

## FROM CHAOS TO COHERENCE: EXPLORING TEACHER'S SELF- ESTEEM AND ITS EFFECTS ON STUDENT LEARNING

---

SUMA A\*

### ABSTRACT

*"What a person thinks of himself that is which determine his fate"*

*–Walden Thoreau*

*Self-esteem enriches all aspects of life by facilitating people to have positive feelings about themselves, to have increased personal output and satisfactory interpersonal relationships. Individuals who have positive feelings about themselves are more capable of defining goals and objectives, identifying strengths and dealing with disappointments. They are also more willing to accept responsibility, view mistakes as essential in the process of growth and development and are personally motivated. Self-esteem has its foundation in a "strong sense of self-worth which survives both failure and success; mistakes and disappointment, acceptance and rejection from others". Like all other walks of life, teaching as a profession needs high sense of self-esteem. Researchers have shown that teachers with high self- esteem can in turn develop a sense of self-esteem in his/ her students and can eventually enhance the academic performance of the learner. Teachers who have a high level of self-esteem manifest themselves in the classroom as confident and relaxed and have a respectful attitude towards students. The ethos engendered by such a person who projects trust and belief in the child's capacity and who has a warm supportive presence which enhances the child's view of himself /herself as someone of worth, results in an enhancement of the student's performance as well. Teachers who have a high level of self-esteem are more likely to be flexible and exploratory in their approach to teaching and it will definitely influence his/her style of teaching and ability to develop good pupil-teacher relationships. The present paper is a thematic intervention which explores the scope of teacher's self esteem and its effects on student learning.*

---

**Keywords:** *Self- Esteem, Academic Performance, Self-worth, Growth and Development.*

---

### Introduction

The term self-esteem is now becoming more universally recognised. It is usually used with reference to evaluations that individuals make and retain of themselves. It incorporates attitudes of approval or disapproval and the degree to which people feel valuable, capable, significant and competent. Self- esteem enriches all aspects of life by facilitating people to have positive feelings about themselves, to have increased personal output and satisfactory interpersonal relationships. Persons with high self-esteem accept themselves as they are with their strengths and weaknesses. The more individuals come to terms with their limitations, the more they are willing to listen to other people's criticism and learn from it, even to the extent of risking change. High self-esteem also manifests itself in a feeling of confidence about personal value. Such individuals are unrestricted towards love and acceptance from others. However, if they experience rejection they are not undermined because their self-esteem helps them to cope with that rejection and subsequent disappointment. Like all other walks of life, teaching as a profession also needs high sense of self-esteem. Researchers have shown that

---

\* UGC Junior Research Fellow, Department of Education, University of Calicut, Malappuram, Kerala, India.

teachers with high self- esteem can in turn develop a sense of self-esteem in his/ her students and can eventually enhance the academic performance of the learner. Unfortunately, little attention is raised in regard to the self-esteem of the teachers who are supposed to develop a sense of self- esteem in the students entrusted to them. If teachers have a distorted self-image of themselves, it is possible that they become incapacitated in their teaching career and it will definitely be reflected in the performance of the learners as well.

### Understanding the Concept of Self- Esteem

A historical account of the origin of self-esteem is outlined in R.B. Burn's 'The Self-Concept' He traces the importance of an individual acquiring self-knowledge back at least as far as Socrates who stated that "the unexamined life was not worth living". The theory of 'self' has been a focus of individuals, primarily as a philosophical and theological concern, down through the centuries. When we discuss about self-esteem, we need to understand other terms connected to self-esteem such as self-concept, self-image, and ideal self. According to Laurence (2012), **self- concept** is an umbrella term encompassing **self-image** (what the person is), **ideal-self** (what the person would like to be) and **self-esteem** (what the person feels about the discrepancy between what one is and what one would like to become). For each individual, the real-self and the ideal-self are at variance as the ideal-self encompasses what we would like to become. This disparity is important, because without some degree of aspiration children and adults can become poorly adjusted. It is normal, and in fact commendable, for an individual to be continually striving. However, the narrower the gap between the real-self and the ideal-self the more confident the individual will become, and the greater will be his/her capacity to achieve a high level of self-esteem. Conversely, when there is a large disparity between the real-self and ideal-self the individual is more likely to have a low level of self-esteem.

Literature suggests that an individual's level of self-esteem is determined largely by the feedback received from the social environment. It is important to note that all the beliefs and images which persons hold as an integral part of their self- concept were not an inherent component of an individual's self-concept at birth. We were all born with certain describable physical characteristics and untapped potential but no one was born with fully formed conceptualisations that he/ she is intelligent or stupid, ugly or good looking, extrovert or introvert. Most of the images and beliefs which we hold about ourselves as adults were acquired prior to adulthood. The origin of our self-concept stems from how others treated us and what they informed us about ourselves. According to **Maslow's hierarchy of needs**, the need for self- esteem can be satisfied if and only if the preceding stages, ie. the **physiological needs, the safety and security needs and the need for love and belongingness** are successfully completed.

