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Teachers' Leadership Behaviour in Relation to their Self-Esteem

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Abstract

The aim of the presented research study is to identify elementary and secondary school teachers' leadership behaviours in terms of Kouzes and Posner's conception in relation to teachers' self-esteem. The study is of a quantitative, correlational design using the following research tools: Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSS). The research sample consists of 213 elementary and secondary school teachers from Middle Slovakia. The main findings of the empirical analysis include weak, statistically significant relationships between LPI variables and self-esteem. Our findings indicate a weak relationship between teachers' leadership behaviours and their self-esteem.

Key words: leadership, teacher as a leader, teacher self-esteem

Introduction

The terms leader, leadership have penetrated the education sphere even in the Slovak region. In recent years the concept of leadership, although mostly dealt with in the area of management, has found its substantiated application also in the school system. Currently, a leader in education is not necessarily understood as a school employee in a managerial position or one involved in decision-making on the school legislation and national programmes for education and education system development. The current situation in education and the transformation

of the teacher's mission, status and role have subscribed the fact that not only a legislatively and formally appointed manager becomes a leader at school, but also a teacher whose followers are pupils. „...*the teachers as educational leaders in the school system... have the position of low level managers*” (Sabeena & Rathi, 2015, p. 58). Teachers assume a wide range of roles (Harrison & Joellen, 2007) that require special competencies and specific practices. The teaching profession requires performance of a number of activities where leadership competencies and leadership behaviour become inevitable.

Although the issue of teachers' leadership has been explored in detail abroad, its more in-depth exploration is required in the Slovak school setting. Our research aims to find out correlations between teachers' leadership behaviour and their self-esteem. We assume that the knowledge of leadership behaviour principles and regularities, making the development of modern educational programmes for elementary and secondary school teachers more effective, would be beneficial to the training of exemplary teacher leaders.

Problem of Research

Research activities in the area of leadership in education have been carried out for more than 50 years. Although most of them are of US origin, professional periodicals have published a considerable number of studies from various European and Asian countries. The first research has focused on characteristics of school leaders, principals, and later attention has turned to leadership behaviour of principals and teachers and to the impact of leadership on pupils' academic achievements (e. g. Purkey & Smith, 1983; Riehl & Firestone, 2005) or teachers' achievements (Aydin, Sarier & Uysal, 2013; Nasution, 2018; Zare & Nastiezaie, 2019). Numerous research has confirmed that teachers' leadership has a positive effect on pupils' outcomes, on achieving the vision of the school, on the school climate, that the teacher leader can positively influence pupils' involvement in classes (Silins & Mulford, 2004), students' achievements (Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2000), etc. As to the development of teachers themselves, leadership has enhanced their self-confidence (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Ovando, 1996), professional growth and learning (Ovando, 1996). Teacher leaders help other teachers overcome their reluctance to changes (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001), support them in improving their own teaching practice, etc. Our attention has focused on research oriented on the relationship between leadership behaviour and self-esteem. The term self-esteem is associated with personality, self-concept, self-acceptance and recognition of one's own qualities, with self-knowledge as the basis. Self-esteem is a component of self-concept, it is „*a mental representation of the emotional relationship to oneself*,

