

# TEACHERS' SELF-CONCEPT AND ITS BENEFITS FOR SCIENCE EDUCATION

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## Introduction

Highly qualified teachers are central to quality education. A teacher's quality is estimated on the basis of their teaching and conduct, both of which largely depend on the teacher's ability to adapt to current circumstances. Self-awareness and understanding of oneself are crucial to the success of the process of teachers' quality improvement, which means that they represent significant factors that constitute the profession of teaching itself. In other words, teachers who understand and know their own character are better at adapting themselves to various situations and are more self-confident in teaching than those who lack these abilities. This further contributes to teachers' job satisfaction (Shastri, 2015). Self-awareness and understanding of oneself are the basis of the notion of self-concept (Durodolu, 2018), which may be explained as a system of attitudes one has towards oneself according to Prasad (2014). Certain authors have offered more ample explanations, which include additional characteristics of self-concept, so that it is defined as: a system of attitudes and knowledge about oneself, as well as perceptions, characteristics and attributes used when describing oneself (Peralta Sánchez & Sánchez Roda, 2003); a complex, organized and dynamic system of learned opinions, attitudes and emotions that individuals ascribe to themselves considering them to be true (Mehrad, 2016); an organized cognitive structure comprised of attitudes, beliefs and values, independent of experience and activities, which are combined to help in the realization of particular and specific habits, abilities, perspectives, ideas and emotions (Mishra, 2013).

The term *self* refers to "psychological mechanisms or processes that enable individuals to think about themselves consciously" (Leary & Tangney, 2012, p. 6). *Self* includes both the one who thinks ("I think") and the object of their thoughts ("about myself"). Mental concepts or ideas regarding the queries of who one is, who one was and who one will be occupy an important part of these thoughts. These mental concepts are actually the gist of self-concept (Oyserman et al., 2012). Self-concept is present in the character of each individual and that individual's experience. It may be defined as a general and conscious understanding of oneself. In fact, it is the ability to



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**Abstract.** *Self-concept, understood as an impression or idea one has about oneself, represents a significant precondition for the professional improvement of teachers, as well as for the advancement of teaching itself and students' development of their own positive self-concept. This research aimed to examine the idea of self-concept with the purpose of determining the manner in which primary and secondary school teachers perceive themselves. The factors to be analyzed in relation to the variables, work experience and pay satisfaction, were defined by means of the scale of estimates and factor analysis. The obtained results showed that accepting oneself, self-improvement, self-satisfaction and job satisfaction, as well as the initiative and openness to change varied depending on work experience and pay satisfaction. Work experience, not pay satisfaction, proved to have an impact on the teachers' perception of the relationship with their colleagues, whereas the perception of personal and teaching qualities did not depend on the aforementioned variables.*

**Keywords:** *empirical research, practice, teachers, self-concept, science education.*

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conceptualize and represent oneself, which is independent of quotidian experiences (Shastri, 2015).

Teachers' self-concept is the factor that determines their conduct and behaviour (Shastri, 2015). In the light of the profession, teachers' self-concept includes a series of convictions, attitudes and suppositions they have regarding their teaching achievements, relationship with students and colleagues and values of their profession (Villa & Calvete, 2001). Teachers' self-concept is based on several dimensions. They are: (1) social self-concept, related to an individual's ideas of other people's perception of that individual; (2) teachers' efficiency, reflected in the acquisition of professional skills, such as self-reliance, adaptability, personal efficiency, etc.; (3) resolving academic issues through the use of knowledge, facts and data with the purpose of solving professional and institutional problems; and (4) self-confidence, which is based on teachers' estimate of their own values and which includes their convictions ("I am competent", "I am useful") and emotions (success, despair, pride, shame). These dimensions are interconnected and complementary. Those teachers who perceive themselves in a positive way have a positive self-concept. Actually, the premise "I can do this" triggers the individual's ability to choose and try novel things, as well as their desire to succeed (Shastri, 2015). Moreover, the significance of teachers' having a positive self-concept is evident in their endeavour to help their students create a positive image of themselves, but also accept their own flaws and constraints. The teachers who do not have a positive self-concept lack the self-confidence necessary for them to encourage their students to create their own positive self-concept (Villa & Calvete, 2001). This is very important, especially as regards the fact that self-concept is crucial and central to the process of personality development. A positive self-concept is the basis of an overtly good personal, social and professional engagement, personal satisfaction and the ability of each individual to be comfortable "in their own skin" (Esnaola et al., 2008).

