IAE Journal of Research and Development (IJORED)
Vol. 2, Issue 1, March 2026, pp. 78-100,
eISSN: 3088-5515, pISSN: 3088-5523,
Published by IAE under **CC BY-NC** license
DOI: https://doi.org/10.6108/ijored2026v02i01.04

Misaligned Readiness: Association Between Self-Reported Abilities and Actual English and Academic Performance Among First-Year College Students in Tanzania

Michael Wilfred Ng'umbi[1] & N'ana Daniel Mbunda[2]
Institute of Adult Education, Tanzania
[1]**Email**: michael.ngumbi16@gmail.com
[1]**ORCID**: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7547-2171
[2]**Email**: mbundand@gmail.com
[2]**ORCID**: https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4096-8630

Received: 15 February 2026
Revised: 13 April 2026
Accepted: 27 April 2026
Published: 15 May 2026

Abstract

A study was conducted of how first-year students' self-reported readiness in English, academic, and practical skills relates to their actual performance in a Tanzanian higher education setting. Using a quantitative study (N = 218), students' self-ratings were compared with test and task results. The findings show weak and uneven links between what students believe about their abilities and how they actually perform. In English, there was a small link between self-ratings and performance, but overall ability was low. Practical skills showed little connection to performance. Importantly, there was no clear difference or relationship between students' perceived and actual academic performance. While overall class averages were similar, individual students' self-ratings did not reliably match their results. This suggests that students are not yet good at judging their own academic performance at entry. Academic self-perceptions appear relatively stable but only weakly associated with actual performance outcomes, suggesting that they may reflect general self-confidence or subjective belief rather than accurate self-assessment of ability.

Keywords: *College readiness; self-concept; metacognition; English proficiency; academic performance; practical skills; Tanzania*

How to cite: Ng'umbi, M. W. & Mbunda, N. D. (2026). Misaligned readiness: association between self-reported abilities and actual English and academic performance among first-year college students in Tanzania. *IAE Journal of Research and Development, 2*(1), 78-100. DOI: https://doi.org/10.61408/ijored2026v02i01.04

Introduction

Assessing college readiness is critical for determining whether students possess the academic, linguistic, and self-regulatory capacities required for success in higher education. In Tanzania, the rapid expansion of university enrolment has widened access while simultaneously intensifying inequalities in prior schooling quality, English language exposure, and socio-economic background. Regulatory bodies such as the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) have therefore emphasized the need for evidence-based mechanisms to support student transition, identify learners at risk, and improve progression and completion rates (Tanzania Commission for Universities [TCU], 2019). Within this context, readiness is not merely an individual attribute but a systemic concern linked to equity, efficiency, and academic quality.

Admission decisions in Tanzania continue to rely heavily on Grade Point Average (GPA), reflecting the assumption that prior academic achievement is a sufficient proxy for readiness. However, research indicates that GPA alone inadequately captures the linguistic, metacognitive, and practical demands of university study, particularly in mass systems characterized by cultural and linguistic stratification (Conley, 2010). This limitation is especially pronounced in Tanzania's English-medium universities, where most students transition from Kiswahili-based schooling into English-dominated academic environments. English proficiency thus functions as a hidden curriculum, shaping participation, assessment, and recognition (Brock-Utne, 2010, 2022). Empirical evidence further shows that students often report relatively high confidence in English despite limited functional competence (Shumbusho, 2020; Roemer, 2023),

raising concerns about the reliability of self-assessed readiness in linguistically mediated contexts.