or the image of oneself from the aspect of one's own competence (in any area whether social, moral or performance)" (Blatný & Plhánková, 2003, p. 115). Positive self-esteem belongs to the competencies contributing to the dynamics of personality, its motivation and value systems. It includes the emotional-evaluative dimension of self-concept, it is the outcome of positive self-experience and self-evaluation, and expresses the degree of satisfaction with the Self. Its regulating function considerably affects behaviour and conduct; the relation to both oneself and other people uncoils from its level, it influences attitudes to life and the ability to deal with life situations. Self-esteem has influence on interpretation of one's own behaviour as well as evaluation of others, which has a considerable impact on a teacher's behaviour and evaluation of pupils. Thus, a teacher's self-esteem belongs to the factors determining formation of a teacher's professional belief, the way of his/her response, behaviour and consequently also the classroom climate, teaching and learning of pupils and also their self-esteem. While positive self-esteem is associated with self-confidence, optimism, an ability to solve problems, ability to trust others, ability to accept their mistakes, non-blaming behaviour, as well as with an awareness of personal strengths, etc.; low self-esteem shows such signs as fear of taking risks, mistrusting others, perfectionist attitudes, dependence – letting others make decisions, fear of being ridiculed, etc. (Mbuva, 2016, p. 62 – 63). An important contribution to the issue of the relationship between self-esteem and leadership and a person's achievement is the latest work by two authors Hill and Ritchie (1977) concerned with the meta-analysis of several studies on the influence of self-esteem on social interactions between superiors and subordinates and organizational processes in firms. They found out that already in the first half of the 20th century some studies had confirmed a positive relationship between self-confidence and expressed leadership (Cowley, 1931; Cox, 1926; Moor & Zeleny, 1939, in: Hill & Ritchie, 1977). They also stated that in the 1950-ties and 1960-ties researchers confirmed that self-esteem predicted the effectiveness of leaders in various areas (Beer et al., 1959; Kipnis & Lane, 1962; Hobert & Dunnette, 1967, in: Hill & Ritchie, 1977). The research carried out by Avant & Miller (1992) and Nidds & McGerald (1994) indicated, *inter alia*, strong relationships between self-esteem and the effectiveness of school principals' work.

Works dealing with the leadership – self-esteem relationship address mostly associations between the leadership style or the leader's competencies and self-esteem of „subordinates" (pupils and students or teachers), but do not deal with self-esteem of the leader him/herself from his/her own perspective.

Research Focus

The necessity to motivate pupils to learning and personal growth, to lead them to acquire knowledge and skills, form attitudes and aspirations, self-improve their social competencies and approximate their potential as well as the ability of self-reflection and their professional development planning shows close parallels with transformational leader behaviour that can be identified in the Exemplary Leadership® Model by two authors Kouzes and Posner (2002). According to their interpretation „*leadership is not about personality, it is about behaviour – observable set of skills and abilities*” (The Leadership Challenge®, 2021). If leadership can be characterized as behaviour then it can be improved and enhanced by experience and purposeful activities based on recognized behavioristic approaches. Every teacher as a unique subject demonstrates leadership practices with various frequencies and various intensities. In this place, a question arises to what extent his/her behaviour is shaped by experience and how it is influenced by his/her personality traits. There is some research on correlations, for example, between extroversion and leadership (Hinkley, 2008; Caligiuri & Tarique, 2009), and between other traits. Is there a relationship also between teacher self-esteem and teacher leadership behaviour? Are there correlations between self-esteem and modelling the behaviour, inspiring pupils, evaluating them, striving for innovation, willingness to take risks and respond to challenges, sharing responsibility and power in the classroom or encouraging and emotionally supporting pupils? Self-esteem of a person, including the teacher – leader, uncoils from self-perception not in the ideal but the real self. In the process of its formation, an important role is played by the feedback from the social environment indicating whether the person is accepted or refused by society (in case of a teacher mostly by the school management, colleagues and especially pupils). External evaluation undergoes internal evaluation, which requires a high degree of self-reflection and self-evaluation. Based on the self-evaluation and self-reflection, the teacher can then consciously change his/her behaviour and optimize also his/her leadership behaviours. From the above it can be concluded that there could be a relationship between self-esteem and leadership behaviour. Based on the above considerations and detailed study of literature, our hypothesis has been formulated as follows:

1) Positive statistically significant correlations are assumed between teachers' leadership behaviours and their self-esteem.

