

# SELF-CONCEPT OF TEACHERS AND ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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## **Abstract**

This paper focuses on self-concept of teachers and its psychological implication. It highlights the influences that determine our self-concepts such as the roles we play, our social identities, comparisons we make, how we perceive other's appraising us, our experiences of success and failure. Culture also shapes the self. Our sense of self helps organize our thoughts and actions. Teachers with low self-concept are more susceptible to psychological illnesses ranging from stress, PTSD, depression, loneliness, anxiety and learned helplessness. It further examines the social psychological approaches that can be adopted in correcting these disorders. The therapeutic measures include, inducing internal change through external behaviour or positive thinking, social skills training, explanatory style therapy and social support.

## **Introduction**

The self is a social being with the ability to engage in symbolic communication and self-awareness. It does not develop in isolation, but within a social context. Many teachers attach much importance to good health and are generally aware that their behaviour plays an important role in achieving and maintaining physical well-being. Even though good health is generally considered important, a great number of teachers have not been able to develop positive self-concept, which would guide them thoroughly in maintaining good health. This paper will therefore examine self concept of primary school teachers and its psychological implications as well as the social- psychological approaches adopted in improving the patterns of thinking that are linked with problems in living. The self is a key construct in several schools of psychology. It is the conscious reflective personality of a person or individual. It is the essence of a person, an essential being and

developing aspect it's the central point within the psyche to which every part is related.

Self-concept is the "me" aspect of the self. It is the totality of one's thoughts and feelings, which defines the self-as an object self-concept also describes our behaviour, which we construct through social interaction. However, self-concept has no precise location or boundaries, rather is framed through identification, moreover, our self-concept is a grand self-portrait we paint and repaint throughout our lives: a little changes here, a small alteration there, most of the time se insignificant that no one notices.

The evaluative aspect of self-concept is known as self-esteem. Self esteem is one's evaluation of his or her self or one's attitude towards oneself, which may be positive (high), neutral or negative (low). Research indicates that teachers that teachers with low self-esteem have less clearly defined and stable self-concepts than those with high self- esteem do (setterlund and Niedenthal, 1993). Teachers with low self-esteem have less flexible and less complex self-concept. Our sense of self organizes our thoughts, feelings, actions, and enable us to remember our past, assess our present, and project our future and thus to behave adaptively. No wonder, Leary and Butter more, (2003), noted that self-awareness is keener in humans than it is in chimps (judging from such things as art, body adornment, and language). Varied social relationship also help to define to define our self. We have varying selves: one self with mum, another with friends, and another with teachers.

Self-concept has become a major social psychological focus because it helps organize teachers thinking and guide their behaviour. Studies of twins points to genetic influences on personality, self-concept, and social experience

as determinants of self-concepts (Myers, 2005). Self-concept can be developed through the following influences:

**1. Role-playing:** Role is a set of norms that defines how people in a given social position ought to behave (Myers, 2005). A social role is a cluster of socially defined expectations that individuals in a given situation are expected to fulfill. Social roles are defined by society, whether institutions or schools, applied to all teachers in a particular social category, and consist of well-learned responses by the teachers.

When enacting new social roles as teachers, we initially, feel self-conscious and phony, but our unease seldom lasts.

It is in this role-playing that teachers develop beliefs about themselves, which are largely a reflection of how they believe others evaluate them. This reflected appraisal determines their self-beliefs. Moreover, observing themselves can be self-revealing; they may now perceive themselves as holding the views they expressed. Thus, role-playing becomes reality.

**2. Social Identity;** Our self-concept (our sense of what we are) contains both our personal identity (sense of our personal attributes), as well as our social identity, which derives from groups to which we belong. The social identity of teachers describes what and where they are in social terms association, institution or school, race, religion, academic major, ethnic group and so forth. Because their social identity forms a central aspect of their own self-definition, their self-esteem is partly determined by the social esteem of their in-groups. Consistency with several self-concept theories, social identity theory asserts that teachers are motivated to achieve or maintain a high level of self-esteem. The theory predicts that when the social esteem of an in-group is threatened, teachers will attempt to maintain a positive social identity by engaging in in-group biasing (Franzoi, 2000). Teachers who engage in in-group biasing tend to

experience an increase in self-esteem compared with those who are not given the opportunity to express this bias.

