



A Theoretical Model of Self-Concept and Self-Esteem in the Foreign Language Classroom

FERNANDO DAVID RUBIO-ALCALÁ*

University of Huelva (Spain)

PABLO ANTONIO CANO-JIMÉNEZ

University of Huelva (Spain)

Received: 24/09/2023. Accepted: 21/10/2024.

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a domain-specific theoretical model of self-concept and self-esteem in the foreign language classroom context. We studied different dimensions and factors, and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) yielded a three-dimensional structured acceptable model fit with a reliability coefficient of $\omega = .92$ ($n=252$), supporting the dimensions of language competence, task performance skills, and perceived social support. The specific factors within these dimensions and their interactions were analysed. Implications for research and pedagogy are also discussed.

KEYWORDS: Self-Esteem; Self-Concept; Foreign Language; Classroom; Theoretical Model.

1. INTRODUCTION

Affective factors are key aspects of success or failure in the language classroom (Arnold, 1999). Among these factors, self-esteem has been highlighted as a core element in this context, interacting with many other factors and responsible for the development of optimal or critical experiences (Rubio-Alcalá, 2007; Mercer, 2012). In contrast with the study of other affective factors such as anxiety or motivation, self-esteem is relatively new, and most studies have been

**Address for correspondence:* Av. De las Fuerzas Armadas, s/n, Faculty of Humanities, University of Huelva, 21007 Huelva; e-mail: fernando.rubio@dfing.uhu.es

conducted in the 21st century (c.f. Guban-Caisido's meta-analysis, 2020). While there are some milestones (e.g., Mercer, 2011; 2012; Rubio-Alcalá, 2014; Habrat, 2018), there is no validated theoretical model in the literature that explains for the structure of the self-concept, the mechanism for the development of self-esteem, or the properties that the construct exhibits in this specific context. In this paper we present, to the best of our knowledge, the first theoretical model of self-concept and self-esteem in the foreign language classroom (FLC), which serves not only as a basis for understanding the process, but also as a springboard for developing instruments to diagnose and measure self-esteem in groups of students.

We must note that all the studies that have been conducted in this particular field have used instruments to measure global self-esteem. For instance, Coopersmith's Self-esteem Questionnaire, 1967: Hayati and Ostadian, 2008; Maleki and Mohammadi, 2009; Soureshjani and Naseri, 2011; Rosenberg's Self-esteem Scale, 1965: Zare and Riasati, 2012; Dev and Qiqieh, 2016; Mandokhail et al., 2018; Sorensen's Self-esteem Test, 2005: Koosha et al., 2011. Other studies have used self-developed, adapted or indirect measurement instruments (anxiety, language attitude, language aptitude, etc.): Hassan, 2001; Pramita, 2012; Fahim and Rad, 2012; Takahashi et al., 2013; Tilfarlioglu and Delbesoglugil, 2014; Wullur, 2014; Basco and Han, 2016; Alrabai, 2017; Moriya, 2019; Satriani, 2019. Ronsenberg et al. (1995) have provided evidence that global and specific self-esteem differ substantially and have different effects, with the former being more relevant to psychological well-being and the latter to behaviour. Furthermore, Mercer (2012) acknowledges the importance of the domain-specificity of self-concept and advocates avoiding a mixture of global and specific measures in correlational studies. In addition, Mercer (2011) and Rubio-Alcalá (2014) have pointed to the domain-specific profile of the foreign language classroom, in which students perform tasks that differ from those in other subjects, which may lead them to experience different and critical thoughts and feelings, described by Gkonou et al. (2020) as an emotional rollercoaster. In summary, a domain-specific theoretical model is needed to elucidate the structure and functioning of self-concept and self-esteem in the FLC and the subsequent derivation for the development of measuring tools.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to offer the first theoretical model of self-concept and self-esteem in the context of the FLC so that the model can be further used to develop instruments to measure this domain-specific psychological phenomenon and then conduct appropriate studies. This model applies to all foreign languages learned in formal contexts and applies to foreign language learners who are learning a foreign language not used in their home country. The model draws on evidence from the literature to form different dimensions. Statistical analyses were performed to examine their interactions and interrelationships. The three-dimensional model is confirmed by construct validity, and the result of the study has three dimensions: language competence, task performance skills, and perceived social support.