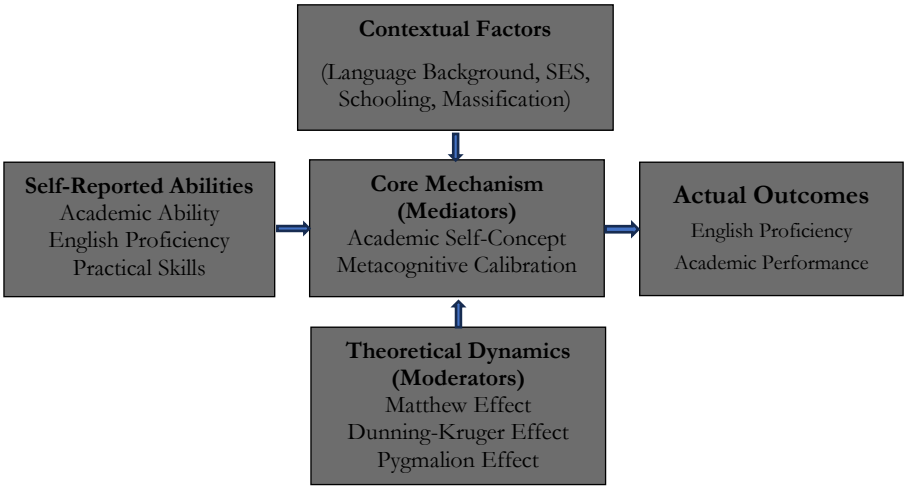
Beyond academic and linguistic skills, readiness also encompasses non-cognitive and practical capacities such as time management, digital literacy, and self-regulation, which are increasingly important in massified systems with limited institutional support (Kuh et al., 2008; York et al., 2015). Emerging evidence from Tanzanian and comparable contexts underscores the importance of these competencies. For example, Mandari et al. (2024) highlight the central role of self-regulation in shaping learning outcomes, while Li and Huang (2025) demonstrate that engagement with digital learning environments enhances learner control and readiness. Similarly, Saimon et al. (2023) show that pedagogical approaches emphasizing active engagement and problem-solving strengthen transferable skills critical for university success, whereas persistent structural constraints in e-learning environments may limit such development (Mwandosya, 2023). Despite this, policy and practice often assume that these capacities are already in place at entry, with limited empirical scrutiny of how accurately students assess their preparedness or how these self-assessments relate to actual performance.

The present study conceptualizes college readiness as an emergent outcome of the interaction between academic self-concept and metacognitive calibration - that is, between what students believe about their competence and how accurately they can monitor and evaluate their abilities. This interactional core provides the generative mechanism through which cumulative advantage - Matthew effect (Merton, 1968), metacognitive miscalibration - Dunning–Kruger effect (Kruger & Dunning, 1999), and expectancy-based self-fulfilling prophecy - Pygmalion effect (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) become operative under specific institutional and cohort conditions. Where competence, calibration, and self-concept align, cumulative advantage is likely to emerge (Vandelannote & Demanet, 2025); where calibration is weak, inflated self-assessments may persist (Dogan et al.,

2023); and where institutional endorsement substitutes for diagnostic feedback, socially induced confidence may develop despite fragile academic foundations.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework guiding this study. The model illustrates how students' self-reported academic, language, and practical abilities interact with academic self-concept and metacognitive calibration to influence actual academic and language performance. The framework further integrates key theoretical mechanisms - the Matthew effect, Dunning–Kruger effect, and Pygmalion effect - which explain how alignment or misalignment between perception and competence produces differential outcomes. These relationships are situated within broader contextual factors, including prior schooling quality, language transition, and socio-economic background.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for College Readiness Assessment



Literature on Tanzanian higher education highlights a complex interplay between language preparedness, practical competencies, and college readiness. Studies consistently show that English, as the medium of instruction, presents significant challenges for first-year students, who

often enter university with limited proficiency despite high self-reported confidence (Shumbusho, 2020; Roemer, 2023). This linguistic gap is compounded by abrupt transitions from Kiswahili in primary education to English in secondary and tertiary contexts (Brock-Utne, 2022; Ideh & Tibategeza, 2022). In addition, gaps in information about higher education pathways and future work opportunities hinder students' transitions (Kalimasi & Chisalala, 2016), reflecting weak coordination across the education system. At the same time, practical skills- such as technology use, time management, and social engagement - emerge as critical enablers of readiness, supporting both academic and linguistic performance through feedback-rich, self-regulated learning processes (Mandari et al., 2024; Li & Huang, 2025). Collectively, these studies reinforce the view that college readiness in Tanzania is multidimensional, requiring not only mastery of English and disciplinary knowledge but also practical competencies and informed transitions.

Despite policy emphasis on transition support and quality assurance, empirical evidence in Tanzania linking students' self-reported academic, English language, and practical abilities to their actual performance remains limited. Few studies examine these dimensions simultaneously within an English-medium, massified higher education environment or explicitly analyse the role of metacognitive calibration in shaping readiness outcomes. Addressing this gap is essential for informing evidence-based readiness assessment and targeted student support strategies consistent with TCU guidelines and broader African higher education reform agendas.

Accordingly, the study investigates the relationship between students' self-reported academic, English language, and practical abilities and their actual English proficiency and academic performance. Guided by the above theoretical framework, the study tests the following hypotheses:

1. H_{01}: There is no difference between perceived language skills and actual English language proficiency.
2. H_{02}: There is no difference between perceived academic ability and actual academic performance.

3. Ho_3: There is no significant relationship between students' self-reported practical abilities and their English proficiency and academic performance.