Self-concept is frequently viewed through the prism of self-confidence (Mishra, 2013), which is actually self-conviction of one's own abilities that enables one to deal with unpredictable situations and challenges (Asmaa, 2016). Considering the fact that self-confidence means the expression of one's personal value (Gabrys-Barker, 2010), it follows that a highly confident person has a positive self-concept. Since teachers form and shape future generations, they are responsible for the development of the positive self-concept and self-confidence (Mishra, 2013). In other words, the development of teachers' self-concept is also the strategy for the improvement of the quality of education in general (Villa & Calvete, 2001). Self-confidence can be developed by means of creating positive attitudes to oneself, as well as by reconsidering the system of values on which self-concept is based (Gabrys-Barker, 2010). Self-confidence is improved by teachers' acceptance of their own mistakes and their determination to overcome and correct them (Mbuva, 2016). Self-concept may be improved by the development of reflective abilities regarding one's own qualities and their base. This may either influence their further development or prevent it completely (Gabrys-Barker, 2010). Another problem is the fact that self-concept is resistant to change (Živković, 2013), which means that a person struggles to maintain the already existing self-concept even when it is changed, i.e. an individual still holds tight onto obsolete and negative perceptions, which leads to self-deception and impairs further advancement (Sampthirao, 2016). A young teacher with a negative self-concept is unlikely to accept a different view in the future. This is also caused by the fact that self-concept is a relational construct – it develops under the influence of the perception that individuals have regarding their relationship with other people that are important to them (Živković, 2013). Relationships with other people mostly influence two aspects of self-concept: the image of oneself, related to the characteristics that one believes one has, and self-confidence, or one's estimate of what is valuable and significant in one's own character (Sampthirao, 2016).

Self-concept also depends on age, gender, education, experience, academic advancement, social and economic status, intelligence, as well as on certain institutional variables, such as school environment, organizational ambience, interpersonal relationships, etc., and on the factors such as success and failure, social feedback and self-respect. Moreover, self-concept is conditioned by teachers' competence. Teachers who feel competent enough and prepared to improve their communicative and teaching skills communicate better with their students and have an overall better understanding of their own selves, i.e. they create a positive self-concept (Mishra, 2013).

Self-concept is one of the most significant factors that determines one's success. The person who knows their own abilities and talents, develops a positive attitude towards them and believes in their own success, is the person who can improve and succeed. The same premise is valid for teachers and their self-concept. Teachers' attitude towards their own selves is crucial to the process of teaching and learning since it directs this process to teachers' identification of their own abilities, talents, interests and motivation, which in turn have an impact on the process of teaching (Sadeghi et al., 2015). Self-concept is also a teacher's awareness of their own personality. However, a distorted self-image may have a negative effect on teachers' teaching competences (Mbuva, 2016).



The creation of a positive image of their own personality, i.e. a positive self-image, is an imperative and obligation for any contemporary teacher. The teachers with a positive image of themselves, with a strong belief in their own abilities and engaged in a continuous self-improvement are likely to be not only more successful teachers, but also more successful in their relationship with colleagues, students and other persons of importance. Besides, teachers being role-models for their students, their positive self-concept is a precondition for the development of students' positive self-concept.

Knowing one own self, one's abilities, characteristics, skills and knowledge, as well as constrains and drawbacks is undoubtedly central to successful teaching; therefore, this research was focused upon the study of self-concept of teachers, which was examined through the perceptions that teachers have regarding their own competences, interpersonal relationships, hazards, initiatives, satisfaction and acceptance of their own personalities. The aim of this research was to motivate teachers, who educate the future scholars, to reconsider their own personalities and expectations and to reevaluate their own work.

