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SELF-CONCEPT IN MEXICAN SCHOLAR CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

The following investigation will talk about self-concept in scholar children when it comes to the Mexican context. The objectives are to determine the level of self-concept of the participants and whether the diverse variables, such as age, gender, grade and school, are definite factors in that level of self-concept or not. A quantitative non-experimental and cross-sectional study was conducted with 202 children, who were the object of the investigation, by using the scale of self-concept of Piers-Harris. The results show that these children present a very low level of self-concept. Age was only correlated to the feeling of happiness and satisfaction. Despite gender is not a determining variable in self-concept, the school grade is. Furthermore, the school itself is a determining variable only when it comes to the behavioral and the anxiety dimensions of self-concept.

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INTRODUCTION

Self-concept refers to the groups of self-perceptions which a person forms “a) through one’s experience with and interpretations of one’s environment, and b) are influenced specially by reinforcement, evaluations of significant others, and one’s attributions for one’s behavior” (Shavelson and Bolus, 1982, quoted in Schink, 2012, p. 383). The self-concept, one’s view of oneself, tends to develop more in adolescence than in pre-adolescence stages because of the greater use of abstractions in the describing one-self (Whitty, 2002, quoted in Tuckman and Monetti, 2011).

In the Mexican context, the investigation about the self-concept in children and preteenagers is a relatively reduced studied field, at least based on the amount of published papers that are found in such type of researches. It is not a common subject compared to studies regarding self-concept itself when it comes to young scholars of higher levels of education, including university level. This situation may be the result of the theorization regarding children, and according to Schunk (2012, p. 384):

...By adolescence, individuals have relatively well-structured perceptions of themselves in areas such as intelligence, sociability, and sports. Brief experiences providing evidence that conflicts with personal beliefs may not have much effect. Conversely, self-concept is modified more easily when people have poorly formed ideas about themselves, usually because they have little or no experience. Young children perceive themselves concretely; they define themselves in terms of their

appearance, actions, name, possessions, and so forth. Children do not distinguish among behaviors and underlying abilities or personal characteristics. They also do not have a sense of enduring personality because their self-concepts are diffuse and loosely organized.

Given the situation described above, this study addresses self-concept in scholar children with specific objectives to be explained ahead. Not to mention the aim to contribute to the study field when it comes to the Mexican environment in education.

LITERATURE SURVEY

As the most recent antecedent, the work of Robles, Martínez y Del Ángel (2015) is mentioned. These authors worked with a sample of 100 children from second to sixth grade in elementary school and by using the scale of Piers-Harris. They discovered that both, male and female participants in the study demonstrate a positive level of self-concept. Additionally, a significant and statistical difference in popularity was found favoring girls.

On the other hand, Gaeta, Cavazos and Pérez (2014) analyzed the self-concept, both physical and general, as well as concern about physical appearance and obesity. In addition they studied eating habits in Mexican children aged 9 to 13, having found that general self-concept and physical appearance self-concept manifest positively and that there are very few significant differences influenced by gender. Based on the interests of this study, the conclusion is explained around the complexity in the

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subjective perception of the students regarding their self-concept and their eating habits.

Ibarra, in the year 2011 (quoted by Ibarra and Jacobo, 2014) conducted a study with scholar children aged 11 and 12. Such a study concluded by establishing a link between self-concept and academic performance.

Six years earlier, Valdez, Mondragon and Morelato (2005), worked with a population of 67 Mexican participants and 108 Argentinian children aged 11 to 13 with the ultimate purpose of comparing their mental structure of self-concept. The main results showed, when it comes to the Mexican children, the conclusion that being a social individual implies perceiving oneself as a generous, accommodating and honest person. Furthermore, it happened to be very important to be pleasing, romantic, caring, and sympathetic. These qualities are perceptible in the “expressive-affective” dimension of such a study.