Methodology

The research adopted a quantitative approach, emphasising measurement, numerical data, and statistical analysis to examine relationships between variables. Within this approach, a correlational research design was employed to investigate associations among students' self-concept, metacognitive calibration, and observed performance. This design allows for the measurement of two or more variables to determine the strength and direction of their relationships without manipulating independent variables, making it suitable for exploring naturally occurring variation among first-year college students. Specifically, the study examined whether self-reported English language skills, academic abilities, and practical competencies corresponded with students' actual performance in English and academic tasks.

The target population comprised all first-year students enrolled at the college (N = 250). The study sample consisted of 218 students drawn from the campus-based first-year cohort, representing a high response rate of 87 percent. The cluster sampling technique was employed, with the entire first-year campus cluster selected, while continuing and off-campus (distance learning) students were excluded. This approach ensured that the sample was representative of the students most likely to engage directly with face-to-face academic and practical activities.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to capture both self-reported abilities and actual performance outcomes across language, academic, and practical domains. The instrument was administered to 218 first-year college students and analysed in SPSS using descriptive and inferential statistics. The measurement framework is as follows:

1. Perceived Language Skills: Students rated their English proficiency on a five-point Likert-type scale from Excellent (A) to Poor (E). These self-assessments were compared with two indicators of observable English competence.
2. Observed Language Skills: First, students completed a sentence construction task prompted by the question: *Why did you choose to study in the X programme?* Responses were coded for grammatical correctness, sentence structure, and particularly the use of the simple past tense ("I chose"). Second, functional written communication was assessed through an open-ended item asking: *What should the college do for you to make your study period more successful?* Responses were coded for clarity, coherence, and completeness, providing a macro-level measure of English communication beyond isolated grammar.
3. Perceived Academic Ability: Students self-assessed their mastery of programme content via a ten-item true/false questionnaire, rated ordinally from Poor to Excellent.
4. Observed Academic Performance: Students completed the same ten-item true/false test under standard conditions, allowing direct comparison between perceived and actual academic competence.
5. Perceived Practical Skills: Participants evaluated their proficiency in scheduling, social interaction, technology use, and fee management. Although not directly tested, these practical skills were analysed for their relationship with both English competence and academic performance, serving as potential mediators of functional readiness.

As depicted in Table 1, the study employed a structured questionnaire to assess students' self-reported abilities across eight domains: communication, English language skills, academic skills, scheduling, technology use, fees management, social skills, and overall academic performance. The instrument was designed to capture both perceived competence and practical readiness, with items measured on Likert-type scales and academic performance scaled from 1 to 10.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of Student Readiness Instrument (N = 218)

Domain / Item	Mean	Std. Dev	N	Interpretation
Communication	3.40	0.81	218	Moderate
Scheduling	4.29	0.57	218	High
Technology	4.06	0.63	218	High
Fees management	4.21	0.78	218	High
Academic Skills	4.34	0.62	218	High
Social Skills	4.53	0.58	218	Very high
English Skills	3.97	0.68	218	Moderate–High
Academic Score	6.68	1.73	218	Moderate–High (scaled 1–10)

Reliability: Cronbach's Alpha = 0.795 → good internal consistency across the 8-item instrument

Instrument reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α = 0.795), indicating good internal consistency across the eight items, as shown in Table 1. Item-level descriptive statistics were computed to summarise central tendencies and variability, providing an initial overview of students' perceived abilities across practical, language, and academic domains. Preliminary patterns indicated relatively higher self-ratings in practical and academic skills, and lower ratings in English communication. Observed academic scores were also summarised to serve as a benchmark for comparison. The writing ability measure was derived from an open-ended task and scored on a 1–5 scale based on clarity, coherence, and completeness. As a performance-based indicator, it was excluded from reliability analysis.

To examine relationships between perceived readiness and observed performance, a combination of Chi-square tests, correlation analyses, paired-samples t-tests, and MANOVA was employed, with each method aligned to specific hypotheses. For $H0_1$, Chi-square tests assessed associations between performance outcomes (tense accuracy and communication ability) and demographic variables, while Spearman's rho

(ϱ) evaluated alignment between self-reported and actual English proficiency. For $H0_2$, standardised perceived and actual academic scores (z-scores) were compared using a paired-samples t-test, with a Pearson correlation (r) used to assess individual-level alignment. For $H0_3$, MANOVA (Pillai's Trace) examined the effects of practical skill domains (scheduling, technology use, fee management, and social skills) on English proficiency and academic performance, followed by univariate ANOVAs where appropriate. Statistical significance was evaluated at $\alpha = .05$, with effect sizes reported to assess practical relevance: Cramér's V (Chi-square), Spearman's ϱ / Pearson's r (correlations), and partial η^2 (MANOVA/ANOVA), interpreted using standard benchmarks (small ≈ .10, moderate ≈ .30, large ≈ .50).

