

# **“THE SELF-PERCEPTION AND SELF-ESTEEM OF SECOND CHANCE SCHOOL GRADUATES”**

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## **Abstract**

This research studies the objective perception of graduates of the Second Chance Schools (SCS) – a European Lifelong Learning program operating in Greece – regarding their sociability, work abilities, and the level of self-esteem, to determine the possible effects of the course of study in the formation of positive self-perception in the above traits and high self-esteem. The research was completed in three months, from November 2008 to January 2009. The sample in the research were 30 SCS graduates comprising Group A, and 30 adults who did not finish mandatory education, comprising Group B. To achieve the objective of this research the two samples were compared. The research tool was a questionnaire with self-references made by the researcher, based on the questionnaire for assessing the self-perception and self-esteem of high school students “How I Perceive Myself IV” by Makri-Botsari and the Mensa guide “Know yourself.” Analysis of the research results indicates that SCS graduates exhibit more positive professional and social self-perception and higher self-esteem than adults that have not completed mandatory education. Therefore, the contribution of Lifelong Learning in general and SCS in specific is recognized in lifting social isolation and contributing to the social and professional rehabilitation of people who did not manage to acquire sufficient knowledge and skills during the educational period that the formal educational system defines.

## **Key words**

Lifelong learning, SCS, Self-esteem, self-perception, school drop outs,

## **1. Introduction**

Since the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy in March 2000, the European Union brought Lifelong Learning to the center of interest in order to achieve the ultimate goal: “Make Europe the most developed society of knowledge in the world, in the next ten years (European Commission, 2000)”. Towards achieving the above objective, Greece, as a member of the European Union, has established structures of Lifelong Education, one of which is the Second Chance Schools (SCS). SCS is a flexible and innovative educational program, which allows people of the age 18+ who have not completed the nine-year compulsory education, to earn their high school diploma, so that they can integrate smoothly into the social, economic and professional life. To achieve the social integration of graduates it is essential for them to have positive self-perception regarding their capacity for creating and maintaining social relations in the live/work environment. Employability skills on the other hand, will become the most important self – perception boost for them, in order to get a job opportunity in today’s very demanding and continuously developing job market. Of course, for both objectives, a self-esteem program for adults who attend the program of SCS, is provided. Although, improving self-esteem and creating positive self-perception in certain fields matter to the SCS, there is no organized system to provide monitoring and follow-up to ensure that the students are receiving the maximum benefit from the assistance provided. As a result, schools and educators do not receive the information that could help them in the feedback function of that institution. Within this context, this research’s expectation is to contribute in filling this gap.

## **2. Self-perception - Self-esteem and School Drop-out**

Self-perception is the awareness of the characteristics that constitute one's self, the self-knowledge -in other words- that is developed to the humans by acting as an observer of one’s own existence (Brown, 1993). In interpreting the structure of self-concept several theoretical models were developed, grouped into two major categories: one-dimensional and multidimensional. The first category consists of the linear-additive model of Coopersmith (1967) according to which “self” is one-dimensional and its various aspects are determined

from the general self-esteem and can not be differentiated and studied separately, and the one-dimensional - spherical model of Rosenberg (1986) according to which discrete elements of "self" are weighted and combined with certain hierarchical order as a result of a very complex equation. In the category of multivariate models we have the concentric model of Harter (1983), which is based on the idea that self-esteem in general is influenced by the various aspects of self-conception in the degree of importance given by the same person, and the hierarchical model of Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976) stating that self-perception is organized hierarchically, where the upper level stands for the general self-perception and the lower levels for the different facets of self-perception.

Self-perception is formatted during the process of the cognitive and social development of the same person. This suggests that it is developed, in the course of growing up, as we form a sense of identity (since we are not able of self-rating at our birth). We build our identity through our experiences as we relate to "significant others", follow standards and values expressed by the social context, depending on how we interpret the individual interactions and the self-knowledge, in reference to others. Furthermore, self-perception is influenced by other factors in somebody's life such as family, cultural background, personal history, external beauty and appearance, school and peer group. In this research, school is considered to play the major role in the formation of self-perception which depends not only on the student's progress at school but also on his progress compared to other students. We need to underline the significant role of the teacher and the features of the group in which the student is supposed to fit in. Self-perception is moreover influenced by school performance in cases of students who do not meet the standards of school success. In many cases this leads to school drop-outs, since some students feel that they are not smart or capable enough (Burns, 1982). Furthermore, peer groups can be of great help in the development of positive self-perception by providing a supportive framework to the person or on the contrary establish a negative self-image to the person, because of condemnation and rejection, which eventually leads to social exclusion as in the case of those who drop out school. (Parker and Asher, 1987).