Espinoza and Balcazar (2002) analyzed the differences between real self-concept and ideal self-concept as well as self-esteem that were presented in two samples of children, those who suffer from domestic violence and those who are members of more stable families. One of the main results revealed that in respect to real self-concept, in families with a more favoring environment, is more positive than in those who suffer from domestic violence.

A similar investigation to the one conducted by Valdez, Mondragon and Morelato (2005) is the investigation by Valdez et al. (2001) with Mexican and Peruvian children. The results showed that both Mexican and Peruvian participants tend to perceive themselves as obedient to the cause and respectful to the norms. It was concluded that there is a high probability that the historical factor provides an important effect on self-concept in children.

Thus, the described above is an evidence of how self-concept in Mexican children has been studied. Nevertheless, with the purpose of broaden this review of antecedents to contexts that are not familiar to Mexico and in the languages English and Spanish, it is suggested to the reader to consult the state of the art presented by Hernandez (2016).

Problem Definition

This study is framed in a determined scholastic zone located in the rural area in the limits of the city of Durango in the Mexican state of Durango. The zone is annexed to the Secretariat of Public Education and it is a federal supported region. The area has a total of 8 elementary schools (working with children that are between 6 and 12 years old). From those, three of the schools are organized in the format of independent grades arrangement and five of them work in groups including mixed scholars of different grades.

It is important to mention that the communities where these schools are situated have an economy based on agriculture, cattle ranching, as well as employment in domestic activities in the capital of the state.

In this school zone, there are multiple problems that are represented in regard to the conduct, discouragement, exploitation and social inclusion among the students. These situations have gotten the attention of professors and

educational authorities who have made the effort to eradicate these problems, but they have not had very effective results. In addition, the lack of participation from the parents makes these problems harder to be solved.

It is believed that such problems can be associated to a low level of self-value that children have about themselves and the fact that some of them have expressed this during the school activities. Therefore, it was decided to address this situation throughout the following investigation objectives:

1. To determine the level of self-concept in scholar children of this school zone.
2. To determine whether variables such as age, gender, grade and school are decisive factors in the level of self-concept of the participants.

METHODOLOGY

This study is framed in the quantitative approach of investigation, it is a correlational research and non-experimental, this is because... The scientist does not have a direct control on independent variable because their manifestations have already occurred or because they are inherently not manipulable (Kerlinger y Lee, 2002); and cross-sectional or transversal because data will be collected at a single time (Hernandez, Fernandez and Baptista, 2010). The general hypothesis which guides the investigation is defined as: H₁: “Self-concept in scholar children presents an inferior or low level”.

The counterpart or null hypothesis is H₀: “Self-concept in scholar children does not present an inferior or low level”.

On the other hand, in this school zone the number of students is 639. While 70% of them belong to three schools of independent grades organization the rest are in schools of multiple graders in the same group. This is the reason why it was decided to work with the population of the 3 schools of independent grades organization (which will be referred as A, B and C), and in a more specific way with the fifth and sixth graders because they are the one who presented a greater problem regarding self-concept. In total the participants of this investigation were 202 individuals.

For the data collection the instrument used was a survey and it was interpreted with the scale of self-concept by Piers-Harris (Piers, 1984) which measures self-concept based on 80 items that shape the 6 dimensions (or specific self-concepts) of the scale. These items are (Piers and Harris, 1969):

1. Behavioral adjustment: It is the group of conducts that a child presents in school and home.
2. Intellectual: It is the image that children have about themselves in aspects that are related to academic performance and their intelligence. Moreover, the value about the opinion their classmates have about them and these aspects.
3. Freedom of anxiety: The state of animus or emotional equilibrium in the daily life of a child.
4. Popularity: It refers to the appreciation that a child has regarding his/her social status and the relationships established with their counterparts.

5. Physical appearance and attributes: These are judgements that a child has about his/her body and the way they look
6. Happiness and satisfaction: It is the appreciation that a child has about their own state of happiness and satisfaction with his/her life (personal well-being).

