Self-Concept of a Younger Pupil Within the Context of His or Her Personality Development

Michal Pankevič and Dominika Suchá

ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of primary education saturates a number of pedagogic-psychological variables and predicts various situations, failure which can negatively affect the self-concept process of the pupil. This self-concept of the pupil affects his or her relationship to school, learning, school success, but above all, it can affect his or her relationship to himself or herself and can be a fundamental determining factor in the process of development of the pupil’s personality. In this paper, we present a partial exploratory analysis of the results of the Piers-Harris 2 (PHCSCS-2) questionnaire survey of the self-concept of the school pupils, who attended the fourth year of the elementary school.

Keywords: pupil’s personality, Piers-Harris 2, self-concept, younger school age.

I. SELF-CONCEPT AS A PROCESS OF ONE’S OWN ACTIVE “I”

In educational practice, we often meet with specific pupil failure and with related school failure. However, the mentioned variables are sometimes not related to limited metacognitive or executive skills of pupils, or problems and learning disorders. It is simply a negative perception of one’s own “I,” a deconstruction of one’s own self-concept.

Self-concept comes from the belief “that individuals create a relatively consistent system of opinions about themselves, which develops and stabilizes during the time of childhood” (Obereigner et al., 2015, p. 43). This set of opinions represents the so-called self-concept (in the literature we also meet with the term self-concept)—a term that is usually used synonymously with the term self-esteem or self-evaluation (auto-evaluation). Authors who deal with self-concept (e.g., Dickstein, 2017; Harter, 2015; Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton, 2016; Schönfeld, 2019 and others) assume that children’s and pupils’ self-concept can be derived from their agreement or disagreement with simple statements. This assessment then relates to other aspects of children’s personality and predicts future behavior and actions (Abelson & Staley, 2020).

In principle, we can state that the concept of self-concept is related to the perception of oneself in relation to important aspects of life. This perception primarily develops in the interaction of the individual with the environment in early childhood and is also based on the approach to the behavior of the environment towards the child, but it is influenced by biological and cultural factors, too. The mentioned procedural operationalization of personality leads to the formation of self-evaluative approaches and feelings, which have both important organizational and motivational functions. In response to changes in the environment, developmental changes or changes in priorities and values, the self-concept of the child/pupil can also change over time especially in the pre-school period and younger school age period (Chapman, 2013).

II. DETERMINANTS OF A CHILD’S SELF-CONCEPT (NOT ONLY) IN THE PERIOD OF YOUNGER SCHOOL AGE

Within the context of the determination of the term of self-concept, there are several theoretical starting points. Several concepts of self-concept can be found in the relevant expert literature; in the paper, we use the theoretical elaboration of the concept of Piers and Herzberg (2022).

Within this context, the authors say that the self-concept:

1) Is, by its very nature, phenomenological – it cannot be observed directly, but it must be inferred from the behavior or expressions of the individual himself or herself. Although behavior can be inferred directly, it is difficult to use observation of behavior to draw consistent conclusions about self-concept. Statements about oneself, even if it may be distorted in various ways, are stricter because it is a direct experience of the particular individual.

2) Has global and specific components – global self-concept expresses how an individual perceives the characteristics that shape his or her personality. These characteristics include, among others, abilities, skills, personality traits as well as the intensity and depth of interaction with the surrounding environment. Specific aspects of self-concept include several dimensions – some are relatively broad (e.g., physical self, moral and ethical self, academic self), others are narrowly defined (e.g., good results at math, poor results at

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.24018/ejedu.2022.3.6.525

Vol 3 | Issue 6 | December 2022
physical education). The importance of a given aspect in an individual’s self-concept determines the extent to which success or failure will affect the overall self-evaluation of the child. Unimportant areas are unlikely to have a significant impact on the overall self-evaluation.

3) “Is relatively stable”

(Piers & Herzberg, 2022, p. 94)

Despite the above-mentioned statements, it should be added that even if it is empirically conditioned, it does not change easily or quickly. The self-concept of children of younger school age is determined rather situationally and it only becomes stable over time. Although it may be possible for the self-concept of a child to be improved through a collective experience, this is unlikely to happen on the basis of a brief, single or superficial intervention. For example, a weekend trip can be pleasant for a child, but it is unlikely to bring about a long-term change in the self-concept of a child. Additionally, some areas of self-concept may be more resistant to change than others.