## Methodology of Research

### *General Background*

Self-concept is a complex and multidimensional notion. It is primarily the image one has of oneself. People frequently wonder: Who are we? What are we like? What is our value and self-worth? One often relies on pieces of information contained in the statements made by other people about them, i.e. on their behaviour towards others. However, it is of utter importance that the information about one's own personality be provided by that person with self-criticism. Owing to the fact that teaching represents one demanding, complex and challenging profession, self-concept is crucial in the context of the contemporary education system.

The following hypotheses were postulated:

1. Teachers' views on their relationships with colleagues are expected to vary depending on work experience and pay satisfaction.
2. Teachers' views on the acceptance of their own selves and self-improvement are expected to vary depending on work experience and pay satisfaction.
3. Teachers' views on the satisfaction with their own selves, their achievements and their own profession are expected to vary depending on work experience and pay satisfaction.
4. Teachers' views on their teaching and personal qualities are expected to vary depending on work experience and pay satisfaction.
5. Teachers' views on the initiative and openness to change are expected to vary depending on work experience and pay satisfaction.

The research was conducted on the territory of the Republic of Serbia in the course of the academic year of 2017/2018. The sample was constructed on the basis of the voluntary participation of teachers in the empirical research. Therefore, it consisted of 442 respondents from the territory of the Republic of Serbia. The sample was defined concerning the following factors: work experience (up to 5 years; 6 – 15 years; 16 – 25 years; over 25 years) and pay satisfaction (examined in two categories: yes and no). The sample was the convenience sample.

### *Instruments and Procedures*

The method used was descriptive with the scaling technique and Likert Scale (5- strongly agree, 4- agree, 3- neither agree nor disagree, 2- disagree, 1- strongly disagree). The teachers' reflections on their self-concept included the following segments: estimate of teachers' competence, perception of interpersonal relationships with colleagues, acceptance of risks and taking initiative, assessment of relationships with students, estimate of job satisfaction and self-acceptance. The scale, consisting of 33 items, constructed for the purposes of this research in particular and used to test the teachers' self-concept, was examined by Factor Analysis. However, the adequacy of the data to be analyzed using Factor Analysis had to be first determined. Thus, Kaiser-Meyer-Okin (KMO) and Bartlett's test were applied. The data are adequate for Factor Analysis if the value of KMO is higher than .600, and the value of Bartlett's test lower than .050 (the value is supposed to be statistically significant) (Pallant, 2011).



*Data Analysis*

The nature of the research and the choice of the research instruments determined the statistical tools to be used. Therefore, the descriptive, inferential statistics and multivariate statistical method were used. Five main factors were distinguished by Factor Analysis. The parametric statistics (*t* test and *ANOVA* test) was used in the further data processing in accordance with the determined independent research variables.

**Results of Research**

The scale consisting of 33 items, used to test the teachers' self-concept, was examined by Factor Analysis. However, the adequacy of the data to be analyzed using Factor Analysis had to be first determined. Thus, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test were applied. The data are adequate for Factor Analysis if the value of KMO is higher than .600, and the value of Bartlett's test lower than .050 (the value is supposed to be statistically significant) (Pallant, 2011).

**Table 1. KMO and Bartlett's test.**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.745
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	8846.797
	df	528
	Sig.	.001