The reliability of the instrument in respect to the participants for the investigation was .916 in Cronbach’s Alpha and .908 by split-half (according to the Spearman-Brown formula).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In general terms, the results of self-concept are shown in the table 1, when it comes to the total amount of the population.

Table 1 General results of self-concepts and their dimensions

| No | Dimension (self-concept) | Direct score (Arithmetic measure) | Percentile score |
|----|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| 1 | Behavioral | 13.83 | 30 |
| 2 | Intellectual | 10.43 | 30 |
| 3 | Anxiety | 7.20 | 50 |
| 4 | Popularity | 8.69 | 25 |
| 5 | Physical appearance | 7.25 | 25 |
| 6 | Happiness and satisfaction | 7.77 | 50 |
| 7 | Global self-concept | 55.17 | 25 |

According to Piers (1984), the corresponding descriptor to each percentile score is equal, depending on each case, to what it shown in the table 2.

Table 2 Corresponding to the Percentile score

| Percentile score | Descriptor |
|------------------|---------------|
| 60-70 | High level |
| 55-59 | Above-average |
| 45-54 | Average |
| 40-44 | Below-average |
| 35-39 | Low |
| 34 or lower | Very low |

Given these figures, it is possible to determine that the self-concept when it comes to behavioral, intellectual, popularity and physical is very low, as well as the indications in results of the global self-concept. On the contrary, self-concept in respect to anxiety and happiness-satisfaction showed an average level. By exploring the results per school, a statistical significance is shown in the table 3. In this, it is observed that there is only a significant statistical difference (by using the ANOVA model and a reference value of .050) in behavioral self-concept (sig=.016) and in anxiety (sig=.000).

Table 3 Statistical significance of self-concept and its dimensions regarding school and students enrollment.

| No | Dimension (self-concept) | Significance |
|----|----------------------------|--------------|
| 1 | Behavioral | .016 |
| 2 | Intellectual | .172 |
| 3 | Anxiety | .000 |
| 4 | Popularity | .340 |
| 5 | Physical appearance | .300 |
| 6 | Happiness and satisfaction | .300 |
| 7 | Global self-concept | .135 |

This being the case, the study proceeded to the test of continuity by Duncan in order to understand the dimension and having found that students of the elementary school “A” are the ones who show a lower level of behavioral self-concept,

with 12.71 points on average. On the other hand, the students of the elementary school “C” were the ones who got a higher level (14.32 points). When it comes to anxiety, the students of the school “A” are the ones who showed the lowest score on average (6.21), while in the school “B” it was found that the students had the highest score on average in this dimension (8.17 points).

In respect to the school grade (fifth and sixth) and gender (male and female) in general, there is a statistical significance showed in the table 4 (the Student’s T-test was used in this case with a reference value of 0.050):

Table 4 Statistical significance of self-concept and its dimensions in respect to the school grade and the gender of the students.

| No | Dimension (self-concept) | Significance | |
|----|----------------------------|--------------|--------|
| | | Grade | Gender |
| 1 | Behavioral | .003 | .058 |
| 2 | Intellectual | .023 | .694 |
| 3 | Anxiety | .068 | .079 |
| 4 | Popularity | .006 | .475 |
| 5 | Physical appearance | .000 | .655 |
| 6 | Happiness and satisfaction | .000 | .655 |
| 7 | Global self-concept | .000 | .593 |

With the exception of anxiety, all of the dimensions show a meaningful statistical difference between the fifth and sixth grade. A higher score in average in the students of sixth grade was found in all of the dimensions: 14.48, 10.97, 9.15, 7.67, 7.67 and 58.15 points in the dimension behavioral, intellectual, popularity, physical appearance, happiness and satisfaction, as well as global self-concept respectively. On the other hand the figures of 12.93, 9.78, 8.07, 6.67, 6.67 and 51.13 points in respect to the same dimensions but presented in the students of fifth grade

Addressing now the category of gender, it was not possible to determine a meaningful statistical difference, nor in any of the dimensions neither it was possible in global self-concept.