Ethical Issues Consideration

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant authorities. Participation was voluntary, with informed consent secured. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and all data were analysed in aggregate form. The study posed minimal risk, and data were securely stored for research purposes only.

Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools

Artificial Intelligence (AI)-assisted tools were used during manuscript preparation to improve language quality and structural organisation. The tools were used for editorial purposes and not for generating content, analysing data, or making conclusions. All decisions regarding the content remain the responsibility of the authors.

Results

$H0_1$: Perceived Language Skills vs. Observed English Communication

The first hypothesis ($H0_1$) examined whether students' self-reported English proficiency corresponds with their actual performance on two measures of English language use: a controlled grammatical task

(simple past tense selection) and an open-ended written communication task assessing coherence and clarity. The two tasks capture both micro-level grammatical accuracy and macro-level communicative competence, providing an objective basis for comparison with perceived language ability.

Table 2: Integrated Statistical Summary of Tense Performance, Communication Ability, and Proficiency Alignment (N = 218)

Dimension	Variable	Category / Test	Statistic	df	p-value	Effect Size
Tense Task (Accuracy)	Age	χ^2	3.100	3	0.376	V = 0.119
	Gender	χ^2	6.423	1	0.011	V = 0.172
	Programme	χ^2	1.618	2	0.445	V = 0.086
	Overall performance	Mean	0.115	—	—	SD = 0.319
Communication Ability	Abi2Com	Mean	2.257	—	—	SD = 0.761
	Age association	χ^2	15.045	12	0.239	V = 0.152
	Gender association	χ^2	4.509	4	0.341	V = 0.144
	Programme association	χ^2	53.901	8	<0.001	V = 0.352
Proficiency Alignment	Self vs Actual	Spearman's rho	0.136	—	0.044	—
Hypothesis ($H0_1$)	Relationship test		—	—	$p < 0.05$	—

Table 2 presents an integrated statistical summary of students' performance on two complementary measures of English proficiency - (i) a controlled tense-selection task assessing grammatical accuracy and (ii) a structured communication task measuring functional writing ability - alongside their self-reported proficiency and the resulting alignment analysis (N = 218). The combination of these two performance measures provides a more robust indicator of "actual proficiency" by capturing both micro-level grammatical control and

macro-level communicative competence, rather than relying on a single task.

Results from the tense task indicate very low grammatical accuracy across the sample, with only 11.5% correct responses (M = 0.115, SD = 0.319). Performance was consistently weak across all demographic categories. Age was not significantly associated with tense performance (χ^2 = 3.100, df = 3, p = .376, V = 0.119), nor was programme of study (χ^2 = 1.618, df = 2, p = .445, V = 0.086), suggesting that grammatical difficulties are broadly shared across groups. Gender showed a statistically significant association (χ^2 = 6.423, df = 1, p = .011), but the effect size remained small (V = 0.172), indicating limited practical influence despite females (15.0%) outperforming males (3.1%).

The communication task, which captures students' ability to organise and express ideas in extended written form, further confirms generally low functional proficiency (M = 2.257, SD = 0.761 on a 5-point scale). Similar to the tense task, age (χ^2 = 15.045, df = 12, p = .239, V = 0.152) and gender (χ^2 = 4.509, df = 4, p = .341, V = 0.144) were not significantly associated with communication ability. However, programme of study showed a statistically significant and moderate association with performance (χ^2 = 53.901, df = 8, p < .001, V = 0.352), with degree students more frequently occupying higher ability categories and certificate students concentrated at the lowest level. This suggests that prior academic exposure plays a more substantial role in shaping communicative competence than demographic factors.

To obtain a statistically meaningful representation of actual English proficiency, the tense task and communication ability scores were first standardised using z-scores to ensure comparability across their different measurement scales (binary accuracy for tense and a 5-point scale for communication ability). The standardised scores were then combined to form a composite "Actual Proficiency" index, representing an integrated measure of grammatical accuracy and functional writing competence.

This approach allows both tasks to contribute equally to the overall construct of English proficiency, avoiding scale dominance and enabling a more valid cross-task comparison. The resulting composite measure indicates consistently low proficiency across the sample, with limited variation explained by age or gender and only moderate variation attributable to programme of study. Overall, this combined index reflects a generalised pattern of weak English proficiency rather than isolated skill deficits in either grammar or writing alone.

When compared with self-reported English ability, the analysis shows a weak but statistically significant positive correlation with actual performance (Spearman's $\rho = 0.136$, $p = .044$, $N = 218$). This indicates that students' perceptions of their English ability only marginally align with their demonstrated performance across both grammatical and communicative tasks. Although the relationship is statistically significant, the effect size is weak, indicating poor calibration between perceived and actual proficiency.