### Need for High Self-Esteem for Teachers

**Teachers who have a high level of self-esteem manifest themselves in the classroom as confident, relaxed and have a respectful attitude towards students.** The ethos engendered by such a person who projects trust and belief in the child's capacity and who has a warm supportive presence which enhances the child's view of him/herself as someone of worth, results in an **enhancement of the student's performance.** Teachers who have a high level of self-esteem are more likely to be flexible and exploratory in their approach to teaching and are well **aware of the impacts of hidden curriculum in the development of learner's 'self'** and eventually enhancing their overall performance. Teachers with healthy levels of self-esteem who are confident and relaxed about their role as teachers, communicate positive messages both verbally and non-verbally to their students. **Teachers who are aware of the importance of enhancing self-esteem give pupils realistic self-concepts rather than inaccurate ones.** A teacher with a high sense of self- esteem is capable of building a **teacher-pupil relationship which is based on empathy, acceptance and genuineness.** Such a teacher can enable the child feel free and accept blame and criticism without adversely affecting self-esteem. Thus teachers self-esteem can help them in two ways: (1) It helps to refine their own personality (2) It helps to enrich the self-esteem of the students entrusted to them and thereby enhance their potential output.

### Characteristics of teachers with high sense of self-esteem

A teacher with high self- esteem preferably has the following characteristics:

- Have a realistic view of themselves and accept themselves for what they are;
- Are able to identify their strengths and accept their limitations;
- Usually find it easy to relate to others;
- Are not afraid of taking risks, in terms of responding to challenges;

- Do not feel under pressure when confronted with new situations or challenges;
- Acknowledge recognition for their achievements because they feel responsible for the results;
- Can cope with mistakes and failures and view them as opportunities for further learning;
- Can establish goals for themselves.
- Always confident and self-directed.
- Have the ability to trust others
- Usually have a non- blaming behaviour.

#### **Scope of Teacher's Self-Esteem on Student Learning**

A teacher with high sense of self- esteem can enhance student's self- esteem and eventually his/ her performance in learning as well. **Teacher's self-esteem which can be reflected through his/her personal characteristics, teaching style, way of communication, everyday interactions and skill of assertion** and have an everlasting remark on the student's 'self', which truly motivates him/ her to strive towards realistic goals.

#### **Teacher's Personal Characteristics**

- **Empathy:** Empathy, when expressed verbally, gives students reassurance that they are understood and accepted for what they are. Empathy also implies being able to appreciate what it feels like to be another person. One possible way of doing this is perhaps trying to come to terms with the feelings behind a verbal message. If pupils feel that the teacher understands them and that the teacher "is on their wavelength", then it is more probable that the pupil will trust or be influenced by that teacher. A correlation was found between the level of empathy in a student and the level of academic attainment. Evidence suggests that students tend to perform better if they like the teacher and if they feel the teacher understands them.
- **Acceptance:** Acceptance means liking and demonstrating concerns for the students as they are, with their strengths and weaknesses, capacities and limitations. For instance, if a child misbehaves, it is important that the child is still accepted even though the behaviour requires reprimand. Acceptance can be shown by demonstrating concerns for the child's welfare, by maintaining interest in the child, by being involved in the child's development, by recognising and appreciating what the child can do and by offering support for the child in times of difficulty. The concept of acceptance is best exemplified when teachers do not pass judgment on their students. They are not only judgmental to students, but teachers also accept their own students as they are. Hence, instead of condemning students, a good teacher will be compassionate, will care for all students, and, will inspire students by making learning fun.
- **Genuineness:** Genuineness means being able to respond to a person in need, naturally and spontaneously as one might respond to a good friend, rather than in terms of an individual's professional stereotype or status. Hence genuine teachers are not defensive, but spontaneous. The behavioural characteristics of a genuine person have been outlined as follows:
  - their verbal and non-verbal behaviours are congruent with each other;
  - they are willing to be open about themselves;
  - they do not refer to their status/role;
  - they are consistent in their behaviour whether counselling a pupil or not;
  - if challenged, they can cope with the challenge and explain their viewpoint

#### **Teaching Style**

A teacher with a high sense of self- esteem can motivate the learners by adopting the preferred teaching style. A study done by Sheikh and Mahmmod (2014) affirms that "different teaching styles have a significant effect towards the motivational level of students" thus, signifying that students' self-esteem in terms of motivation to learn is enhanced by teachers' use of students' preferred teaching styles. A smart teacher can adopt styles like **task analysis**, so that the students themselves can set realistic goals. The advantages in being able to make a difficult task easier are that it enhances the students' sense of being responsible for their own successes. In addition, it prompts the student to focus on the main obstacles to learning and enables the students to increase the opportunities for success without necessarily lowering aspirations. It is clear, therefore, that realistic goal setting combined with task analysis strengthens the link between effort and outcome.

