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ABSTRACT

This research measured the effects of students' perceptions of classroom social climate in middle school social studies classes on academic self-concept in social studies. The 185 subjects, consisting of 95 females and 90 males, were eighth graders enrolled in U.S. history courses. Students' perceptions of classroom social climate were measured by the involvement subscale and by the affiliation subscale of the Classroom Environment Scale (E. Trickett and R. Moos, 1993). Academic self-concept was measured by the Academic Self Description Questionnaire II (H. Marsh, 1990). Statistically significant ($p<.05$) relationships were found between students' perceptions of classroom social climate and academic self-concept. Evidence of consistent relationships between students' perceptions of classroom social climate and academic self-concept was increased. Appendixes contain both measures used. (Contains 39 references.) (Author/SLD)

Measuring the Effects of Students' Perceptions of Classroom Social Climate on Academic Self-Concept

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Abstract

This research measured the effects of students' perceptions of classroom social climate in middle school social studies classes on academic self-concept in social studies. Consisting of 95 females and 90 males, the 185 subjects were eighth graders enrolled in U.S. history courses. Students' perceptions of classroom social climate were measured by the involvement subscale and by the affiliation subscale of the Classroom Environment Scale. Academic self-concept was measured by Academic Self Description Questionnaire II. Statistically significant ($p < .05$) relationships were found between students' perceptions of classroom social climate and academic self-concept. Evidence of consistent relationships between students' perceptions of classroom social climate and academic self-concept was increased.

Previous research has provided evidence of positive relationships between students' perceptions of classroom environment and learning outcomes (Fisher & Fraser, 1983; Martin-Reynolds & Reynolds, 1983; Moos, 1979; Trickett & Moos, 1974). Research has found that students' perceptions of classroom environment were independent variables that explained substantial variance in their learning outcomes after controlling for their background characteristics (Anderson, 1974; Fraser & Walberg, 1981; Walberg, 1976). Previous research has also provided evidence of positive relationships between students' perceptions of classroom environment and the dependent variables of: academic achievement (Moos & Moos, 1978), social studies attitude (Fouts, 1987), and motivation (Knight & Waxman, 1990).

However, little research has measured the effects of students' perceptions of specific dimensions of classroom environment such as students' perceptions of classroom involvement and students' perceptions of classroom affiliation on academic self-concept. Additionally, there has been little research into the effects of students' perceptions of classroom environment in middle school (grades 6 through 8) on academic self-concept. The lack of research into academic self-concept as a subject-specific measurement of students' pride and confidence in their academic work in specific subject areas further exacerbates these gaps in the research.

This study investigated the effects of students' perceptions of classroom social climate in middle school social studies classes on the dependent variable of academic self-concept in social studies. The independent variable of students' perceptions of classroom social climate refers to students' perceptions of classroom involvement and students' perceptions of classroom affiliation. Academic self-concept refers the extent of students' pride and confidence in their social studies work. Students' parents' education was used as a control variable.

Perceptions are personal meanings that people develop from interacting with environmental circumstances. People's perceptions decisively influence people's behavior. Behavior originates from perceptions or personal meanings developed from people interacting with environmental circumstances. Understanding student behavior as being influenced by perception or personal meaning has the potential to increase educators' effectiveness in controlling specific student behaviors. A central task of good teaching is to positively influence students' perceptions of classroom environment (Combs, 1982). Fraser (1989) presented examples suggesting that students' perceptions of classroom environment explained substantial variance in their learning outcomes after controlling for their background characteristics. Fraser (1989) also described how scientifically identifying students' perceptions of classroom environment provides a method for promoting students' classroom learning.

Moos (1979) presented students' perceptions of classroom social climate as including students' perceptions of classroom involvement (the extent to which students perceive attentive engagement in classroom learning activities) and students' perceptions of classroom affiliation (the extent to which students perceive a friendly camaraderie among classmates). Student involvement in classroom learning is an important dimension of classroom social climate that promotes students' academic motivation (Zevin, 1983). Fouts, Chan and Biao (1993) found that both Chinese and American students' perceptions of classroom involvement were positively related to attitudinal outcomes. Moos and Moos (1978) found that students' perceptions of classroom involvement were positively related to students' grades. Knight and Waxman (1990) found that students' perceptions of classroom involvement were positively related to academic self-concept. Emphasizing the benefits of enhancing students' perceptions of classroom affiliation,

Schmuck and Schmuck (1992) contended that an academically-helpful camaraderie among classmates promotes positive self-esteem. Students perceiving affiliation-oriented classroom environments characterized by mutually supportive assistance among classmates are encouraged to confidently utilize their academic ability (Van Egmond, 1960).