Unlike self-perception which was considered so far as the cognitive dimension of self, self-esteem is the emotional dimension of self-awareness. It is associated with the overall positive evaluation of a person's sense of self-worth and self-respect and refers to ones belief of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and is worthy of happiness. Self-esteem is not identical to self-perception, but consists of additional mental constructions (Wells and Marwell, 1976).

In our quest of a theoretical interpretative framework for self-esteem we realize that Erikson (1968) considers the fifth stage to be the key point for self-esteem. That means that if a person has gained confidence, independence, initiative and diligence by the resolution of conflicts in previous stages, then creates a positive, healthy self-image. Maslow (1968) on the other hand, through the self-realization theory argues that first humans try to meet basic biological needs and then seek to be loved and accepted. When it succeeds, it creates a positive self esteem, which will facilitate the path to self-actualization. Rogers (1977) according to the humanistic theory states that by interpreting the way we perceive a situation one attains a higher self-esteem while Winnicott (1965) concludes that the formation of self-esteem depends on the relationship between infant-caregiver (mother) and Nichols (1995) adds that it also requires effective parenting on the terms of listening and understanding throughout the course of evolutionary progress of the child. The research data shows that there are three conditions that can have negative impact on self-esteem: failures, inconsistencies, and stressful conditions. The existence of big or small failures (e.g. failed marriage) lead to low self-esteem, inconsistencies which arise unexpectedly upset the balance of each individual either positively or negatively while some stressful events make one realize that some things are too difficult to handle, (e.g. loss of a child) with ones personality's experiences till then (Branden, 1969).

One of the most interesting findings of some researches is the correlation between self-perception and self-esteem. If a specific facet of self-perception which is having good results is the one that matters mostly to the person then it contributes to the formation of higher self-esteem. (Rosenberg, 1986). Nevertheless, the modern theory argues that the facets of self-perception do not influence the general self-esteem. Instead, self-esteem is what makes a person feel that he/she has many positive characteristics since this realization can be amended more easily than one person's self-worth (Brown, 1993).

The formation of self-perception and self-esteem of people is also associated with school drop-outs. The latter is a multifactor phenomenon which is influenced either by family-social or educational factors. One is influenced by this phenomenon on every term of his life as he is excluded educationally, professionally and ultimately socially. Indeed this phenomenon has negative impact on self-perception and affects the areas of sociability, employability and academic ability (Vergidis, 1999).

### **3. The survey**

#### **3.1 Purpose**

The aim of this survey is to examine whether studying in SCS contributes to the formation of positive self-perception and high self-esteem. The main goal of this study is to reassure that SCS has managed to fulfill three of its basic intentions, as these were described above, to facilitate the path to social inclusion and rehabilitation, to develop employability skills in order to improve reintegration into the labor market and to build high self-esteem.

#### **3.2 The sample (Participants)**

To achieve the aim of this research it was considered necessary to compare the areas of self-perception and self-esteem of adults who graduated the SCS with others who did not complete mandatory education. Therefore, the sample for this research was selected from a group that consisted of graduates of SCS in Naoussa (Group A) and a second group that consisted of adults who did not finish mandatory education (Group B). The number of the participants of each group should be equal in number in order to bear comparable results. Randomly chosen were 30 graduates of SCS in Naoussa and 30 adults who did not finish mandatory education.

#### **3.3 Research Planning**

This research's hypotheses is that graduates of SCS (Group A) after attending the specific program have developed a higher level of positive self-perception and self-esteem than adults who did not keep up with the formal school system and have not completed compulsory education (group B). This research used the comparison of two sample groups' for review. This comparison took place between graduates of SCS (Group A) and a group of adults who did not complete compulsory education (Group B) towards certain fields of self-perception and self-esteem. In this case the factor "completion of compulsory education" (Factor X) lies in Group A and is expected to have causal relationship with the dependent variables. If the group displayed a difference in the values of the dependent variables in relation to the values exhibited by Group B, then this would be a strong evidence in favor of the original hypothesis: the impact of the completion of compulsory education in the formation of a more positive self-perception in some areas and of higher self-esteem for adult graduates during their life. To examine the research's hypotheses, we used the self-reference rule-based questionnaire "How do I perceive myself (PATEM) IV" by Makri – Botsari (translated questionnaire of Harter adjusted to the Greek standards) and the guidebook of Mensa "Know yourself" in which participants responded with a five-point scale based on an alternative classification of the Likert scale. The codification and the process of data were performed by the statistical package SPSS 17.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The survey was conducted over a period of three months from November 2008 to January 2009 and throughout this process several contacts with participants were required. A questionnaire and an interview based on the questionnaire were used as data collection techniques.