Based on these findings, the null hypothesis (H01), which stated that there is no difference between perceived language skills and actual English language proficiency, is rejected. The statistical evidence demonstrates a clear and consistent mismatch between self-assessed ability and objectively measured performance across both tasks, confirming that students tend to overestimate their English proficiency despite uniformly low actual performance.

$H0_2$: Perceived Academic Ability vs. Observed Academic Performance

$H0_2$ examined whether students perceived academic ability corresponds with their actual academic performance. As shown in Table 3, both perceived ability (ZAcademia) and actual performance (ZScore) were standardised ($M = 0$, $SD = 1$), allowing direct comparison. The paired-samples t-test indicated no statistically significant difference between the two measures, $t(217) = 0.00$, $p = 1.000$, with a mean difference of 0.000 and a 95% confidence interval of −0.187 to 0.187. At the aggregate level, this suggests that students, as a group, neither systematically overestimate nor underestimate their academic performance.

However, this apparent equivalence in group means masks a more important pattern revealed by the correlation analysis. The paired-samples correlation was extremely weak and non-significant ($r = 0.024$, $p = 0.728$), indicating that individual students' self-assessments do not correspond to their actual academic performance. In other words, while average perceived and actual scores align statistically, this alignment is not meaningful at the individual level and does not reflect accurate self-monitoring.

This combination of findings is theoretically important. It indicates the absence of systematic bias (no consistent over- or under-confidence at group level) but also the presence of very weak calibration accuracy at the individual level. Students are not uniformly misjudging their abilities, but neither are they reliably able to estimate their own performance.

Accordingly, the null hypothesis ($H0_2$) is retained in the strict statistical sense, as no significant mean difference or meaningful association was detected between perceived and actual academic performance. However, this retention should not be interpreted as evidence of accurate self-assessment; rather, it reflects a lack of systematic bias coupled with minimal predictive alignment between perception and performance.

Table 3: Comparison of Perceived Academic Ability and Actual Academic Performance (Standardised Scores) (N = 218)

Measure	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t	df	p-value	95% CI (Lower, Upper)	Correlation (r)	p-value (r)
Perceived Ability (ZAcademia)	0.000	1.000							
Actual Performance (ZScore)	0.000	1.000	0.000	0.000	217	1.000	-0.187, 0.187	0.024	0.728

Note:

1. Scores are standardised (z-scores; M = 0, SD = 1).
2. Mean difference calculated as Actual − Perceived.
3. Correlation (r) represents the paired-samples (Pearson) correlation.
4. CI = Confidence Interval.

$H0_3$: Self-Reported Practical Skills vs. English and Academic Performance

$H0_3$ examined whether students' self-reported practical skills - specifically scheduling, technology use, fee management, and social skills - are associated with English proficiency and academic performance. The analysis aimed to determine whether these competencies contribute to functional readiness across linguistic and academic domains.

Table 4. Multivariate and Univariate Effects of Practical Skills on English Proficiency and Academic Performance (N = 218)

Practical Skill Domain	Multivariate Effect (Pillai's Trace)	F (2,212)	p-value	Partial η^2	English Prof. (F)	p-value	Academic Perform. (F)	p-value	Partial η^2 (Academic)
Scheduling	0.003	0.315	0.730	0.003	0.550	0.459	0.104	0.747	0.000
Technology Use	0.019	2.062	0.130	0.019	0.695	0.405	3.298	0.071	0.015
Fees managing	0.011	1.218	0.298	0.011	0.264	0.608	2.250	0.135	0.010
Social Skills	0.023	2.466	0.087	0.023	0.996	0.319	4.138	0.043*	0.019

1. English Proficiency: $R^2 = 0.014$ (Adjusted $R^2 = -0.005$)
2. Academic Performance: $R^2 = 0.035$ (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.017$)

Significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 4 presents the multivariate and univariate effects of practical skill domains on both outcome variables. The multivariate tests (Pillai's Trace) indicate that none of the practical skill domains had a statistically significant combined effect on English proficiency and academic performance ($p > .05$ for all domains). This suggests that, collectively, these practical competencies do not strongly predict variation in the two outcomes.

At the univariate level, results show that scheduling, technology use, and fee management were not significantly associated with either English proficiency or academic performance ($p > .05$). Social skills

emerged as the only domain with a statistically significant effect, showing a modest association with academic performance ($F = 4.138$, $p = .043$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.019$). However, social skills were not significantly related to English proficiency ($p = .319$).