1.1. Conceptual clarification

The terms “self-concept” and “self-esteem” need clarification for operational use. We adopt an etymological perspective in the conceptualization, so that “esteem” comes from Latin, meaning “to value, appraise, and “concept” from Medieval Latin, referring to “draft”, or “abstract”. Accordingly, we describe self-esteem as ‘a process of evaluation and the emergent evaluation, while self-concept is the perceived entity that is evaluated’ (Rubio-Alcalá, 2014: 42). At the same time, we draw on a definition that has an operational perspective, in the sense that it can be used for research purposes; indeed, the two concepts represent one side of a coin and cannot be separated. We pretend to refine the distinction made by Harter (1999), who describes self-esteem as an overall assessment of one’s worth or value that is influenced by domain-specific self-concepts. In our case, self-esteem refers to any evaluative experience following the perception of the self-concept, whether it is unidimensional or multidimensional. Both cognition and affect are interrelated processes that occur during appraisal (Schumann, 1997; Swain, 2013), being the self-concept more cognitive and self-esteem more affective. As a result, both self-esteem and self-concept become operative in the sense that the former refers to the process of evaluating the latter, which is formed by certain self-dimensions, regardless of the context or situation, and both processes do not interfere in functional terms. Specifically, in the FLC, there are as many dimensions of self-concept as there are circumstances that the individual is trying to evaluate, e.g., skills’ performance, relationship to the group in oral tasks, perception of language competence, etc.

1.2. The theoretical model

A theoretical model refers to the construction of a framework that describes the structure, the properties that the components exhibit and the mechanism for development. In our case, the main contribution is to be able to offer a domain-specific framework in which the elements included are clearly embedded in the context of the FLC. Although some features can be found in other academic domains or even in domains outside the academic context, the framework we propose is valid only for this context. Specifically, the internal structure is the most distinguishable part, as the development and characteristics are similar to other areas of self-concept or self-esteem processes. Thus, to understand how self-esteem develops we refer to Rubio-Alcalá’s (2014) neurogenerative conception of self-concept and self-esteem, which is shown in Figure 1.

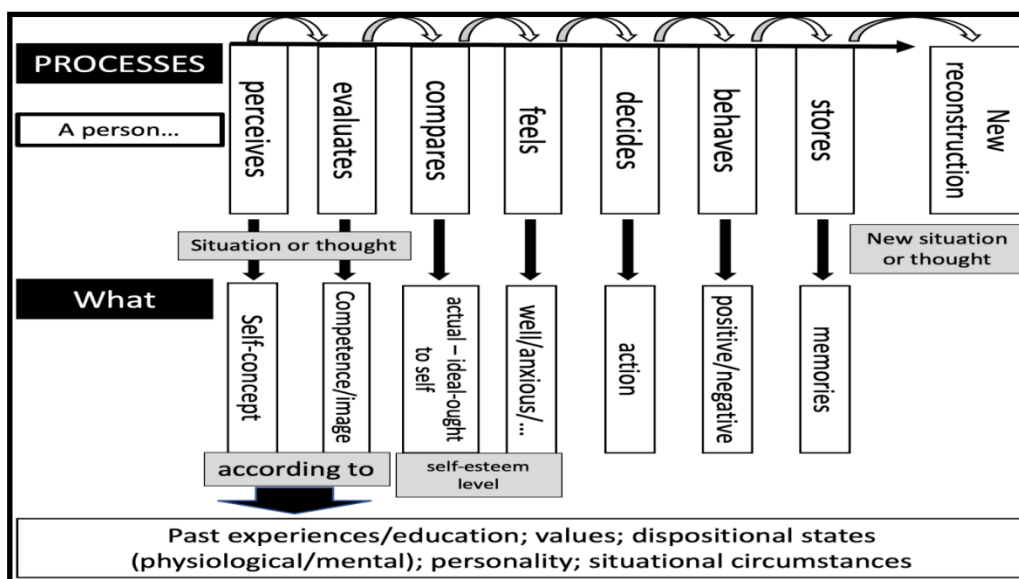


Figure 1. Neurogenerative conception of self-concept and self-esteem (Rubio-Alcalá, 2014:48).