**3. Social Comparisons:** Social comparison is a process in which we evaluate our own accomplishments by comparing them with those close to us, and our self-esteem suffers if we are outperformed. Most teachers tend to define themselves as intelligent or unintelligent, rich or poor, bright or dull, smart or dumb., tall or short: they compare themselves with others and consider how they differ. Social comparison

explains why most teachers tend to have a higher academic self-concept if they attended a school with few exceptionally capable students (Marsh, 2000). Much of our life revolves around social-comparison. At times, we feel smart when others seem dull, caring when others seem callous. It is obvious that most teachers may privately take some pleasure in a colleague's failure, especially when it is the failure of an envied person. When teachers experience an increase in affluence, status, or achievement, they raise the standard by which they evaluate their own attainments. When facing competition, they often protect their shaky self-esteem by perceiving the competitor as advantaged.

**4. Success and Failure:** Self-concept is fed by our daily experiences. To undertake challenging yet realistic tasks and to succeed is to feel more competent. After experiencing academic success, teachers develop higher appraisals of their academic ability, which often stimulate them to work harder and achieve more. To do one's best and achieve is to feel more confident and empowered.

The success-feeds-self-esteem principle has led several research psychologists to question efforts to boost achievement by raising self-esteem with positive messages ("You are somebody! You're special!"), teachers with low self-esteem do sometimes encounter problems. Compared with those with low self-esteem, teachers with a sense of self-worth are happier,

less neurotic, less troubled by ulcers and insomnia, less prone to drug and alcohol addictions, and more persistent after failure (Brown, 2003). But it's at least as true the other way around, the critics argue: problems and failures cause low self-esteem. Feelings follow reality. As we conquer challenges and learn skills, our success breeds a more hopeful, confident attitude. Self-esteem comes not only from telling teachers how wonderful they are but also from hard-earned achievements (Myers, 2005)> recognized achievements boost self-concept because we see ourselves in others' positive appraisals.

### **5. Other People's Judgements:**

When people think well of us, it helps us think well of ourselves. Teachers whom others labels as gifted, hard working, or helpful tend to incorporate such ideas into their self-concepts and behaviour. (Myers,2005). If minority teachers feel threatened by negative stereotype of their academic ability, or if they feel threatened by low expectations for their performance, they may "misidentify" with these realms. Rather than fight such pre-judgements, they may identify their interest elsewhere. Self-esteem is a psychological gauge by which we monitor and react to how others appraise us (Mark Leary, 1998).

### **6. The Surrounding Culture:**

Culture shapes the structure of our self-concept. In collectivist cultures such as Africa, interdependent self prevails. Most teachers are more critical and have less need for positive self-regard. Self identity is defined more in relation to others and group identities prevail Kanagawa, 2001). When speaking, teachers using the language of collectivist countries say "I" less often.

Collectivism has a long history, with roots, for example in Chinese agricultural villages, where harmony and cooperation enabled good crop production. This resulted in social relations and differing ways of thinking (Myers, 2005). With an interdependent self, most

teachers have a greater sense of belonging and embedding in social memberships. This results in many selves: self-with-students, self-at-work, self-with friends, and self-with -colleagues. The goal of social life is not so much to enhance one's individual self but to harmonize with and support one's communities. Most teachers place less value on expressing their uniqueness and more on more on education and shared practices.

### **Self-Concept of Teachers and its Psychological Implications**

Social psychologists focusing on health are employed in colleges, universities, schools of medicine and public health, and in government agencies. However, the areas in which teachers self-concept are attributed to health in one's environment are as follows:

#### **1. Stressful Life Events and Post**

**Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** Stress is an unpleasant state that arises when people perceive that the demands of an event seriously' tax or exceeds their ability to satisfy or alter those demands, stress also occurs when the psychological or physical well-being is disrupted. A teacher may experience a difficult event in his life with the hope that there is" nothing that can be done to elevate him again. Such teacher's self-concept will be weighed down and the immune system will also become weak thereby exposing him to various illnesses, which ranges from emotions to depression. Teachers who undergo highly stressful experiences become more vulnerable to diseases. Cohen (2002), inline with this stressed that sustained stress directs energy from the immune system, leaving us more vulnerable to infections and malignancy. Research showed that when stress—induced rumination is filtered through a negative explanatory style, the frequent outcome is depression (Robinson and Alloy, 2003). When most teachers experience set back, difficulty, and failure, and perceive such stressful events in a negative way, they develop negative self-concept, which leads to depression.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), is an anxiety disorder, which arise as a protracted and delayed response after experiencing a traumatic event involving actual or threatened death or serious injury to the self or others. Teachers who experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) usually have intense fear, flashbacks, helplessness, hypervigilance and find it difficult to concentrate. Their self-concept keeps on reflecting on the negative events that had occurred, which result in poor health background. Those with positive self-concept are bound to be healthy, while those with negative self-concept experience certain illness like shock and depression, which eventually leads to post traumatic illness or disorder. These individuals are likely to die of shock, fatigue or even commit suicide.