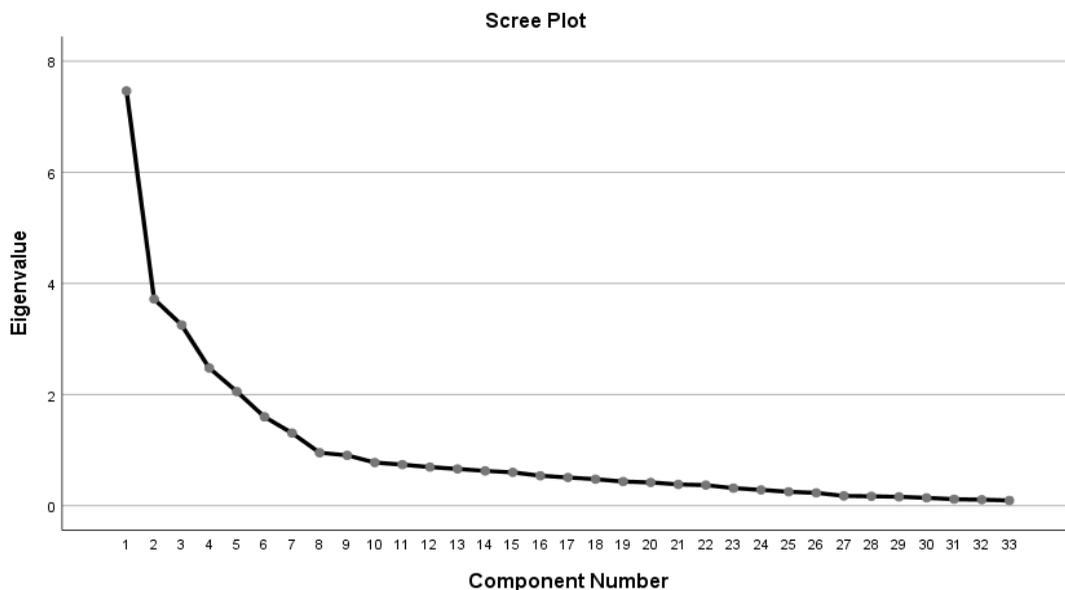
Table 1 shows that the KMO value was 0.745, while the value of Bartlett's test was statistically significant,  $p=.001$ , which meant that the data were adequate for Factor Analysis.

**Table 2. Structure matrix of the extracted factors.**

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings(a)
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	7.465	22.620	22.620	7.465	22.620	22.620	4.815
2	3.718	11.268	33.888	3.718	11.268	33.888	4.482
3	3.251	9.852	43.740	3.251	9.852	43.740	3.191
4	2.479	7.511	51.251	2.479	7.511	51.251	4.805
5	2.052	6.219	57.470	2.052	6.219	57.470	3.011
6	1.599	4.845	62.315	1.599	4.845	62.315	3.696
7	1.307	3.960	66.275	1.307	3.960	66.275	1.790

Table 2 shows the extracted factors. The number of the factors to be extracted had to be based upon Kaiser test, according to which only those factors whose eigenvalues were 1 or more had to be taken into consideration. Those values were determined in 7 factors (7.465, 3.718, 3.251, 2.479, 2.052, 1.599, 1.307).





**Figure1. Scree Plot.**

The scree plot presented in Figure 1 also proves that 7 factors were extracted by Factor Analysis with the varimax rotation. The point where the slope of the curve was clearly leveling off (the “elbow”) indicated the number of factors that should be generated by the analysis (the break clearly visible at factor 8). However, since 7 appeared to be rather a lot of factors, it was decided to reduce them to 5, which described over 50% of the total cumulative variance.

The structure matrix of the rotated factors shown below was obtained by the oblimin factor rotation.

**Table 3. Structure matrix of rotated factors.**

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
p10	.860				
p11	.854				
p12	.802				
p14	.694				
p13	.627				
p31		.869			
p30		.849			
p32		.820			
p29		.803			
p33		.753			
p28			.857		
p24			.789		
p26			.764		
p25			.688		
p27			.622		



	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
p2				.742	
p6				.727	
p3				.698	
p4				.697	
p1				.640	
p7				.639	
p9				.634	
p5				.626	
p15					.792
p18					.738
p16					.706
p19					.603

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.<sup>a</sup>

a. Rotation converged in 9 iterations.

Since it was decided to retain 5 factors, the following items were excluded: p21 (*I completely trust my students*), p22 (*I usually enjoy teaching*), p23 (*Generally speaking, my students respect me*), p20 (*I am self-confident in the relationship with my students*), p17 (*I find it difficult to take the initiative*) and p8 (*I am prone to questioning my ideas and skills*).

The following factors were included in the research:

The first factor comprised these items: I feel that my colleagues and I are part of the same team; I am pleased with the interpersonal relationships with my colleagues at work; I feel that I am respected; I am accepted by others; I enjoy sharing experience and cooperating with my colleagues. This factor was named *Relationship with colleagues*.