4) Has both evaluative and descriptive character, it represents, in an individual, accumulated judgments about himself or herself. Some of these may represent internalized judgments of others (e.g., values, norms, and ideas about what is socially desirable), others may be unique to each individual. When we evaluate the reported self-concept, it is therefore important to consider both nomothetic (interpersonal) and idiographic (intrapersonal) sources of comparison. This should reflect how the child evaluates himself or herself in relation to his or her peers and how he or she evaluates himself or herself in relation to his or her internal standards.

5) “Is experienced and expressed differently at different stages of one’s development.”

(Piers & Herzberg, 2022, p. 97)

In the period of pre-school and younger school age (following the school environment), the main goal is to distinguish oneself from others and create a reciprocal relationship, e.g., with a teacher or educator (Ainsworth, 1979; Mahleret al., 1975; in Piers, Herzberg, 2022). In the mentioned period, the child moves more, establishes social relations with other children and adults and begins to realize that he or she belongs to the given gender. In this period, self-concept is primarily based on the experiences of a child in these areas, as well as on the behavior and attitude of the parents, school results and relationships with peers. With older age and increasing experience, the individual self-concept of the child is more differentiated, which is a consequence of the effort to integrate different experiences into a unified framework (Fahey & Phillips, 1981; in Piers & Herzberg, 2022).

6) Serves for the organization of behavior and motivation – a stable self-concept maintains consistent reactions of the individual when dealing with different situations, which helps to reduce ambiguity in new situations and structure behavior towards the existing goals. Here, the action of an individual is also influenced by his or her judgment about whether the given behavior is consistent with his or her own self-image. Behavior and actions that are in line with the individual’s self-concept will be preferred, potential success or failure and the emotions associated with it (e.g., pride, joy, humiliation, etc.) can also serve as important sources of motivation (Piers & Herzberg, 2022).

III. THE ISSUE OF SELF-CONCEPT OF YOUNGER PUPILS IN EXPLORATORY DISCOURSE

Self-concept as an educational, psycho-diagnostic, and psycho-dynamic phenomenon of a child’s/pupil’s personality, represents one of the important exploratory variables, finding its justification in school and clinical-psychological practice.

The beginnings of researching the self-concept of children and pupils go back to 1952, when in the work of Jersid (1952; in Ottenbacher, 2017) we find information about finding out what children like about themselves and what they don’t like about themselves. The author divided their statements into the following categories:

1) Physical characteristics and appearance,
2) Dressing and taking care of oneself,
3) Health and feeling of physical well-being,
4) Home and family
5) Pleasure from rest
6) Skills in sports and games,
7) School performance and attitudes towards school,
8) Intellectual abilities,
9) Special talent (music, art, etc.),
10) “Just me,”
11) Personality characteristics, inner resources and emotional tendencies.

The mentioned set, consisting of 164 items, was written to reflect these different aspects of children’s self-concept. Items were presented as simple statements (e.g., I am a happy person) and answers to them were “yes” and “no”. Half of the items were formulated negatively in order to limit the effect of answering in the desired direction, and the other half, on the contrary, expressed a positive self-concept (e.g., I have many friends). The items were administered to a sample of pupils in the third to fifth year of elementary school.

Within the context of Carl Rogers’ “I” theory, we find an exploration of self-concept in the form of the so-called Q-sorting, which consists in preparing a set of papers, each of which has some self-descriptive statement written on it (e.g., I’m diligent/I’m popular/I’m pretty, etc.). The child/pupil is then asked to sort the cards into five separate groups starting with “it is most like me” and ending with “it is least like me.” In addition to the Q-classification, the so-called semantic differential, the essence of which is questionnaire scaling (e.g., good - x - bad), (Fontana, 2003) is also used.

An important group of exploratory activities that are aimed at determining the self-concept of children/pupils of younger school age is represented by case studies, carried
out individually or in groups. Several such studies are described in the literature. Within the mentioned context, we were interested in case studies from German and Czech provenance (case study of Piers-Harris 2-Angela, case study from the field of counseling and school psychology-Roman; case study from the field of clinical psychology-Dalibor), which were carried out by clinical psychologists and experts in the field of school and counseling psychology and the Piers-Harris 2 questionnaire construct was used as a measuring tool (e.g. Friedlová, 2015; Malčík, 2016; Reiter, 2016; Petrujová, 19; in Cooley, Ayres, 2020). The above-mentioned fact, but especially the exploratory use of the mentioned construct in the implementation of pedagogical diagnostics within the context of action research at the primary level of education, also inspired our effort to carry out a similar measurement in the selected research sample (see the next chapter).