As is shown in Figure 1, the resulting level of self-esteem is the completion of a complex process in which the perception of a stimulus (whether real, fictitious; or internal or external to the individual) intervenes, which entails the evaluation of some domains of the self-concept (such as the competence, sense of belonging, interrelationships, etc.). In the FLC, the domains would include those factors that exert the most influence on the language learning experience. At the evaluative level, there is influence from previous experiences of success or failure, values, dispositional states (physiological at the bodily or mental level), personality, and situational circumstances. Then, the individuals compare the resulting evaluation with their factual self (the one they have), the ideal (the one desired) or the ought-to or normative (the one they should have), which causes a positive feeling or emotion, or of well-being when it coincides, or the contrary (Higgins, 1987). In this phase, we would talk about the level of self-esteem resulting from the evaluation of the self-concept domain(s). Next, the feeling serves as a drive for the emission of a response, and the coping phase begins, which may be positive or negative, or mature or immature, depending on the behaviour. Finally, the experience is stored in the memory of the individuals and is part of their history, which may influence new constructions of the self. The cycle is regenerated each time the subjects carry out an evaluation of a domain within their selves.

Being a dynamic, complex, and multidimensional process (Mercer, 2011), these phases do not have to occur linearly, nor inevitably all of them, since the new constructions of the self, for instance, can come from inferences in which the behaviour does not necessarily precede a feeling or an evaluation.

Regarding stability, we concur with Markus and Kunda (1986), Markus and Wurf (1987), and Mercer (2009 and 2011), who found evidence that the more stable dimensions of the self-concept are those that affect globally and are less immediately influenced by the

context, and, accordingly, a stronger degree of dynamicity is found in specific domains and the proper subdomains that play a role during the language learning experience. For that reason, we sustain that individuals that are in the FLC continuously generate new evaluations and their level of self-esteem is prone to change in many situations. This is of great significance since it means that specific pedagogical actions, such as strategies and techniques, can be introduced in the classroom to increase the levels of self-esteem and then favour positive attitudes and behaviours.

Our study deals with a particular context, the FLC, and therefore the factors are the most salient aspect of the theoretical model. A comprehensive review of the literature led to the identification of four main dimensions that could form the internal structure of the language learners' self-concept: 1) language learning competence; 2) skills or task performance; 3) perceived social support; and 4) language learning orientation. These dimensions were assessed by seven inter-rater experts who unanimously advised that the fourth dimension should be dropped as the factors (anxiety, motivation, attitudes, etc.) are separate constructs, as we explain below the structure and properties of the factors.

1.3. Language learning competence

This dimension consists of students' self-perception of intellectual or academic ability in learning a foreign language. In other words, it is the sense of personal competence in the FLC and, in particular, the ability to perform well and adhere to the academic demands. Competence, autonomy and relatedness are central factors in Deci and Ryan's (2002) Self-determination Theory. Specifically, competence is described as the need to apply one's skills and abilities in the social environment. In line with this theory, Harter (1992) points out that perceptions of competence are a crucial factor in triggering specific affective states that regulate students' motivational orientation in the classroom.

Competence is an important factor in various models of self-esteem (e.g., Kohn, 1994; Branden, 1995; Shackelford & Michalski, 2011). Mruk (1999) summarized earlier theories and theoretical approaches of different researchers (e.g., James, White, Rosenberg, Coppersmith, Branden, Epstein) and arrived at two basic components of self-esteem: competence and worthiness. Other more contextualised models, e.g., Reasoner's (1983) model of general academic self-esteem, also have the sense of competence as one of the five central dimensions. In the context of the FLC, the literature has generally identified three different sub-dimensions of competence: self-efficacy, language aptitude and communicative competence (referred to as language proficiency).