The second factor comprised the following items: I know what I want and what I am able to do; I accept myself although I am not perfect; I learn from my own mistakes; I feel free and I am not afraid to be what I am and to accept the consequences; I learn continually. This factor was named *Accepting and improving oneself*.

The third factor comprised these items: I cannot stand my own self; I consider myself a failure; I find my teaching unsatisfactory; It is very hard for me to be successful in the present circumstances; I wish I could change my job. This factor was named *Self-satisfaction and job satisfaction*.

The fourth factor comprised the following items: Generally speaking, I consider myself a good teacher; I am known to be an efficient teacher; I think that I have good teaching skills/abilities; I am confident of my abilities; I feel quite competent; I feel that I am a worthy person; My colleagues consider me a competent teacher; I feel self-confident. This factor was named *Teaching and personal qualities*.

The fifth factor comprised the following items: I enjoy thinking about new plans; I love to take risks; I am not concerned about changes; I readily accept any criticism coming from either my colleagues or my students. This factor was named *Initiative and openness to change*.

The success in teaching depends largely on the ability of every individual teacher to become aware of their own characteristics, abilities and qualities, so as to attain a true image of themselves, including all possible flaws and drawbacks of their character, which is the first step towards them being overcome. This further proves the significance of the study of self-concept. Presented through separate factors (relationship with colleagues, accepting and improving oneself, self-satisfaction and job satisfaction, teaching and personal qualities, initiative and openness to change), teachers' self-concept was studied in relation to the stated variables: work experience and pay satisfaction.



**Table 4. Differences in teachers' views on their relationship with colleagues as regards work experience.**

	Work experience	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Relationship with colleagues	0-5 yrs	21.949	2.621	3.445	3	.017
	6-15 yrs	21.312	2.644			
	16-25 yrs	22.139	2.346			
	over 25 yrs	22.374	3.126			

Table 4 presents the differences in teachers' views on their relationship with colleagues as regards work experience. The results were estimated by *F* test. The value  $p=.017$  indicated that this difference was statistically significant. It meant that teachers having different views on interpersonal relationships with colleagues, cooperation with colleagues, team work, mutual approval and respect depended on work experience. The results also proved that the most experienced teachers (over 25 years of teaching) valued most the aforementioned elements (cooperation, approval and respect, team work), i.e. relationship with colleagues ( $M=22.374$ ).

**Table 5. Differences in teachers' views on their relationship with colleagues as regards pay satisfaction.**

	Pay satisfaction primanjima	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Relationship with colleagues	Yes	22.083	1.556	.629	56.803	.532
	No	21.899	2.756			

Table 5 presents the differences in teachers' views on their relationship with colleagues as regards pay satisfaction. The results were estimated by *t*-test. The obtained value  $p=.532$  proved that pay satisfaction did not determine any statistically significant difference in teachers' views on their relationship with colleagues, which was further proved by the similar arithmetic mean for the categories *yes* ( $M=22.083$ ) and *no* ( $M=21.899$ ).

**Table 6. Differences in teachers' views on self-acceptance and self-improvement as regards work experience.**

	Work experience	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-acceptance and self-improvement	0-5 yrs	23.063	1.917	5.483	3	.001
	6-15 yrs	21.023	4.195			
	16-25 yrs	22.062	3.134			
	over 25 yrs	21.099	5.679			

Table 6 presents the differences in teachers' views on accepting and improving oneself as regards work experience. The results were estimated by *ANOVA F* test for the independent variable work experience. The difference in teachers' views was statistically significant ( $p=.001$ ). The concept of accepting and improving oneself was related to the acceptance of one's own imperfection, flaws and mistakes and continuous efforts at overcoming these drawbacks and improving one's personal and professional qualities. The obtained results proved that the least experienced teachers (up to 5 years of teaching) valued most this concept ( $M=23.063$ ), which means that they were the most willing to accept and improve themselves.

