they became frustrated with school and if they liked to be a better student when they had fun with their friends. My results suggested that students who liked to play with their
friends when they were frustrated with school negatively correlated with academic performance. Students who liked to be better students when they had fun with their friends were negatively related to academic performance. Beran, Hughes, & Lupart (2008) supported the idea that student conscientiousness and student enjoyment of school are positively related to academic achievement. My research did not support the thought that students who find enjoyment in school have a greater possibility to have a positive academic performance.

Lastly, students’ perception of being liked/disliked (questions one, two, and three) had little to no correlation with academic performance. The entire survey in my research questioned students’ perception of their social status, but these three questions were the direct questions aimed to understand how students felt about being liked/disliked. My research did not show that there was a strong relationship between academic performance and students’ perception of being liked or disliked by their peers.

Limitations/Recommendations

As a study of one classroom of fourth-grade students, limitations did exist throughout the course of my research. After identifying and discussing these, I also provided multiple recommendations for other researchers in the field to keep in mind while reviewing my research or if they wish to duplicate this study.

One limitation to my study was that it was a small sample size. In addition to being small, it was not a representative sample of some a larger population. Rather than a weakness however, it is an expected result of Action Research, and fully satisfactory to describe the students of this fourth-grade classroom. Due to the available student sample and the fact that I was not able to use random sampling, a representative sample of fourth-grade students could not be obtained. The sample may be representative of this particular school, but it was by no means representative
of local or state regions, or the entire United States. However, it is not expected that questions about perceived social status and academic success would be greatly influenced by location. This is certainly an open question and researchers may need to pay close attention to the particular questions asked in the survey.

Another limitation to my study was that it was not longitudinal, rather constraints of time only allowed for a brief snapshot of both perceived social status and academic performance. The students were not studied over time and this may have had an affect on the reliability as the students completed the one survey only one time.

As for recommendations, if I were to complete this study again I would make the range larger in the Likert scale questions. I would definitely keep questions one, two, and three. I think these questions directly asked students about their perception of being liked/disliked, but I would have liked to see a larger range in the question answers. Students were only able to choose from 1-5 and after seeing the results I would have liked to utilize a larger range of choices, such as using a seven-point Likert scale (three answers meaning yes/agree, one neutral, and three answers meaning no/disagree). I believe the results would elicit a larger range of data therefore leading to more “colorful” results; students would not be confined to a simple yes or no. For example, students who do not agree or disagree 100% with the statement or question in the survey would be able to express their answers and opinions more accurately.

The Pearson-\(r\) correlation was not the most appropriate test of inference for this sort of data, although it served adequately. It was difficult to conduct a correlation with Likert-scale questions (categorical data) especially since the numbers were labeled opposite agree-disagree 1-5 instead of disagree-agree 1-5. Correlation works better for research with quantifiable data, where the actual numbers are significant.
The last recommendation I have is to factor in the student’s report cards in their entirety. Students were also graded on life skills, work habits, and attendance, not only their academic performance. In my particular study, I was looking at their academic performance therefore, I only viewed students grades in Math, Language, Social Studies, Science, Fine Arts, and Physical Education, but I am curious to know if students perceived social status relates to their life skills, works habits, and/or attendance. In addition, I would analyze the participants standardized test scores; I wonder if students’ academic performance would be different with this measurement.

Lastly, I would like to know more about each student’s home life to try to determine if there could be internal factors compromising or benefiting their academic performance. I wonder if home life plays a part in their perceived social status and GPA relationship. I am curious to learn about the socioeconomic status of each student’s family and if this relates to academic performance. It would also be interesting to know if there were internal stressors or dysfunction in the family and if this affects their perceived social status then explore if there is a relationship with students’ academic performance. Parental support is positively related to academic achievement. (Beran, Hughes, & Lupart 2008).

**Discussion**

Many thoughts arose upon completion of my research. First, I would like to conduct this study again with the proposed suggestions above. The possibility of generating more reliable data is appealing to me. The question of the relationship between perceived social status and academic performance is very compelling and I wonder if different results would arise after making the recommended changes.

I think my study provided some insight for future research. The first idea my study suggested was that it was important for students to feel like they are good students because they
will probably be good students if they feel like they are, especially boys. Educators should attempt to keep this in mind when teaching. Teachers should try to keep student confidence levels relatively high so that students will do their best to succeed.

Another idea my research implied was that boys who receive better grades academically do not think spending time with their friends when they are frustrated with school is of importance. This can show educators that it is important to add social time for boys to build upon teamwork as it is of high importance in the “work world.” They may also try to implement this idea into their classroom more often. For example, providing more opportunities for group work or partner work.

Conclusion

In conclusion, after completing this study, I learned that there was little or no correlation between academic performance and the direct questions asking students about their perception of their social status (feeling liked/disliked). There was, however, a correlation between perceived social status and students’ perceived academic performance, especially strong with boys. My research suggests that self-efficacy is an essential factor in positive academic performance. I believe it is very important to keep students confidence levels in school relatively high. If students feel like they are doing well, then they probably are doing well or will do well academically.
References


Appendix A: Perceived Social Status Survey

What is your name? _______________________
How old are you? _________
Are you a boy or a girl? ___________

1. Do you feel liked by your classmates? Circle ONE answer
   Yes  No  neither liked nor disliked

2. Do you feel disliked by your classmates? Circle ONE answer
   Yes  No  neither disliked nor liked

3. On a scale from 1-5, how liked/disliked do you feel by your classmates? Circle ONE number

<table>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liked a lot</td>
<td>Liked quite a bit</td>
<td>Kind of liked and disliked</td>
<td>Disliked quite a bit</td>
<td>Disliked a lot</td>
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4. I think I have friends that I sit with at lunch. Circle ONE number

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<th>Always</th>
<th>Mostly</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Never</th>
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5. I think I have friends that I play with at recess or on my breaks. Circle ONE number

<table>
<thead>
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<th>All the time</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Never</th>
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</table>
6. I feel that I am a good student in class. Circle **ONE** number

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
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</table>

7. Tell me 2 things you like about school:

1.

2.

8. If you become frustrated with school, would you like to spend more time with your friends? Circle **ONE** number

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All the time</th>
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<th>Some of the time</th>
<th>A little of the time</th>
<th>Never</th>
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</thead>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
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</table>

9. I want to be a better student when I have fun with my friends. Circle **ONE** number

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
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