In a different classification: age, which is around 9 to 12 years old. In order to determine whether there is a relation between that verge of age of the participants and self-concept, the Pearson ρ value was used. The obtained results are shown in the table 5.

Table 5 Correlation quotient of Pearson between self-concept (and its dimensions) and the age of the students

| No | Dimension (self-concept) | ρ |
|----|----------------------------|--------|
| 1 | Behavioral | .043 |
| 2 | Intellectual | .035 |
| 3 | Anxiety | .045 |
| 4 | Popularity | .091 |
| 5 | Physical appearance | .111 |
| 6 | Happiness and satisfaction | .127* |
| 7 | Global self-concept | .087 |

*Significant correlation at the level 0.05

Exclusively in the dimension of “happiness and satisfaction” it was found that there is a significant connection which (despite being weak) indicates that self-concept increase more as the students become older and contrariwise.

In general terms, the results of this investigation differ from the ones reported by Robles, Martinez and Del Angel (2015), because in their study they found a positive level of self-

concept in their studied sample. The results also differ from the concluded by Gaeta, Cavazos and Perez (2014) who also determined a positive self-concept in general and in the physical appearance dimension.

In the first case, the discrepancy could be explained by understanding that the subjects involved in the investigation were students from an elementary school in an institution in the city of Toluca, in the State of Mexico in Mexico. This urban area is considered as an upper-medium economic, social and political spectrum. However, in the second case the discrepancy is not explained in the respect to the characteristics of the subjects because they present fairly similar characteristic to the subjects in this investigation. The divergence could be understood by paying attention to the instrument used (Goñi, Ruiz de Azua and Liberal, 2004). Nevertheless, this could be assured only at a level of assumption because a deeper analysis of the instruments would be necessary to confirm it.

In respect to the conclusion of the study by Espinoza and Balcazar (2002) where it is stated that children from families with domestic violence related problems have a lower level of self-concept than those who are members of a stable family, it can be inferred that there are similar results to the ones obtained in this study, from a contextualized perspective where the subjects are not privilege either, this without affirming that they are suffering from domestic violence.

CONCLUSIONS

Taking into account the results described above, it was determined that the scholar children in this study present a very low level of self-concept in the dimensions of behavioral, intellectual, popularity, physical appearance, as well as in global self-concept. On the other hand, they showed an average level of self-concepts when it comes to anxiety and the happiness and satisfaction dimensions. With this, the primary objective of the study was accomplished: To determine the level of self-concept in scholar children of this school zone.

At the same time, it was possible to determine the acceptance of the hypothesis in this investigation H1: "Self-concept in scholar children presents an inferior or low level" because it was this the result in both general and global terms.

When it comes to the second objective in this study, it is concluded that age is only correlated with self-concept of happiness and satisfaction in a positive way. Gender is not a determining variable in global self-concept or in any of its dimensions, while school grade is. In this case it is shown that sixth graders have a higher level regarding global self-concept as well as in each dimension, except anxiety.

Finally, school happened to be an interfering element only in the case of appreciation of self-concept in the dimensions of behavioral and anxiety. In both of these cases, it was only one of the schools that presented a lower average score. With this particularity, it is possible to have future investigations in order to determine the very factors and conditions of the school that had an effect in the results.

Future Scope

As well as it was addressed in the review of the antecedents, the majority of the investigations in Mexico regarding self-concept in scholars have been conducted in higher levels of

educations and university level. In other words, the investigations included mostly students who are older than 15 years old. Because of this, the presented investigation contributes to the field of knowledge in the Mexican context of elementary education. This is the reason why similar investigations can emerge and suggest future research that is related to self-concept in academic performance, school advantage, social, economic and family conditions. By studying these themes the level of self-appreciation in scholar children could be explained and consequently strategies to improve it can be established.

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