#### **3.4 Survey results - Discussion**

It was established that both groups consisted of a similar quantity in both sexes (Group A: **40%** men **60%** women and Group B: **53%** men **47%** women). Moreover, the majority of participants in both cases belonged to the age group 36-50 (Group A: **50%** and Group B: **40%**), while in both groups, percentages that represented the age group 26 - 35 were similar (Group A: **20%** and Group B: **23%**). Thus both samples were composed of young and middle aged people in their majority. Regarding the marital status of members we noted the following: the majority in both samples were married (Group A: **53%** and Group B:

83%), while less were unmarried (Group A: 37% and Group B: 10%). Both groups are identical towards the majority. Moreover, employed declared about the half in both groups (Group A: 47% and Group B: 53%), while identical retired (7%) participated in both samples. Also, a significant percentage (Group A: 43% and Group B: 40%) in both samples consisted of unemployed including housewives. Finally, on justifying the reasons of traditional school drop-outs, similar percentage of both groups had difficulty in keeping up with the lessons in a traditional school (Group A: 41% and Group B: 42%), while the second reason for school drop-outs in both samples (Group A: 23% and Group B: 27%) is the economic problems faced by the families of the participants in both groups. We conclude that it is obvious that the profiles of the two sample groups show common elements in all demographic characteristics examined, at least the majorities each time. So, the two samples and the results of their responses may be considered comparable.

In order to reach the target of the survey, it is necessary to test the reliability and validity of the research tool. The reliability of the questionnaire for both groups was tested with the statistic Cronbach. The reliability type (group A Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.907$  and group B Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.939$ ) indicates that the research tool was really reliable.

Factor analysis was applied for statistical tests on the validity of the questionnaire, in order to examine the variables that form the structure of the questionnaire and to determine the number of factors that describe the structure. Both groups resulted to the same four factors in both cases which simply appeared in a different order, as outlined below (Table I & II):

Table I (group A)

Factors	Categories of the Factors	Percentages of the total fluctuation
Factor 1	Self-esteem	33,42
Factor 2	Social Self-perception	29,96
Factor 3	Academic Self-perception for the traditional school	15,49
Factor 4	Professional Self-perception	9,40
Total		88,27

Table II (group B)

Factors	Categories of the Factors	Percentages of the total fluctuation
Factor 1	Self-esteem	49,57
Factor 2	Academic Self-perception for the traditional school	22,85
Factor 3	Professional Self-perception	15,84
Factor 4	Social Self-perception	4,93
Total		93,19

Finally, in order to determine whether the research's hypotheses, that SCS graduates have higher self-perception on fields examined and higher self-esteem, we compared the two groups on the four factors of the research. To compare the two groups (A and B) in these factors the research applied the process of t-test for independent samples (table XI):

Table XI

Factors	Group A	Group B	P
Self-esteem	4,07	3,82	,33
Academic Self-perception for the traditional school	2,73	1,73	,00
Professional Self-perception	3,61	3,39	,39
Social Self-perception	3,60	2,98	,00

It was established that group A differs significantly from group B in the field of school self-perception of the traditional school ( $p = ,00 < 0,05$ ) and the social self-perception ( $p = ,00 < 0,05$ ). However, both groups mean differ on all of the four factors, group a is having a higher average in all subjects than that of group b, which suggests higher self esteem and more positive self-perception for group a. In conclusion, the original hypothesis seems to be confirmed, at least partly, that the SCS succeeds or tries to keep up with its original goal to provide assistance on help student develop a positive self-image.

#### 4. Conclusions

Self-perception is a multidimensional dynamic process that is constantly updated with new information during the course of life of the individual, is shaped by the progress and experiences of the person and is associated with cognitive and social development. Self-

esteem, on the other hand, is not identical to self-perception, but both constitute complementary cognitive structures. There is a positive correlation between self-esteem and individual sectors of self-concept, but only insofar as the individual assesses them to be important for him. School drop-outs as a phenomenon are associated with the formation of somebody's self-perception. The SCS operates therapeutically on the phenomenon of school drop-outs and its effects on individuals and society. The institute's main objective is to provide support in formatting positive self-perception and self-esteem. The findings of this study indicate that SCS graduates in general have a more positive self-perception on professional and social fields and higher self-esteem than adults who have not completed compulsory education. Lifelong learning in general and SCS specifically is acknowledged to prevent social exclusion and to provide educational rehabilitation to individuals who failed to gain sufficient knowledge and skills from the formal educational system. This is why the future European citizens, need to improve their lives through learning, in order to achieve better quality of life socially and personally.

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