According to a body of literature, the control variable of students' parents' education influences students' perceptions of classroom social climate and students' academic self-concepts. Edwards (1938) included years of education completed by students' parents as a decisive factor in determining students' socioeconomic background circumstances. Rodehaver, Axtel, and Gross (1957) argued that education determines social class position of families; these authors further argued that students from families with lower class positions tend to experience social and academic disadvantages that pejoratively influence their classroom learning experiences. Rosenberg (1965) described students with the highest social class positions as having fathers who generally have college degrees and above average incomes. He described students with lower social class positions as having fathers who generally have grade school educations and below average incomes. Epps (1969) and Hollingshead (1949) have found positive relationships between students' social class positions and students' self-concepts. Previously summarized research has described why this study's control variable of students' parents' education is a background student characteristic that could affect the influence students' perceptions of classroom social climate on students' academic self-concepts.

After operationally defining academic self-concept as students' pride in academic work and students' academic performance expectations, Knight and Waxman (1990) found statistically significant ($p < .05$) positive relationships between their study's independent variable of students'

perceptions of classroom social climate and their dependent variable of academic self-concept. Students develop academic self-concept as they form self-perceptions of their academic efficacy through experiencing the classroom environment and through evaluations by significant others. Academic self-concept predicts the extent of diligent and persevering effort that students will devote toward their academic work (Shavelson, Huber & Stanton, 1976). Academic self-concept is an effective variable for predicting students' learning behaviors. In addition to being related to promoting students' interest in learning, academic self-concept can be used to promote students' motivation for further learning (Walburg & Uguroglu, 1980). Marsh and Craven (1997) presented academic self-concept as a desirable student outcome that boosts students' self-confidence, respect for others, and achievement of personal excellence.

In addition to being a key motivation-related variable, prior academic self-concept has also been shown to be positively correlated with subsequent academic achievement. Cort (1979) found statistically significant ($p < .05$) positive effects of prior academic self-concept in social studies on subsequent academic achievement in social studies. Kifer (1973) found positive correlations between prior academic self-concept and subsequent academic achievement of $\underline{r=.23}$ for the fifth grade students and $\underline{r=.50}$ for the sixth grade students. Kifer (1973) and Payne (1992) provided evidence that the relationships between prior academic self-concept and subsequent academic achievement are stronger for students in middle school than for students in earlier or later grades.

Marsh and Shavelson (1985) found that academic self-concept was more accurately measured by separately measuring math/academic self-concept and verbal academic self-concept. Having found positive correlations between prior academic self-concept in eight subject areas and subsequent academic achievement in the corresponding eight subject areas that were larger than

correlations between general academic self-concept and overall academic achievement, Marsh (1992) provided evidence for the subject specificity of academic self-concept.

Knight and Waxman (1990) formulated their hypothesis that students' perceptions of classroom social climate are positively related to academic self-concept by using Henry A. Murray's needs-press theory as theoretical underpinning. Murray (1938) developed needs-press theory as a means of explaining the relationship between environmental influences and human behavior. Needs-press theory holds that people have needs for human fulfilment that include students' needs for classroom involvement and students' needs for classroom affiliation. Environmental influences may exert stimulation (or a press) that encourages students to perceive that they are benefitting from participating in a classroom environment that meets their needs for classroom involvement and classroom affiliation. Theoretically, students perceiving that they are benefitting from the classroom involvement opportunities and from the classroom affiliation opportunities offered by their classroom environments tend to be environmentally influenced toward positive learning outcomes that include positive academic self-concepts.

Using Murray's needs-press theory as a theoretical foundation, Trickett and Moos (1973) developed the Classroom Environment Scale (CES) as a means of measuring students' perceptions of classroom environment. The CES begins with subscales that measure students' perceptions of classroom social climate which includes the dimension of students' perceptions of classroom involvement and the dimension of students' perceptions of classroom affiliation. Involvement dimension statements measure the extent to which students perceive attentive participation in classroom learning activities. Affiliation dimension statements measure the extent to which students perceive an academically-helpful camaraderie among their classsmates.