The overall explanatory power of the models was low, with practical skills accounting for only 1.4% of the variance in English proficiency (Adjusted $R^2 = -0.005$) and 3.5% of the variance in academic performance (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.017$). These findings indicate that practical skills, as measured in this study, have limited predictive value for both outcomes.

1. Self-reported practical skills did not demonstrate statistically significant multivariate or univariate effects on English proficiency or academic performance ($p > .05$ for most domains). Additionally, the overall variance explained by these skills was minimal ($R^2 = 0.014$ for English; $R^2 = 0.035$ for academic performance), indicating weak predictive capacity. Although social skills showed a small significant effect on academic performance, this isolated finding does not provide sufficient evidence of a consistent or meaningful relationship across domains. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H03), which states: there is no significant relationship between students' self-reported practical abilities and their English proficiency and academic performance, is retained, as the results suggest that self-reported practical abilities are not significantly associated with students' actual performance in English and academic tasks.

Discussion

The alignment between students' self-reported readiness in the language, academic, and practical domains and their observed entry-level performance in higher education was examined. The findings indicate that perceived readiness is only weakly aligned with actual performance and varies across domains. Rather than reflecting a unified construct, readiness appears fragmented, shaped by

differences in metacognitive calibration, feedback exposure, and domain-specific experience. This interpretation is broadly consistent with metacognitive frameworks such as the Dunning–Kruger effect (Kruger & Dunning, 1999), which highlight limitations in individuals' ability to assess their competence accurately.

The $H0_1$ results revealed a weak but statistically significant relationship between perceived and actual English proficiency, alongside consistently low performance in both grammatical accuracy and written communication. This points to limited calibration rather than complete misjudgement: students' perceptions are not entirely inaccurate, but they lack precision. This finding aligns with research showing that lower-performing individuals often struggle to accurately evaluate their abilities (Dogan et al., 2023). At the same time, institutional progression into higher education may contribute to inflated or unchallenged self-perceptions, particularly in contexts where diagnostic feedback on language skills has been limited. In the Tanzanian context, where students may advance through the system despite persistent language challenges, self-perceived competence may not be systematically corrected, resulting in weak alignment at entry.

For $H0_2$, the results show no statistically significant difference between perceived academic ability and actual performance, indicating that students are not systematically over- or underestimating their academic competence at the group level. However, the absence of a meaningful correlation ($r = 0.024$, $p = 0.728$) reveals a more critical issue: individual self-assessments have virtually no predictive value for actual outcomes. This implies that the apparent "accuracy" at the aggregate level is misleading, masking substantial idiosyncratic errors in self-evaluation. Rather than reflecting well-calibrated self-knowledge, these findings suggest a form of statistical cancellation, where overestimations and underestimations balance out across the sample. Consequently, students' academic self-perceptions appear to function more as generalized confidence judgments than as grounded evaluations of competence. This weak alignment challenges

assumptions of early-stage self-efficacy–performance coupling (e.g., Vandelannote & Demanet, 2025), suggesting that such relationships may only emerge with sustained feedback and experience rather than at entry into higher education.

The findings for $H0_3$ further reinforce the limited role of perceived readiness in predicting performance. Self-reported practical skills showed no significant multivariate effects on English proficiency or academic performance, with only a small and isolated effect of social skills on academic outcomes. The overall explanatory power of these models was minimal, indicating that practical competencies, as measured in this study, do not meaningfully predict performance. This diverges from research that emphasises the importance of self-regulation and practical skills in supporting learning outcomes (Mandari et al., 2024; Li & Huang, 2025). One possible explanation is that self-reported measures may not accurately capture actual behavioural competencies, particularly in early stages of transition where students have not yet engaged fully with academic demands.

These findings reveal that students enter higher education with limited metacognitive accuracy across multiple domains. While some weak alignment is observed in language, academic and practical self-assessments show little to no predictive validity. This challenges assumptions that students possess reliable insight into their readiness and highlights the need to distinguish between perceived competence and demonstrated ability.

From a theoretical perspective, the results provide partial support for metacognitive explanations such as the Dunning–Kruger effect (Kruger & Dunning, 1999), particularly in relation to weak calibration in language performance. However, there is limited evidence in this study to support stronger expectation-driven or cumulative frameworks, such as the Pygmalion effect (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) or the Matthew effect (Merton, 1968). The absence of consistent relationships between perceived readiness and performance suggests that early expectations and self-beliefs are not yet translating

into measurable differences in outcomes. Instead, the transition into higher education appears characterised more by uncertainty and weak self-knowledge than by structured patterns of advantage or disadvantage.