IV. METHODOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS OF THE SURVEY

Objective reality has various questions which cannot be answered immediately. The need to search for answers therefore calls for focusing both theoretical and pragmatic efforts on new knowledge. There can be several research questions, but by abstracting the main components and relationships, you can arrive at the formulation of your own research problem (Nowak, Lepa, 2011).

A. Research Problem:

What is the relationship between the subscales of self-concept and the overall self-concept of a younger school age pupils?

B. Objectives of the Survey:

The primary goal of the survey is to find out the level of self-concept of pupils in the fourth year of elementary school. Specific objectives of the survey:

1) to identify the scores of defined subscales of self-concept.
2) to interpret the level of self-concept of pupils in relation to their personality.

C. Research Tasks:

1) Selection of a relevant, valid, and reliable exploration construct.
2) Administration of the questionnaire in the selected research sample.
3) Interpretation of the results of the questionnaire survey.

D. Survey Questions:

Q1: Is there a statistically significant relationship between adaptability as a subscale of pupil self-concept and intellectual and academic standing as a subscale of pupil self-concept?
Q2: Is there a statistically significant relationship between physical appearance as a subscale of pupil self-concept and anxiety-resistances as a subscale of pupil self-concept?
Q3: Is there a statistically significant relationship between popularity as a subscale of pupil self-concept and happiness and satisfaction as a subscale of pupil self-concept?

E. Deduction from Q1-Q3

When formulating the survey questions, we used the research of Kugle (2018; in Abelson, Staley, 2020), which investigated the stability of self-concept in a group of 108 pupils of the fourth year of elementary school. The PHCSCS-2 was administered to the sample twice over a span of four months. A correlation index and an index of item stability were calculated for each pupil using the kappa coefficient. The level (average score of the subscales) and the stability of self-concept were subsequently compared, and it was found that there is partial statistical significance in the scores of individual subscales (but not within all subscales), which subsequently affects the identification of the self-concept profile of a pupil.

V. SURVEY METHODS

To ensure the quality of the survey and the validity of its results, it is important to select the relevant research/survey methods. In the survey, we used methods that can be divided into three groups:

A. Literary Methods

This group of methods includes the study of expert literature (books, periodicals, electronic media), making extracts, their processing and sorting.

B. Exploratory Methods

Among the questionnaires for measuring self-concept (e.g., SPAS, SPPC, Rosenberger self-assessment scale), we chose the Piers-Harris 2 (PHCSCS-2) questionnaire for our survey, primarily because of its relatively simple administration (as the survey is carried out on a sample of pupils at fourth year of elementary school with a heterogeneous level of understanding of the text), uncomplicated evaluation and easy interpretation.

“The Piers-Harris Child and Adolescent Self-Concept Questionnaire 2 (PHCSCS-2) is a 60-item self-report questionnaire with the subtitle How I perceive myself […] The items of the PHCSCS-2 questionnaire include statements which describe how people can perceive themselves. Respondents choose between the options yes and no depending on whether the statement applies to them […] The PHCSCS-2 questionnaire includes 6 subscales that assess specific areas of self-concept. These are Adaptability (BEH), Intellectual and Scholastic Status (INT), Physical Appearance (PHY), Anxiety Resistance (FRE), Popularity (POP) and Happiness with Satisfaction (HAP).”

(Obereignerů et al., 2015, p. 7).

C. Statistical Methods

For statistical analysis, given the established survey questions and the nature of the data, we used the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Goodness-of-Fit Test (K-S test) and the Spearman correlation test. We used each of these tests for individual survey questions according to the nature of
the specific data that appear in the given survey question. Statistical analysis was performed in the SPSS 29 program.

VI. SURVEY SAMPLE

The objectification of the survey objectives determined the localization of the survey sample in the area of eastern and central Slovakia, while the basic set represents the area of the Prešov et al. (2022) self-governing regions in Slovakia. From the basic set, we intentionally selected a convenient sample to create a sample set, which, in the context of the exploration, consists of 117 pupils of the fourth year of elementary school (there are 66 girls and 51 boys). The questionnaire survey was, in a defined survey sample, carried out in the months of October and November 2022 in the form of personal, participatory administration.