Building upon needs-press theory, Knight and Waxman (1990) reasoned that students perceiving that their needs for classroom involvement and classroom affiliation are being fulfilled by their classroom environments tend to be environmentally encouraged toward developing positive academic self-concepts. After measuring the relationship between students' perceptions of classroom environment and academic self-concept for one hundred fifty-seven sixth graders, Knight and Waxman (1990) found a statistically significant ($p < .05$) correlation of $r = .35$ between students' perceptions of classroom involvement and academic self-concept and these researchers also found a statistically significant correlation of $r = .21$ between students' perceptions of classroom affiliation and academic self-concept.

Methods

Subjects

The participants in this study were 185 eight grade U.S. history students who were attending a middle school in a western Mississippi school district during the 1998-1999 school year. There were 90 males and 95 females in the sample. Approximately sixty percent of the students in the sample were African-American and approximately forty percent were Caucasian. The school was selected because it is representative of the socioeconomic and attitudinal characteristics that are common in small cities in the southeastern U.S.

Instruments

This first instrument used in this study was the Classroom Environment Scale, Form R (CES). Trickett and Moos (1973) developed the CES in order to measure students' perceptions of classroom social climate. Internal consistency reliability coefficients for the subscales of the CES ranged from .67 to .86 according to the Kuder-Richardson Formula-20 method. Six week

test-retest reliability coefficients for the subscales of the CES ranged from .72 to .90 (Burrus, 1978; Conoley, 1989). Strong associations between data from the subscales of the CES and data from interviews with teachers and classroom observations has established construct validity for the subscales of the CES. Factor analysis indicated that the subscales of the CES measured the dimensions of classroom environment that they intended to measure (Conoley,1989).

The second instrument used in this study was the Academic Self Description Questionnaire II (ASDQ II). The ASDQ II instrument was designed to measure the academic self-concepts of secondary students in 16 subject areas. The ASDQ II instrument consists of separate six-item scales that measure students' academic self-concepts in sixteen separate subject areas. The wording of each of the six-item scales for all of the sixteen subject areas is parallel except for the identification of the subject area (Marsh, 1990). Internal consistency estimates of reliability for all the sixteen scales of the ASDQ II instrument have been determined. Coefficient alpha estimates for the sixteen scales ranged between .885 and .949 (Marsh, 1990; Marsh, 1992).

Construct validity for the ASDQ II has been provided by exploratory factor analysis and by confirmatory factor analysis (Marsh, 1992). Exploratory factor analysis of the ASDQ II instrument's sixteen separate scales has revealed that each of the scales measured the constructs that they intended to measure. Factor loadings for the ASDQ II instrument's measured variables were statistically significant ($p < .05$) and ranged from .668 to .967 (Marsh, 1990).

Procedures

The involvement subscale and the affiliation subscale of the CES were administered to the subjects between September 14 and September 17 of 1998. The ASDQ II was also administered to the subjects at the same time. Three classroom social studies teachers at a middle school

administered the study's instruments to a total of seven of their classes. Teachers informed the subjects that school personnel would not see the completed instruments. The two instruments took approximately thirty minutes to administer.

The control variable of students' parents' education was measured by a 5 point scale that instructed students to check the level of their parents' education. Students' classroom involvement perception scores were determined by their responses to statements 1 through ten on the CES. Statements 1 through ten of the CES constitute a subscale that measures students' perceptions of classroom involvement. Five of the ten involvement perception statements are reverse scored. Students responded with either true or false to each statement. Students' classroom affiliation perception scores were determined by their responses to statements eleven through twenty on the CES. Statements eleven through twenty on the CES constitute a subscale that measures students' perceptions of classroom affiliation. Five of the ten affiliation perception statements are reverse scored. Students responded with either true or false to each statement. Students' academic self-concept scores were determined by their responses to the ASDQ II. The ASDQ II instrument measures secondary students' subject-specific academic self-concepts in social studies. The ASDQ II consists of six statements that students respond to according to six gradations of truth or falsity. One of the ASDQ II's statements is reverse scored.