Contextual factors within higher education may further contribute to these patterns. Limited feedback mechanisms, large class sizes, and uneven access to instructional support, particularly in language development, may constrain students' ability to accurately evaluate their performance. Previous research in similar contexts highlights the role of pedagogical practices and resource constraints in shaping student learning experiences (Saimon et al., 2023; Mwandosya, 2023). In addition, structured readiness and support programmes have been shown to improve both academic adjustment and self-awareness (Gilbert, 2024; Casale et al., 2025), suggesting that calibration can be strengthened through targeted intervention.

Pedagogically, these findings underscore the importance of early diagnostic assessment and continuous feedback. If students' self-perceptions are only weakly aligned with actual performance, reliance on self-reported readiness is insufficient for identifying support needs. Instead, institutions should prioritise evidence-based assessment, explicit feedback, and opportunities for reflection to improve metacognitive accuracy. Furthermore, the weak role of self-reported practical skills suggests a need to complement perception-based measures with observable indicators of student behaviour and engagement.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that perceived readiness is an inconsistent and only weakly reliable indicator of actual performance. While limited alignment exists in language domains, academic and practical self-assessments show minimal validity. These findings shift the focus away from strong claims of overconfidence or cumulative advantage toward a more grounded interpretation: students entering higher education often lack accurate insight into their abilities. Addressing this gap requires structured feedback, diagnostic assessment, and context-sensitive support systems to enhance both performance and self-awareness.

Conclusion

Evidence indicates that first-year students' self-reported readiness is a weak and inconsistent predictor of actual performance. While English shows a small link between perception and performance, academic and practical self-assessments have little predictive value. Overall, perceived readiness reflects general confidence rather than accurate judgement. Domain differences are clear: language self-assessment is weakly aligned with performance, academic self-perception is not reliably linked to individual results, and practical skills show minimal effect. These patterns suggest limited self-awareness at entry rather than clear overconfidence.

A key implication of retaining $H0_2$ is that there is no systematic over- or underestimation of academic ability at the group level. Students' average self-ratings match performance, but this hides weak accuracy at the individual level, where self-judgements do not reliably reflect actual outcomes. In practice, students may appear well-calibrated on average, but this does not help identify individual strengths or weaknesses.

Recommendations

The findings offer limited support for metacognitive explanations and show weak evidence of cumulative or expectation-driven effects. Instead, the transition is marked by weak self-knowledge and limited feedback use, shaped by contextual constraints. Institutions should prioritise diagnostic assessment, stronger feedback, and self-monitoring skills. Future research should track how self-awareness develops over time.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Funding Declaration

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency.

References

Bandura, A. (1986). Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory. Prentice-Hall.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education (pp. 241–258). Greenwood.

Braine, G. (2010). *Academic literacy and English-medium instruction in higher education.* Routledge.

Brock-Utne, B. (2010). Language and inequality in education in Africa: The Tanzanian experience. African Minds.

Brock-Utne, B. (2022). Globalization and the issue of language of instruction: Examples from Tanzania and Norway. In Globalisation, *Comparative Education and Policy Research* (Vol. 30, pp. 35–53). Springer.

Casale, C., Maier, D., & Piche, D. (2025). Student perspectives on college readiness: Listening to students. Educational Research: Theory and Practice, 36(3), 41–62.

Cleary, T. J., & Zimmerman, B. J. (2004). Self-Regulation Empowerment Program: A School-Based Program to Enhance Self-Regulated and Self-Motivated Cycles of Student Learning. *Psychology in the Schools*, 41(5), 537–550. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.10177

Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Conley, D. T. (2007). Redefining college readiness. Educational Policy Improvement Center.

Dang, J., King, K. M., & Inzlicht, M. (2020). Why are self-report and behavioral measures weakly correlated? Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 24(4), 267–269. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2020.01.007

Dogan, E., Güven, S., Dal, N., Tok, S., & Isik, U. (2023). An investigation of the Dunning–Kruger effect in first-year college students during distance education. Journal of Educators Online, 20(4).

Ehrlinger, J., Johnson, K., Banner, M., Dunning, D., & Kruger, J. (2008). Why the unskilled are unaware: Further explorations of (absent) self-insight among the incompetent. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 105(1), 98–121. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2007.05.002

Gilbert, Y. (2024). Let's hear from early admission students: Designing a readiness program for early admission students at a 2-year public college (Doctoral dissertation, Bradley University).