Methodology of Research

General Background of Research

The presented research study aims to find out correlations between teachers' leadership behaviours and their self-esteem in terms of Kouzes and Posner's conception. The research has a qualitative, correlational design. Data were gathered in February and March 2020 by direct address. Teachers of the elementary school second level and teachers of secondary schools in Banská Bystrica regions took part in this research.

Sample of Research

The research sample was obtained by intentional (teachers) and convenience sampling and consisted of 213 teachers in total, with the mean age 41.27 years, out of it 65 men and 148 women. N = 98 teachers were teaching at the elementary school secondary level, N = 98 were teaching at secondary schools, 17 teachers did not indicate their schools. The research was anonymous.

Instrument and Procedures

Data were obtained by means of the Slovak version of LPI/Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes & Posner, 2013). Kouzes and Posner (2002) identified five practices of leaders: they *Model the Way*: clarify their personal values, set an example for others; *Inspire a Shared Vision*: envisage the future, enlist others; *Challenge the Process*: look for possibilities, experiment and take risks; *Enable Others to Act*: foster collaboration, strengthen others; *Encourage the Heart*: recognize the contributions of others, celebrate values and accomplishments. Respondents assess their behaviour in 30 statements on a scale from 1 – almost never to 10 – almost always. In our research, reliability of the PLI scale and internal consistency of its items showed acceptable values of Cronbach's alpha. MOD (6 items): $\alpha = 0.74$; INS (6 items): $\alpha = 0.64$; CHALL (6 items): $\alpha = 0.82$; ENAB (6 items): $\alpha = 0.76$. Only the variable ENCO (6 items) $\alpha = 0.49$ showed lower internal consistency. Also Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSS) was used in the research, measuring the global relation towards the self. According to the authors Savin, Ritch, Demo (1983; in M. Blatný & L. Osecká, 1994) the scale allows identifying two components: self-esteem and self-underestimation. The scale contains 10 items, out of it 5 reverse. The items are assessed on a four-point scale: I agree – I disagree. Due to our research objectives, the one-factor solution was opted for, this calculation of the level of the global relation towards the self. The scale is internally consistent; our research confirmed $\alpha = 0.76$.

Data Analysis

Obtained results were processed using the spreadsheet MS Excel and statistical program IBM SPSS version 21.

Results of Research

Results were evaluated in the statistical program SPSS 21.0. Based on the values of skewness and kurtosis (>1), the distribution of the examined variables was considered to be not normal (Table 1); that was the reason why non-parametrical statistical tests were used to calculate correlation coefficients and to test differences.

The LPI method had not been standardized and there were even no national data from the LPI applied in other teacher or non-teacher samples. That was why the descriptive results could not be compared. However, values in individual leadership practices, with the range from 10 to 60, were satisfactory in terms of means and medians. Some persons, however, showed also very low (minimum in variables) values. Our sample showed the highest values in the variables ENAB (foster collaboration, strengthen others) and ENCO (recognize contributions of others, celebrate values and accomplishments). Our respondents in total achieved mean positive results also in self-esteem.

Table 1. Descriptive indicators of LPI and RSS variables in the whole sample of teachers $N = 213$

	M	Me	Mod	SD	Skewn	Kurt	Min	Max
MOD	47.84	49.00	50	6.500	-1.205	2.933	18	60
INSP	43.93	45.00	52	10.485	0.546	6.743	13	60
CHALL	43.55	46.00	46	8.237	-0.679	0.602	16	57
ENAB	49.03	51.00	52	6.267	-1.096	2.709	19	60
ENCO	49.75	51.00	56	7.080	-1.252	2.571	17	60
SEL	30.92	31.00	32a	4.062	-0.530	0.048	18	39

Legend: MOD – Model the Way; INSP – Inspire a Shared Vision; CHALL – Challenge the Process; ENAB – Enable Others to Act; ENCO – Encourage the Heart; SEL – self-esteem level

The purpose of our research was to find our correlations between teachers' leadership practices and self-esteem. All leadership practices (measured by the LPI method) were found out to show a weak, statistically significant correlation with self-esteem.