Hypothesis 1 was tested by using multiple regression analysis in order to test the effects of students' perceptions of classroom involvement and students' perceptions of classroom affiliation on the dependent variable of academic self-concept. Hypothesis 2 was tested by using a Pearson r statistical test in order to examine the effects of students' perceptions of classroom involvement on academic self-concept. Hypothesis 3 was also tested by using a Pearson r statistical test

in order to examine the effects of students' perceptions of classroom affiliation on academic self-concept. Hypothesis 4 was tested by using a semipartial correlation test in order to examine the effects of students' perceptions of classroom involvement and students' perceptions of classroom affiliation on academic self-concept after controlling for students' parents' education.

Results

Ranging from 1 to 5, students' parents' education scores had a mean of 3.50 (indicating completion of some college) with a standard deviation of 1.19. Ranging from 0 to ten, students' classroom involvement perception scores had a mean of 4.23 (indicating below average scores) with a standard deviation of 2.49. Ranging from 0 to ten, students' classroom affiliation perception scores had a mean of 6.24 (indicating above average scores) with a standard deviation of 2.25. Ranging from 0 to thirty-six, students' academic self-concept scores had a mean of 26.45 (indicating above average scores) with a standard deviation of 7.43. Table 1 reports the results of the hypothesis tests that measured the effects of students' perceptions of classroom social climate on academic self-concept. The hypotheses were accepted at the rejection level of ($p < .05$). The multiple correlation procedure used to test hypothesis 1 revealed a statistically significant relationship between students' perceptions of classroom involvement and students' perceptions of classroom affiliation and the dependent variable of academic self-concept. The R Square of .079 indicated that 7.9% of the variance in academic self-concept was explained by students' perceptions of classroom involvement and students' perceptions of classroom affiliation. The adjusted R Square of .069 indicated that 6.9% of the variance in academic self-concept was explained by students' perceptions of classroom involvement and students' perceptions of classroom affiliation after controlling for the sample size and the number of independent variables.

The adjusted R Square indicates the variance explained in a dependent variable that can be plausibly generalized to expectations for a new sample. The Pearson r procedure used to test hypothesis 2 revealed a statistically significant relationship between students' perceptions of classroom involvement and academic self-concept. Students' perceptions of classroom involvement explained 5.9% of the variance in academic self-concept. The adjusted R Square of .054 indicates that students' perceptions of classroom involvement explained 5.4% of the variance in academic self-concept after controlling for the sample size and the number of independent variables. The statistical significance level of ($p=.0009$) indicated a linear relationship between students' perceptions of classroom involvement and academic self-concept. The Pearson r procedure used to test hypothesis 3 indicated a statistically significant relationship between students' perceptions of classroom affiliation and academic self-concept. Students' perceptions of classroom affiliation explained 4.5% of the variance in academic self-concept. Students' perceptions of classroom affiliation explained 4.0% of the variance in academic self-concept after controlling for the sample size and the number of independent variables. A correlation coefficient of $r=.21$ and a significance level of ($p=.0041$) resulted. The semipartial correlation procedure used to test hypothesis 4 revealed that adding students' parents' education as a control variable explained no additional variance in academic self-concept. As a control variable, students' parents' education was not significantly related to academic self-concept. Students' parents' education did not explain any variance in academic self-concept. Therefore, the results of testing hypothesis 4 mirror the results of testing hypothesis 1. Students' perceptions of classroom social climate accounted for 7.9% of the variance in academic self-concept after controlling for students' parents' education.

Table 1. Relationships between students' perceptions of classroom involvement and students' perceptions of classroom affiliation and the dependent variable of academic self-concept

Independent Variable(s)	Dependent Variable
Hypothesis 1 Results	
Students' perceptions of classroom involvement (Beta=.20) Students' perceptions of classroom affiliation (Beta=.13)	Academic Self-concept Multiple R= .28* R Square= .079* Adjusted R Square= .069* Significance (p=.0006)
Hypothesis 2 Results	
Students' perceptions of classroom involvement (Beta=.24)	Academic Self-concept r= .24* R Square= .059* Adjusted R Square= .054* Significance (p=.0009)
Hypothesis 3 Results	
Students' perceptions of classroom affiliation (Beta=.21)	Academic Self-Concept r= .21* R Square= .045* Adjusted R Square= .040* Significance (p=.0041)

n=185
*p<.05

Discussion

This study has found statistically significant positive relationships between students' perceptions of classroom social climate and academic self-concept. The building of scientific evidence is facilitated by having at least one instance of comparison to scientific evidence developed from another study (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Continued hypothesis testing provides important opportunities for previously tested hypotheses to be retested and either corroborated or disproved in new tests using new subjects (Popper, 1979).