Ideh, A. E., & Tibategeza, E. R. (2022). Attitude of learners towards English and Kiswahili in Tanzania. NIU Journal of Humanities, 7(1). https://doi.org/10.58709/niujhu.v7i1.1386

Jussim, L., & Harber, K. D. (2005). Teacher expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies: Knowns and unknowns, resolved and unresolved controversies. Personality and Social Psychology Review, 9(2), 131–155. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr0902_3

Kalimasi, P., & Chisalala, N. (2016). Students' preparation from post-secondary to higher education and working life: Information gap for successful transitions in Tanzania. [Unpublished manuscript].

Kember, D. (1995). Open learning courses for adults: A model of student progress. Educational Technology Publications.

Kruger, J., & Dunning, D. (1999). Unskilled and unaware of it: How difficulties in recognizing one's own incompetence lead to inflated self-assessments. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77(6), 1121–1134. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.77.6.1121

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J., Bridges, B., & Hayek, J. (2008). What matters to student success: A review of the literature. National Postsecondary Education Cooperative.

Li, S., & Huang, W. (2025). Do mobile learning experiences affect college students' online learning readiness? Open Praxis, 17(4), 785–802. Doi: 10.55982/openpraxis.17.4.894

Lucas, S. R. (2001). Effectively maintained inequality: Education transitions, track mobility, and social background effects. American Journal of Sociology, 106(6), 1642–1690. https://doi.org/10.1086/321300

Mandari, H., Koloseni, D., & Mahunnah, M. (2024). Self-regulation and age perspectives on MOOCs adoption in Tanzanian higher learning institutions: The role of technology, user, and environmental factors.

Education and Information Technologies, 29(10), 11927–11954. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-023-12318-y

Merton, R. K. (1968). The Matthew effect in science. Science, 159(3810), 56–63. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.159.3810.56

Meyer, J. W., & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. American Journal of Sociology, 83(2), 340–363. https://doi.org/10.1086/226550

Muis, K. R., Winne, P. H., & Jamieson-Noel, D. (2016). Examining the relationships among self-regulated learning, academic achievement, and motivation. Learning and Instruction, 41, 1–10.

Mwandosya, G. I. (2023). A decade of e-learning implementation challenges at the College of Business Education in Tanzania. International Journal of Education and Development Using Information and Communication Technology, 19(1), 115–138.

Pajares, F. (2005). Self-efficacy in academic settings. Review of Educational Research, 66(4), 543–578. https://doi.org/10.2307/1170653

Roemer, A. E. (2023). Second language acquiescence of multilingual students in Tanzania. International Journal of Multilingual Education, 269–285. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2023.2186792

Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. (1968). Pygmalion in the classroom: Teacher expectation and pupils' intellectual development. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Saimon, M., Lavicza, Z., & Dana-Picard, T. (2023). Enhancing the 4Cs among college students of a communication skills course in Tanzania through a project-based learning model. Education and Information Technologies, 28(6), 6269–6285. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-022-11406-9

Schunk, D. H., & DiBenedetto, M. K. (2020). Motivation and social cognitive theory. Contemporary Educational Psychology, 60, 101817. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2019.101832

Shavelson, R. J., Hubner, J. J., & Stanton, G. C. (1976). Self-concept: Validation of construct interpretations. Review of Educational Research, 46(3), 407–441. DOI:10.3102/00346543046003407

Shumbusho, G. N. (2020). Problems of communicating through the English language in Tanzanian universities. Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal, 7(9), 383–399. https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.79.9015

Stanovich, K. E. (1986). Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy. Reading Research Quarterly, 21(4), 360–407. https://doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.21.4.1

Tanzania Commission for Universities. (2019). Handbook for standards and guidelines for university education in Tanzania (3rd ed.). TCU.

Teferra, D., & Altbach, P. G. (2004). African higher education: Challenges for the 21st century. Higher Education, 47(1), 21–50. https://doi.org/10.1023/B:HIGH.0000009822.49980.30

Tu, C.-C., Yang, D., & Mou, Y. Q. (2022). Influence of acculturation in Yunnan's ethnic minority college students on their academic achievement: The moderating role of learning motivation. International Journal of Educational Methodology, 8(2), 199–210. https://doi.org/10.12973/ijem.8.2.199

Vandelannote, I., & Demanet, J. (2025). People get ready: High school students' college readiness and higher education success. Social Psychology of Education. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-024-09974-4

Verrell, P. A., & McCabe, N. R. (2015). Using self-assessments of college readiness to inform college choice. College Teaching, 63(4), 162–170. https://doi.org/10.1080/87567555.2015.1060558

York, T. T., Gibson, C. & Rankin, S., (2015) "Defining and Measuring Academic Success", Practical Assessment, Research, and Evaluation 20(1): 5. doi: https://doi.org/10.7275/hz5x-tx03

Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. Theory Into Practice, 41(2), 64–70. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15430421TIP4102_2