### Way of Communication

Irrefutably teachers impart and transmit knowledge to students in and outside the classroom through communication. Communication involves verbal and non-verbal elements of human behaviour. Through both forms of communication teacher imbibes within the students a strong feeling of self-worth and make them well equipped to set realistic goals and strive towards achieving it.

*Verbal Communication and Non-Verbal Communication:* Verbal communication enhances students' self-esteem through use of **words or phrases to encourage, to praise, and to value**. With non-verbal communication, students are highly sensitive to **body gestures, postures, eye contact, tone, speed of response**, etc. (Cohen, Marion, & Morrison, 2004). Effective body language of a teacher that generates curiosity and motivation among the learner's includes, standing up straight, having eye contact, pleasant face with a smile, adequate facial expressions, probing questions in a non-threatening way, hands out and palms up shows that you are open to questions, adopting different poses, appear relaxed and avoiding folding the arms and using any barriers that hinders the teacher from directly interacting with the pupil.

### Everyday Interaction

A teacher with a high degree of self-esteem should always try to keep a warm contact with his learners. Desirable contacts such as a word of praise, a smile, or encouragement are sufficient enough in effecting positive change in students (Cohen, Marion, & Morrison, 2004). Teacher's **positive feedback and teacher expectation** can in turn strengthen the self-esteem of the learner's and influence their learning to a great extent.

Rogers (1969) showed that when teachers demonstrate high self-esteem in their daily teaching, they can engender high self-esteem in their own students. Teachers can really influence their students' self-image by '**accepting self-esteem as a dynamic system**' and this could be accomplished by:

- improving teachers' competencies to influence self-esteem in students as a dynamic system;
- equipping teachers to deal with cultural and personal differences of students;
- enabling teachers to view self-esteem as a channel for promoting equal opportunities;
- enhancing interpersonal communication skills, professional pedagogic attitudes;
- supporting teacher's to influence the zone of proximal development (ZPD) by appropriate scaffolding.

### Skill of Assertion

A teacher with high self-esteem is always capable of practicing his/ her students the ability to assert, which is a need of the present times. **Assertiveness implies that individuals should defend their own rights without actually violating the rights of others**. Individuals who are assertive are able to express their needs, wants, opinions and feelings in direct, honest and appropriate ways. Non-assertion on the other hand is based on the belief that other people's needs and wants are more important than one's own. It can result in the avoidance of conflict to please others and a non-assertive individual does not express his/her needs, wants, opinions and beliefs. The general characteristics of an assertive behaviour are:

- Decide what they want;
- State their request clearly and unambiguously;
- Ensure that verbal and non-verbal behaviour are congruent;
- Not be manipulated or distracted from what they want to say;
- Listen carefully
- Try to achieve a win/ win the situation.

### Conclusion

Like all other walks of life, teaching as a profession also needs high sense of self-esteem. A teacher's self-esteem is not merely meant to enrich his/ her profession, rather it can indeed strengthen the self-esteem of the students who are entrusted to them and can improve their academic outputs. Today a lot of hurdles are there in the field of education, which almost remains unanswered, at least in the case of private schools. We wonder why our schools have suffered under the exodus of the teachers who seek other jobs; who retire early due to boredom and teacher burnout; who lack motivation and desire to work; who are stressed; who are emotionally exhausted; who see their work not only futile, but inconsistent with their educational goals; who are involved in a fast-track and demanding teaching

profession; who lack control of the content they teach because someone else controls it; who decide to leave the classroom all together; and who do not have the positive image about themselves due to discouragements from lack of parental support, poor or lack of administrative support, and uprising of unmanageable classrooms due to students' behaviour. So its high time we started thinking of exploring the self- esteem of teachers in general and its scope in specific.

#### References

- ✓ Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2004). A guide to teaching practice. Psychology Press.
- ✓ Farber, B. A. (1984). Stress and Burnout in Suburban Teachers. *Journal of Educational Research*, 77 (6), 327.
- ✓ Friedman, I. A. (2000). Burnout in Teacher: Shattered Dreams of Impeccable Professional Performance. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- ✓ Gao, M, & Liu, Q. (2012). Effective teacher attributes: A comparison of American and Chinese secondary teacher candidates' perceptions. *JISTE (Journal of the International Society for Teacher Education*, 16(2), 162-163.
- ✓ Rogers, Carl (1969) Freedom to Learn. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill.
- ✓ Sheikh, A., & Mahmood, N. (2014).Effect of different teaching styles on students' motivation towards English language learning at secondary level.*Sci. Int (Lahore)*, 26(20), 825-830. Retrieved from <https://scholar.google.com>.