This study's finding of a relationship between students' perceptions of classroom social climate and academic self-concept provides limited corroboration for similar findings published by Knight and Waxman in an article entitled Investigating the Effects of the Classroom Learning Environment on Students' Motivation in Social Studies. Knight and Waxman (1990) found a statistically significant ($p < .05$) correlation coefficient of $r = .35$ between the variables of students' perceptions of classroom involvement and academic self-concept. Knight and Waxman (1990) also found a statistically significant correlation coefficient of $r = .21$ between the variables of students' perceptions of classroom affiliation and academic self-concept. In comparison to the correlations found by Knight and Waxman's research, this study found a statistically significant correlation coefficient of $r = .24$ between the variables of students' perceptions of classroom involvement and academic self-concept. Interestingly, this study found a statistically significant correlation coefficient of $r = .21$ between the variables of students' perceptions of classroom affiliation and academic self-concept that compares identically with the correlation coefficient of $r = .21$ found between the same two variables by Knight and Waxman's research in 1990. This comparison provides evidence that the relationships between students' perceptions of classroom

involvement and students' perceptions of classroom affiliation and the dependent variable of academic self-concept are consistent, regularized, and generalizable.

Fisher and Fraser (1984) found that classroom teachers have successfully intervened in order to elevate their students' perceptions of selected dimensions of classroom environment. Two replications of Fisher and Fraser's findings have indicated that classroom teachers have the influencing power to elevate their students' perceptions of selected dimensions of classroom environment that could include their students' classroom involvement perceptions and their students' classroom affiliation perceptions. Therefore, classroom teachers potentially have the influencing power to elevate their students' perceptions of classroom social climate (Fisher & Fraser, 1984) and students' perceptions of classroom social climate have been positively related to academic self-concept (Knight & Waxman, 1990). Kifer (1973), Cort (1979), and Payne (1992) found positive relationships between academic self-concept and subsequent academic achievement. Bloom (1976) described academic self-concept as the strongest of the affect variables in predicting subsequent academic achievement. Therefore classroom teachers potentially have the influencing power to elevate their students' perceptions of classroom social climate; students' perceptions of classroom social climate potentially have the influencing power to elevate academic self-concept, and academic self-concept potentially has the influencing power to elevate subsequent academic achievement. Marsh (1987) found that prior academic achievement was positively related to subsequent academic self-concept.

Implications

This study has increased the evidence that a statistically significant positive relationship exists between students' perceptions of classroom social climate and academic self-concept in middle

school social studies classes. Students' perceptions of classroom involvement and students' perceptions of classroom affiliation each had significant positive effects on the motivation-related dependent variable of academic self-concept. Middle school social studies teachers may use this information as a means of promoting improvements in their students' perceptions of classroom social climate that are positively related to their students' academic self-concepts. Fraser (1989) provided a classroom intervention process that guides and measures teachers' attempts to elevate their students' perceptions of selected dimensions of classroom environment. The teachers administer the CES to their students. Dimensions of classroom environment with low student perceptions are noted by the teachers. Teachers discuss ideas for intervening in order to improve their students' perceptions of designated dimensions of classroom environment. A teacher could choose to intervene in order to elevate his/her students' perceptions of designated areas of classroom environment. After an intervention period of about six weeks, the students complete the CES again. This data is compared to students' responses to the first administration of the CES in order to determine whether or not the teacher's intervention elevated students' perceptions of designated dimensions of classroom environment. Hootstein (1993) found that social studies teachers and students agree that simulations, watching films, and playing games for review are learning activities that motivate students' classroom involvement.

Middle school social studies teachers potentially have the influencing power to elevate their students' perceptions of classroom social climate. Students' perceptions of classroom social climate have been shown to be positively related to academic self-concept. Therefore, teachers potentially have the influencing power to promote improvements in their students' perceptions of classroom social climate. Improvements in students' perceptions of classroom social climate have

been shown to be positively related to improvements in students' academic self-concepts. However, the variance in academic self-concept explained by the independent variables of students' perceptions of classroom involvement and students' perceptions of classroom affiliation was small, suggesting that other independent variables that influence academic self-concept be investigated.