Table 2. Correlation coefficients (Spearman's test) between self-esteem and leadership behaviour

MOD	INSP	CHALL	ENAB	ENCO		
SEL	ρ	0.331	0.230	0.221	0.249	0.192
	p	0.000	0.001	0.001	0.000	0.005

Legend: MOD – Model the Way; INSP – Inspire a Shared Vision; CHALL – Challenge the Process; ENAB – Enable Others to Act; ENCO – Encourage the Heart; SEL – self-esteem level

Discussion

Our research focused on finding connections between elementary and secondary school teachers' leadership practices and their self-esteem. Our starting point was the current practice with the teacher increasingly perceived as a leader. Our teacher sample shows a satisfactory level of individual leadership practices measured by the LPI method based on the transformational leadership theory. Our research findings confirm that there is a statistically significant, although weak, relationship between teachers' individual leadership practices and self-esteem. Our research sample in total shows a positive level of self-esteem. Teachers' adequate self-esteem is an important predictor of their behaviour towards pupils, but also the teaching staff, and, last but not least, also towards parents. Teachers' self-esteem was, along with other characteristics, also the subject of research by Jo Blase and Josepha Blase (2000). They dealt with the impact of principals' leadership characteristics on teachers and teaching and learning in schools from the teachers' perspectives. They found out, among other things, that if principals reflected the requirements in the given areas, teachers felt "*positive effects on their motivation, satisfaction, self-esteem, efficacy, sense of security and feelings of support*" (Blase & Blase, 2000, p. 133). The increase in teachers' self-esteem was associated with giving feedback, using inquiry and soliciting advise / opinion, giving praise to teachers, emphasizing the need for teachers' further education, supporting collaboration, developing coaching relationships among teachers, applying the principles of adult learning, growth and development to collaboration with teachers.

The authors Hill and Ritchie (1977), concerned with meta-analysis of studies dealing with self-esteem as one of the significant variables affecting, among other things, also the effectiveness of leadership, concluded also that "*there is a convincing evidence for the inclusion of self-esteem as an important trait of both superior and subordinate in analysing leadership effectiveness. It seems to be especially signif-*

icant in moderating the effect of participation in organizational decision making... self-esteem is an important dimension qualifying both superior and subordinate involvement...if the leader has low self-esteem, he may be incapable of facilitating genuine and productive involvement by subordinates. He may be so insecure that he would be threatened by any good ideas from others.”(Hill & Ritchie, 1977, p. 499).

We see limitations of our study in the fact that our research was carried out only in the region of Banská Bystrica; the research sample was not representative, it was obtained by intentional and convenience sampling. Although internal consistency of the research tool appears good, teachers' responses may be marked by social desirability despite anonymity of the research.

Conclusions

The issue of leadership in the teaching profession is gaining more and more importance in the world. There is a growing body of research in this area on an international scale. Aware of the lack of national data on teacher leadership, we wanted to supply research data of our national research that may add also to the international and intercultural comparisons. The transformational leadership theory, the LPI method we used, is based on leadership practices and presents the leader as a person who clarifies his/her personal values and leads by example. He/she envisages the future and enlists others. He/she looks for possibilities, experiments and takes risks. He/she fosters collaboration, strengthens others. He/she recognizes contributions of others, celebrates values and accomplishments. All these are practices applicable and desirable also in the teaching profession. Our research indicates that teachers in our research sample have overall a satisfactory level of leadership practices in terms of the transformational leadership and overall positive self-esteem. Although our research shows only weak correlations between individual leadership practices and self-esteem, many international studies indicate that healthy self-esteem is an important predictor of both the teacher's and the leader's effective work. In our opinion it is important for further research in the area of teachers' leadership practices to look for other related personal resources and for answers to what extent the leadership practices can be trained in future teachers' pre-gradual training or teachers' further education.

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