Bong and Skaalvik (2003) consider self-efficacy as one of the most important parts of the self-concept. It refers to the self-perception of competence that students develop in relation to their performance and their ability to complete tasks successfully (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1997: 19) points out that these self-perceptions 'affect almost everything [people] do; how

they think, motivate themselves, feel, and behave', as self-esteem does. Self-efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997) includes four hierarchical drives that can positively or negatively affect student performance: 1) mastery experiences: These are the most influential and occur when students are aware that they are doing well on the task at hand; 2) vicarious experiences: They consist of observing the success or failure of peers; 3) verbal persuasions: These come from teachers' judgements and feedback about task performance; 4) physiological indicators: Self-efficacy beliefs are influenced by the physiological states individuals experience while doing tasks.

The second sub-dimension, language aptitude, generally refers to a particular talent for language learning (Wen, Biedroń & Skehan, 2017). In the field of FL learning, Ryan and Mercer (2012) explain, in relation to students' beliefs about their aptitude, that some people are born linguists and find language learning natural, while other individuals are forever destined to persevere in the struggle to learn a new language. Gardner and Lambert (1959) and Sampasivam and Clément (2014) found evidence that language aptitude is a key predictor of L2 achievement, and Reasoner's model of self-esteem included aptitude as an important factor in the dimension of competence.

The third sub-dimension of competence is communicative competence (regarding proficiency), which is the ability to interact linguistically appropriately in a variety of communicative situations. This means making use of a set of rules that cover grammar and the specific levels of linguistics (syntax, lexicon, phonetics, semantics...), as well as those related to the socio-historical and cultural context in which communication takes place. Mastery of language, in both thinking and performance modes, is a complex cognitive process that requires constant effort and challenge and, like any other type of learning activity, is prone to making mistakes and developing feelings of discomfort and unease. In this process, students develop a self-awareness of their language competence which has a great impact on their ability to cope with the tasks and leads to different motivational states that affect effort, perseverance, resilience and so on. Students who are aware of their strengths and weaknesses have more opportunities to self-generate accurate descriptions of their language competence, which enables them to approach the task under better conditions to achieve learning success (Reasoner, 1983; Rubio-Alcalá, 2007; Mercer, 2011). Soureshjani and Naseri (2011) and Satriani (2014) found that students' self-esteem had a significantly strong positive correlation with their language proficiency, oral proficiency (Ahour & Hassanzadeh, 2015; Mandokhail et al. 2018), and test scores (Gultom & Oktaviani, 2022; Utami & Wahyudin, 2022). Guban-Caisido (2020) also concluded in his systematic review that language proficiency is one of the three variables that have a lasting impact on the self-esteem of foreign language learners.

In summary, there is theoretical and empirical evidence to include the dimension of competence in the structure of our theoretical framework.

1.4. Task performance skills

This dimension refers to the perceptions students have when performing activities or tasks that require the use of various foreign language learning skills: speaking, reading, listening, writing and their corresponding sub-skills (pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary, which are usually integrated into one of the four skills). In the language classroom, certain skills may be specifically assigned. For example, a student may be able to speak fluently but not have mastered pronunciation; or a student may be able to discriminate the sounds (phonemes) they listen to but not be able to understand. Lau, Yeung, Jin and Low (1999) evidenced that skill-specific self-perceptions of speaking, reading, writing, and global English, were different constructs. Indeed, Maleki and Mohammadi (2009), Kalazandeh et al. (2013), Wullur (2014), Arifin and Pertiwi (2017), Mandokhail et al. (2018), and Al-Ariqi and Sharyan (2022), found a significant relationship between self-esteem and speaking skills, with fluency exerting the most influence (Koosha et al. 2011). Other studies also confirmed the same positive correlation for the other skills: reading comprehension (Bagheri & Faghih, 2012; Ghafoori & Nourelahi, 2015; Piran, 2014; Juyandegan, 2016; Koosha et al. 2016; Rosalina, 2019), writing (Hassan, 2001; Fahim & Rad, 2012; Sarkhoush, 2013; Khansir & Abdolahi, 2014), and listening comprehension (Hayati & Ostadian, 2008).