**Table 7. Differences in teachers' views on self-acceptance and self-improvement as regards pay satisfaction.**

	Pay satisfaction primanjima	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-acceptance and self-improvement	Yes	20.278	4.694	-2.298	440	.022
	No	21.872	3.922			

Table 7 presents the differences in teachers' views on self-acceptance and self-improvement as regards pay satisfaction, i.e. whether they were satisfied with their salaries or not. The obtained results proved that pay satisfac-



tion had an impact on whether teachers accepted themselves as they really were, whether they became aware of their own qualities and drawbacks and whether they undertook certain steps with the purpose of continuous learning about their own personalities and improving themselves. The value  $p=.022$  meant that the difference was statistically significant. However, the obtained data showed that the teachers who were not satisfied with their salaries valued the concept of self-acceptance and self-improvement ( $M=21.872$ ) more than the teachers who were satisfied with their salaries ( $M=20.278$ ).

**Table 8. Differences in teachers' views on self-satisfaction and job satisfaction as regards work experience.**

	Work experience	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-satisfaction and job satisfaction	0-5 yrs	7.633	1.956	7.373	3	.001
	6-15 yrs	8.227	2.517			
	16-25 yrs	8.653	3.646			
	over 25 yrs	10.208	6.187			

Table 8 presents the differences in teachers' views on self-satisfaction and job satisfaction as regards work experience. The results were estimated using *F* test. The value  $p=.001$  proved that the difference in teachers' views on self-satisfaction and job satisfaction was statistically significant. This concept included the statements used to examine whether teachers regarded themselves as successful in teaching, whether the present circumstances impaired their success, whether they assessed their teaching as satisfactory or whether they were so unsatisfied by themselves that they wanted to change their job. The estimated arithmetic means proved that teachers who had been teaching for more than 25 years valued most the aforementioned statements ( $M=10.208$ ), which means that they were less satisfied with their own personalities and their job more frequently.

**Table 9. Differences in teachers' views on self-satisfaction and job satisfaction as regards pay satisfaction.**

	Pay satisfaction	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-satisfaction and job satisfaction	Yes	6.861	1.885	-5.287	67.853	.001
	No	8.827	4.013			

Table 9 shows the differences in teachers' views on self-satisfaction and job satisfaction as regards pay satisfaction. The results were estimated by means of *t*-test. The obtained value  $p=.001$  proved that this difference was statistically significant since teachers' different views regarding satisfaction with their own personalities, success in teaching and quality of their teaching depended on the fact whether they were satisfied with their salaries or not. The teachers who were not satisfied with their salaries valued most the statements related to self-satisfaction and job satisfaction ( $M=8.827$ ) in comparison to those teachers who were satisfied with their job ( $M=6.861$ ).

**Table 10. Differences in teachers' views on teaching and personal qualities as regards work experience.**

	Work experience	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Teaching and personal qualities	0-5 yrs	36.013	2.289	.710	3	.546
	6-15 yrs	35.539	3.505			
	16-25 yrs	35.819	3.389			
	over 25 yrs	36.132	3.092			

Table 10 shows the differences in teachers' views on teaching and personal qualities as regards work experience. The results were estimated by means of *F* test. The obtained value  $p=.0546$  ( $p>.050$ ) indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in teachers' views on their personal and teaching qualities in relation to work experience. It meant that teachers similarly valued their competence, efficiency, teaching skills and abilities, self-confidence and self-worth regardless of the years of teaching (5, 6-15, 16-25 or over 25 years).



**Table 11. Differences in teachers' views on teaching and personal qualities as regards pay satisfaction.**

	Pay satisfaction	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Teaching and personal qualities	Yes	35.722	2.337	-.296	47.986	.768
	No	35.847	3.259			

Table 11 presents the differences in teachers' views on their teaching and personal qualities as regards pay satisfaction. The results were estimated by means of *t*-test. The obtained value  $p=.768$  proved that the difference in teachers' views was not statistically significant, and that pay satisfaction did not have a significant influence on teachers' assessment of their teaching and personal qualities, which was proved by the similar arithmetic means for both categories, i.e.  $M=35.722$  for the teachers who were satisfied with their salaries, and  $M=35.847$  for the teachers who were not satisfied with their salaries.