The influence of a variety of independent variables that potentially influence students' academic self-concepts should be investigated. Prior academic achievement could be measured as previous social studies grades and as previous scores on social studies achievement tests. The relationship between prior social studies achievement and academic self-concept could then be measured. Using students' perceptions of all dimensions of classroom environment as independent variables would probably contribute to developing a model capable of explaining substantial variance in academic self-concept. Controlling for students' characteristics such as socioeconomic background could identify the percentage of the variance in academic self-concept explained by variables that classroom teachers can potentially influence or manipulate. School climate could also serve as an excellent control variable. The development of a model capable of explaining substantial variance in academic self-concept would provide a knowledgeable foundation for facilitating classroom social studies teachers' attempts to elevate their students' academic self-concepts.

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Appendix 1 (The Classroom Environment Scale)

Write your student identification number _____.

Place a check in the blank that describes you. _____boy _____girl

Place a check that describes the highest level of education completed by your father.

_____ less than high school

_____ high school

_____ some college

_____ college degree

_____ graduate degree

Place a check that describes the highest level of education completed by your mother.

_____ less than high school

_____ high school

_____ some college

_____ college degree

_____ graduate degree

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT SCALE

Circle your response to each statement.

1. Students put a lot of energy into what they do here. **TRUE** **FALSE**
2. Students daydream a lot in this class. **TRUE** **FALSE**
3. Students are often clockwatching in this class. **TRUE** **FALSE**
4. Most students in this class really pay attention to what the teacher is saying. **TRUE** **FALSE**

5. Very few students take part in class activities or discussions. **TRUE FALSE**

6. A lot of students doodle or pass notes. **TRUE FALSE**

7. Students sometimes present something they've worked on to the class. **TRUE FALSE**

8. A lot of students seem to be only half awake in this class. **TRUE FALSE**

9. Students sometimes do extra work on their own in the class. **TRUE FALSE**

10. Students really enjoy this class. **TRUE FALSE**

11. Students in this class get to know each other really well. **TRUE FALSE**

12. Students in this class aren't very interested
    in getting to know other students. **TRUE FALSE**

13. A lot of friendships have been made in this class. **TRUE FALSE**

14. Its easy to get a group together for a project. **TRUE FALSE**

15. Students enjoy working together on projects in this class. **TRUE FALSE**

16. Students enjoy helping each other with homework. **TRUE FALSE**

17. Students don't have much of a chance
    to get to know each other in this class. **TRUE FALSE**

18. It takes a long time to get to know everybody
    by his first name in this class. **TRUE FALSE**

19. There are groups of students who don't get along in class. **TRUE FALSE**

20. Some students in this class don't like each other. **TRUE FALSE**

Appendix II (The Academic Self Description Questionnaire II)

Underline your response to each statement.

1. Compared to others my age I am good at social studies.
   FALSE
   MOSTLY FALSE
   MORE FALSE THAN TRUE
   MORE TRUE THAN FALSE
   MOSTLY TRUE
   TRUE

2. I get good marks in social studies classes.
   FALSE
   MOSTLY FALSE
   MORE FALSE THAN TRUE
   MORE TRUE THAN FALSE
   MOSTLY TRUE
   TRUE

3. Work in social studies is easy for me.
   FALSE
   MOSTLY FALSE
   MORE FALSE THAN TRUE
   MORE TRUE THAN FALSE
   MOSTLY TRUE
   TRUE

4. I'm hopeless when it comes to social studies
   FALSE
   MOSTLY FALSE
   MORE FALSE THAN TRUE
   MORE TRUE THAN FALSE
   MOSTLY TRUE
   TRUE

5. I learn things quickly in social studies.
   FALSE
   MOSTLY FALSE
   MORE FALSE THAN TRUE
   MORE TRUE THAN FALSE
   MOSTLY TRUE
   TRUE

6. I have always done well in social studies.
   FALSE
   MOSTLY FALSE
   MORE FALSE THAN TRUE
   MORE TRUE THAN FALSE
   MOSTLY TRUE
   TRUE

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