**2. Depression:** Depression is natural when experiencing severe stress like loosing a job, getting divorced or rejected, and suffering trauma. It is a state of sadness, gloom, pessimistic ideation, loss of concentration. In severe cases, it leads to anorexia, weight loss, and feeling of guilt. It is also anything that disrupts our sense of who we are and why we are worthy human beings. Teachers who are depressed repressed respond to bad events with self-blame and their self-esteem fluctuates more rapidly up with boosts and down with threats. Depressed teachers have been more likely than non- depressed teachers to exhibit a negative explanatory style (Peterson and Steen, 2002). This implies that they are more likely to attribute failure and setbacks to causes that are stable (It's going to last forever"), global ("it's going to affect everything I do"), and *internal* (It's all my fault"). The result of this pessimistic, over-generalized, self-blaming thinking makes them hopelessness.

**3. Loneliness:** Loneliness whether chronic or temporary, is a painful than we desire (Myers, 2005). Lonely teachers are self-conscious. Low in self-esteem and perceive their interactions as

making a poor impression, blame themselves for their poor social relationships, and see most things as beyond their control. They often find it hard to introduce themselves, make phone calls, and participate in group discussions or relationship. They are also slow to self-disclose and disdain those who disclose too much.

**4. Anxiety:** Anxiety is apprehension of possible failure, danger, fear, worry, tension, and uneasiness common among shy and easily embarrassed people. Some teachers, especially those who are shy or easily embarrassed, feel anxious in almost any situation in which they might be evaluated. Due to the fact that they are eager to present themselves in ways that make a good impression, they feel anxious when they are - motivated to impress others but doubt their ability to do shy, self-conscious and anxious .teachers perceive incidental events as somehow relevant to themselves.

**5. Learned Helplessness:** This is an apathetic, hopeless condition, which reduces the motivation to solve problems, interferes with the ability to learn from experience, leads to lack of over repeated bad events and produces depression. When teachers experience uncontrollable bad events they learn to feel helpless and resigned. Depressed or oppressed teachers for instance, become passive because they believes their efforts have no effect and suffer paralysis of will, passive resignation, and motionless apathy.

**Social Psychological Approaches to Treatment:** Some approaches are adopted in improving the patterns of teachers thinking that are linked with problems in living, ranging from stress, post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, loneliness, anxiety to learned helplessness. A teacher can generally control a positive self-concept that would give him good health in terrible stressful life events through the following processes:

### **1. Inducing Internal Change though External Behaviour or Positive Thinking:**

changes in external behaviour can trigger internal change (Myers, 2005). The role teachers play, the things they say and do, and the decisions they make influence who they are. Positive thinking helps correct negative self-concepts and impressions that are prone to illnesses by applying Rational Emotive Therapy (RET), which allows the teachers to generate their own emotions by first role-playing assertiveness in a supportive context, and then gradually becomes assertive in everyday life. Positive self-concepts help to regain freedom from psychological illness (such as stress, PTSD, depression, loneliness, anxiety, and learned helplessness). For instance, people who have tested positive to HIV/ AIDS syndrome can be made to last long by using this therapeutic ideology to inform them that they are still accepted in the society and that their illness can be managed through the help of a good physician.

**2. Social Skill Training:** Social skill training is effective for depressed, lonely and shy teachers who suspect and come across poorly in social situations. By observing and then practicing new behaviours in safe situations, they may develop the confidence to behave more effectively in other situations. When shy, anxious teachers observe, rehearse, then try out more assertive behaviours in real situations, their social skills often improve.

**3. Explanatory Style Therapy:** This approach can be effective in changing one's negative thought patterns. It helps teachers to reverse their negative beliefs about themselves and their future by noting their successes and failures, and how they contribute to it, which in turn lead to changes in their negative thoughts.

**4. Social Support:** Another means of raising one's self concept is through social support. When a teacher's self-concept is down or low on certain issues as regard to events in

life, there is the need for social support through contact with close friends and relatives, church members, formal and informal group associations, learned society as well as the institution. By coming in contact with people who tend to give emotional support and at the same time, share problems, such teacher's self-concept can be portrayed in a positive form and problems lessen without experiencing poor health.

### **Conclusion**

Self-concept of teachers has become a major focus for this paper. Self-concept can be shaped by individual traits and cultural context. Self-concept is developed through role-playing, social identity social comparisons, success and failure, other people's judgements and our surrounding culture. Teachers who have positive or high self-concept are known to be free from ill-health unlike those with low self-concept who often witness certain ill-health ranging from stress, PTSD, depression, loneliness, anxiety to learned helplessness.

However, the issue of teacher's self-concept and its psychological implications can be corrected through therapeutic measures such as positive thinking, social skill training, explanatory style therapy and social support.

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