**Table 12. Differences in teachers' views on initiative and openness to change as regards work experience.**

	Work experience	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Initiative and openness to change	0-5 yrs	16.241	2.243	4.478	3	.004
	6-15 yrs	15.883	2.702			
	16-25 yrs	15.097	2.890			
	over 25 yrs	16.187	2.878			

Table 12 presents the differences in teachers' views on initiative and openness to change as regards work experience. The results were estimated by means of *F* test. Readiness to take initiative and openness to change included the elements such as considering new plans, not showing concern about changes, readiness to take risks and accept criticism from both colleagues and students. The obtained value  $p=.004$  showed that the difference in teachers' views on the aforementioned elements was statistically significant with regard to work experience. The obtained results also showed that the teachers with 5 years of teaching experience valued most these elements ( $M=26.241$ ).

**Table 13. Differences in teachers' views on initiative and openness to change as regards pay satisfaction.**

	Pay satisfaction	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Initiative and openness to change	Yes	16.639	1.313	3.705	69.087	.001
	No	15.675	2.841			

Table 13 presents the differences in teachers' views on initiative and openness to change as regards pay satisfaction. The results were estimated by means of *t*-test. The obtained value  $p=.001$  indicated that the difference was statistically significant, which meant that teachers' views on risks, initiative, changes, etc., were significantly determined by pay satisfaction. The teachers who were satisfied with their salaries valued the concept of initiative and openness to change ( $M=16.639$ ) more than the teachers who were not satisfied with their salaries ( $M=15.675$ ).

## Discussion

Self-concept depends on age, gender, education, experience, academic advancement, social and economic status, intelligence, as well as on certain institutional variables, such as school environment, organizational ambience, interpersonal relationships, etc., and the factors such as success and failure, social feedback and self-respect. Moreover, self-concept is conditioned by teachers' competence. Teachers who feel competent enough and prepared to improve their communicative and teaching skills communicate better with their students and have an overall better understanding of their own selves, i.e. they create a positive self-concept (Mishra, 2013).

This empirical research tested the teachers' self-concept on the basis of two variables, work experience, already emphasized by the aforementioned author, and another one, pay satisfaction, which has rarely been explored.



The obtained results proved that teachers' perception on their relationship with colleagues was determined by their work experience, but not by pay satisfaction, which is understandable considering the fact that relationships with colleagues represent interpersonal relationships that may develop into friendship. The results stated that the teachers with the teaching experience of over 25 years valued most their relationships with colleagues, reflected in various forms of team work, sharing and cooperation, approval and respect, as well as mere delight in these relationships with colleagues. This result is partially explained by the fact that these teachers, owing to their long teaching experience, managed to create firm, valuable and recognized relationships with their colleagues, realizing thus the importance of cooperation and team work for any success and achievement. The obtained results therefore partly proved the hypothesis: *Teachers' views on their relationships with colleagues are expected to vary depending on work experience and pay satisfaction.*

Accepting and improving oneself includes the elements such as knowing one's own wishes and abilities, accepting oneself despite one's imperfections, learning from one's own mistakes and continuous learning, so that teachers present their true self in every situation. The results of the research showed that teachers' views varied depending on work experience and pay satisfaction. The teachers with 5 years of teaching experience valued most this concept, which is partly explained by the fact that they were generally young teachers, willing to dedicate themselves to self-improvement in order to be respected and competent teachers and ready to prove their own worth, aware of the fact that professional success was based on the acceptance of the paradigm of life-long learning and education. The results also showed that the teachers with lower pay satisfaction valued this concept more than the teachers who were satisfied with their salaries. This result does not correspond to the expected result, i.e. that the teachers who are not satisfied with their salaries will not be highly motivated to improve themselves, or that the appropriate financial support will contribute to a higher level of motivation for teachers' self-improvement. It is clear that, regardless of the fact that a number of teachers were dissatisfied with their salaries, they still recognized and acknowledged the importance of permanent education, self-improvement, learning from one's own mistakes, overcoming one's own weaknesses and flaws, etc. precisely because they knew that their continuous improvement and education might not be feasible without the adequate financial support. The obtained results confirmed the hypothesis: *Teachers' views on the acceptance of their own selves and self-improvement are expected to vary depending on work experience and pay satisfaction.*