VII. PARTIAL QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY RESULTS

In the following text, we present a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the results of the measurement of individual subscales of pupil self-concept in a defined survey sample. The level of statistical significance, within which the measurement results are evaluated, represents a value of p<0.05.

Q1: Is there a statistically significant relationship between adaptability as a subscale of pupil self-concept and intellectual and academic standing as a subscale of pupil self-concept?

To obtain knowledge about the normality of the data distribution, that is necessary for the subsequent verification of Q1 and based on the sample size, we used the K-S test (see the Table I).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE I: NORMALITY TEST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual and academic standing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For survey question 1 (Q1), we tried to find out whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the adaptability as a subscale of the pupil’s self-concept and intellectual and academic standing as a subscale of the pupil’s self-concept. For the analysis of the survey question, after taking into account the test of normality of the data distribution and the nature of the variables, we used the non-parametric Spearman correlation test (see Table II).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE II: SPEARMAN’S CORRELATION TEST: ADAPTABILITY * INTELLECTUAL AND ACADEMIC STANDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spearman’s Correlation Coefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the results shown in Table II we can conclude that there is a statistically significant relationship between adaptability as a subscale of the pupil’s self-concept and intellectual and academic standing as a subscale of the pupil’s self-concept.

Q2: Is there a statistically significant relationship between physical appearance as a subscale of pupil self-concept and anxiety-resistance as a subscale of pupil self-concept?

In order to gain knowledge about the normality of the data distribution, that is necessary for the subsequent verification of the Q2 and based on the sample size, we used the K-S test (see Table III).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE III: NORMALITY TEST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety resistance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For research question 2 (Q2), we tried to find out whether there is a statistically significant relationship between physical appearance as a subscale of pupil self-concept and anxiety resistance as a subscale of the pupil self-concept. For the analysis of this research question, after taking into account the test of normality of data distribution and the nature of the variables, we used the non-parametric Spearman correlation test (see Table IV).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE IV: SPEARMAN’S CORRELATION TEST: PHYSICAL APPEARANCE * ANXIETY RESISTANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spearman’s Correlation Coefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the results shown in Table IV, we can state that there is no statistically significant relationship between physical appearance as a subscale of the pupil’s self-concept and the resistance to anxiety as a subscale of the pupil’s self-concept.

Q3: Is there a statistically significant relationship between popularity as a subscale of pupil self-concept and happiness and satisfaction as a subscale of pupil self-concept?

We used the K-S test to obtain knowledge about the normality of the distribution of data, that is necessary for the subsequent verification of Q3 and based on the sample size (see Table V).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE V: NORMALITY TEST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness and satisfaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the survey question 3 (Q3), we tried to find out whether there is a statistically significant relationship between popularity as a subscale of pupil self-concept and happiness and satisfaction as a subscale of pupil self-concept. For the analysis of this research question, after taking into account the test of normality of the data.
distribution and the nature of the variables, we used, as in the previous cases, the non-parametric Spearman correlation test (see Table VI).

**TABLE VI: SPEARMAN’S CORRELATION TEST POPULARITY * HAPPINESS AND SATISFACTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spearman’s Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.941</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the results shown in Table VI, we can state that there is a statistically significant relationship between popularity as a subscale of pupil self-concept and happiness and satisfaction as a subscale of pupil self-concept.

In connection with the interpretation of the results of the PHCSCS-2 administration, it is necessary to state that it is (or should be) an integration process. It means, that at the evaluation the researcher should take into account all available data about the researched individual/s. This can be information from various sources - results of other tests, clinical interviews with the child and his or her parents, observation of behavior, reports from teachers, school results, medical history, etc. However, sometimes individual sources can provide information which contradicts one another. If this happens, it is necessary to select information that matches and supports a specific view of the child’s/pupil’s self-concept.

**REFERENCES**


Michal Pankevič is a primary school teacher and an assistant professor at the Department of Preschool and Elementary Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, Catholic University in Ružomberok (Slovakia) as well. It deals with the issue of alternative education, pupils’ education from socially disadvantaged environment, multiculturalism, and its implementation in the educational process.