Task performance skills dimension is closely related to the language learning competence dimension: both are influenced by students' beliefs, which are a cognitive mechanism based on making inferences about some aspect of the self-concept and are generally automatic and subjective. If the belief is based on the fact that one must pronounce a language perfectly in order to speak it well (the ideal self), then the self-perception of this ability tends to be negative, no matter how fluent or effective the communication skill, since the actual self is far from the desired self, as the Self-discrepancy Theory claims (Higgins, 1987).

1.5. Perceived social support

Leary (1999: 33; in Habrat 2018) states that 'human beings are characterized by a pervasive drive to maintain significant relationships'. Further, Golden (2005), cited in Naranjo (2007), points out that peer relationships are highly portrayed as a crucial factor in self-esteem in the context of educational institutions, and when there is no peer support and recognition and the person is pushed aside or rejected, the situation becomes relevant to create low self-esteem, with the consequence that the sense of personal worth decreases.

This dimension of self-concept is composed of the perceptions students have about their relationships and interactions with classmates and teachers. It includes the sense of belonging to the group and the feedback they receive when completing tasks that require them to interact with other peers and the teacher (Reasoner, 1983). Baumeister and Leary's (1995) belongingness hypothesis states that a lack of social bonding is associated with negative effects

on well-being because it has multiple and strong effects on emotional patterns and cognitive processes. In the foreign language classroom, where communicative activities predominate, students have to participate orally and constantly expose themselves to the rest of the class and the teacher, which leads to interpersonal situations, ego-involvement and engagement different than other areas of study (Arnold, 1999; Rubio-Alcalá, 2007).

This dimension is formed as a result of a process of integrating, analysing and evaluating information derived from one's own experience and feedback from significant others in the learning process. The experience of being accepted or rejected in class, or the feeling of belonging to the group influences the evaluation of one's self. In addition, the aspects related to students' communicative skills when they engage in oral activities (usually interactive) where they are exposed to or the focus of attention of the group or class, lead students to make continuous evaluations of the self. These evaluations, according to Williams and Burden's (1997) Theory of Social Comparison, also come from students' perceptions of their abilities when they engage in verbal interactions with their classmates. Interactions include the verbal and non-verbal messages conveyed.

Confirmation is also part of the structure of this dimension. It is a process through which the feeling of being accepted, recognised and valued as significant individuals is transmitted to or by others (León, 2007). While it is true that peer support in the classroom is crucial for self-esteem, the impact of teacher support and feedback, i.e., rapport, is no less important. Teachers' appraisals can be of paramount importance to a student's opinion of his/her worth (Habrát, 2018). Stronger support from them leads to higher self-esteem (Reasoner, 1983). In addition, a positive relationship between students, and between students and teachers, positively affects aspects such as social competence, general attitude towards the educational institution, attitude towards educational activities and classroom behaviour (Rubio-Alcalá, 2007). Consequently, the self-assessments students make in the FLC can be strongly influenced by the interaction with the teacher, and it be of utmost importance what other people think about them.

1.6. Orientation in language learning

Mercer (2011: 335) describes self-concept as 'a complex, multilayered, multidimensional network of interrelated self-beliefs'. This gives an idea of the complexity of analysis involved in this type of study in order to capture all the dimensions and factors that may have a crucial effect on self-esteem. This is the case with the dimension of language learning orientation, which includes many factors that are actually independent constructs. Despite the fact that this dimension was eventually removed from our model, it is necessary to explain the dimension.

We have considered within this dimension motivation, anxiety, attitude, beliefs and other situational, cognitive and affective states that trigger a reaction (behaviour) of approach or rejection towards the subject or course and learning. When it is a state of approach (favoured

by positive states of motivation, interest, etc.), alienation, effort and focus on learning are higher, as is the resulting self-esteem.