The results of the research also proved that self-satisfaction and job satisfaction depended on work experience and pay satisfaction. The teachers with the longest teaching experience (over 25 years) were the least satisfied with themselves and their job, which may be explained by the fact that they had difficulty adapting to innovations and changes required from them, and these were mostly older teachers who could hardly "keep pace" with the novel ideas. Moreover, these teachers were more likely to suffer from the burnout syndrome, which further bred dissatisfaction. Self-satisfaction and job satisfaction were lower in those teachers who were not satisfied with their salaries. Pay is the mark of a job's worth, social acknowledgment and approval, so that pay dissatisfaction inevitably breeds job dissatisfaction and dissatisfaction with one's own personality. The obtained results thus confirmed the hypothesis: *Teachers' views on the satisfaction with their own selves, their achievements and their own profession are expected to vary depending on work experience and pay satisfaction.*

Considering teaching and personal qualities, the obtained results proved that work experience and pay satisfaction did not significantly determine teachers' perceptions of efficiency, teaching skills and abilities, competence and personal worth, self-confidence, etc. These results are partly justified by the fact that teachers, regardless of work experience and pay, trust their own ideas, develop the sense of their own worth and feel competent in teaching since teaching is the profession that requires certain skills and talents. Therefore, the obtained results disproved the hypothesis: *Teachers' views on their teaching and personal qualities are expected to vary depending on work experience and pay satisfaction.*

Initiative and openness to change depend on work experience and pay satisfaction. The teachers with the least work experience (5 years) most considered new plans and were least concerned about changes and criticism. Thus, these teachers were most willing to change, take risks and initiative, which is partly explained by the fact that they were mainly young teachers still endeavouring to find their own manner of teaching, try out various teaching methods and not yet suffering from burnout syndrome. The results also proved that these ideas were more valued by the teachers who were satisfied with their salaries than by the teachers with low pay satisfaction, which further proves that the teachers dissatisfied with their pay are not willing to take initiative or be open to change. The obtained results confirmed the hypothesis: *Teachers' views on the initiative and openness to change are expected to vary depending on work experience and pay satisfaction.*



Numerous scholars have studied the same issues (Asmaa, 2016; Mbuva, 2016; Mishra, 2013; Sadeghi et al., 2015; Sampthirao, 2016), which has provided the grounds for this empirical research. However, two independent variables, work experience and pay satisfaction, were used to perceive the Serbian teachers' self-concept, which further contributes to the future similar studies.

## Conclusions and Implications

Improvement and quality achievement are based on the observation of the current circumstances, characteristics, advantages, success, but also of certain weaknesses, drawbacks and flaws to be corrected. This is valid for people, as well, since it is only by knowing themselves that individuals can change, improve and develop. Self-concept, understood as the "image of oneself", is based on knowing one's own personality. This research was conducted with the purpose of realizing what kind of "self-image" teachers have, i.e. their self-concept. Considering the fact that it is a multidimensional concept, teachers' views on relationships with colleagues, self-satisfaction and job satisfaction, self-acceptance and self-improvement, initiative and openness to change, personal and teaching qualities with regard to work experience and pay satisfaction were studied. The obtained results showed that self-acceptance and self-improvement, self-satisfaction and job satisfaction, as well as initiative and openness to change varied depending on work experience and pay satisfaction. Relationships with colleagues varied depending on work experience, but not on pay satisfaction, whereas the views on personal and teaching qualities depended on the aforementioned variable.

This research may motivate teachers to think about themselves, to consider their own qualities, values, strengths and their drawbacks, but also to consider their own personalities in the context of other people, both their students and colleagues. Self-reflection is very significant from the teachers' viewpoint, since they have to be reflective practitioners and reflect on their own selves and their job and life, in general, in order to be able to fulfil contemporary requirements. Only the teachers who know their own selves will be able to transform their "imagined self" into their "true self", i.e. to create the best version of their own personalities. This is in turn reflected in their success in teaching and educating their students since teachers are the persons that their students appreciate and respect.

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