Student motivation, as a state of cognitive and emotional activation, is determined by various internal aspects (goals, purposes, interests ...) as well as external aspects (peers, teaching and learning styles, educational contexts...) that elicit and guide student behaviour in relation to learning the FL. According to Dörnyei and Ryan (2015), motivation is the main drive to engage with learning tasks and then the driving force to sustain the process. Without sufficient motivation, even students with the most remarkable abilities are unlikely to achieve long-term goals and accomplishments. Conversely, high motivation can compensate for significant deficits in both language skills and learning conditions, allowing for a more positive self-perception when working on tasks.

Anxiety is another affective factor that has been linked to self-esteem (Rubio-Alcalá, 2017). It is an unpleasant subjective state whose cause is difficult to identify and which causes the person to experience a state of alarm or hyperactivity that generally impedes concentration and interferes with the normal performance of a task (Rubio-Alcalá, 2004). In the FLC, anxiety can also lead students to adopt negative attitudes, such as passivity or disruptive behaviour, such as interrupting the teacher or classmates, and even a willingness to withdraw from work and flee the classroom (Rubio-Alcalá, 2017). Rojas (1989) adopts a five-dimensional system in his model of anxiety which includes the psychological dimension that encompasses feelings of low worth and incompetence when individuals experience restlessness, overwhelm, threat, diffuse fears, insecurity, inner emptiness, melancholy, grief, loss of energy and fear of losing control. A breakdown of the ego has also been associated with this experience, when students are aware of their limited proficiency to communicate, feel ashamed of their pronunciation, and even experience a degree of infantilisation (Littlewood and Lipsedge, 1981; Mercer & Williams, 2014).

The psychological symptoms of anxiety are closely related to the communicative symptoms that arise when a person experiences inhibitions in delivering a message, for example, students freeze and block when they need to start a conversation, are very sensitive to errors in correction, avoid participation and generally adopt a passive or avoidant attitude in completing tasks. These behaviours correspond to those that belong to the dimensions of self-esteem when students have a low sense of security, identity, belonging, purpose or competence (Reasoner, 1983). For this reason, anxiety in learning and in using a FL is closely related to communicative tasks, as these are seen as one of the main endeavours of learning and using a language. In particular, communication anxiety has a greater effect on oral than on written communication (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Attitude is another factor related to self-esteem. Heyde-Parsons (1983) divides attitudes into two categories: external and internal. On the one hand, internal attitudes refer to the evaluations that students make of internal factors (i.e., the sum of attitudes towards themselves and the evaluation of what individuals think of themselves). On the other hand, external

attitudes refer to the evaluations students direct towards factors outside themselves, e.g., the value of learning a FL, the desire to be part of the culture of the new language community, etc. Both internal and external attitudes are closely related to affective factors such as self-esteem, motivation and the resulting behaviour, i.e., the desire to move towards or away from the learning experience.

2. METHOD

After an extensive study of the literature from primary and complementary sources, the research team brainstormed an initial list of 111 items relating to the four preliminaries dimensions (language learning competence, skills or task performance, perceived social support, and language learning orientation). We conducted an initial screening looking for duplicates or very similar items and reduced the list to 59, which was refined to 41 items after a deeper independent content analysis by each researcher and the proper joint discussion. To adjust the model and validate a scale on self-esteem, we chose a convenient sample of seven experts in research methodology and psychology for review (c.f. Cano-Jiménez & Rubio-Alcalá, 2022). Independent interviews took place to discuss and clarify the dimensions and items. The experts agreed that the dimensions of language competence and task performance skills were quite robust. Perceived social support (interpersonal relationships) was found to depend on self-concept, but the experts clarified that they were not pure indicators of self-concept. Finally, there was unanimous agreement that orientation in language learning, while related to self-concept, is a distinct dimension, and therefore should not be the focus of the model and should be removed. As a result, the model has three dimensions: language competence; skills performance; and perceived social support. Consequently, the list of factors was reduced to 24 after removing the fourth dimension and was then pilot tested (c.f. Cano-Jiménez & Rubio-Alcalá, 2022). It yielded a reliability omega coefficient of .863. We presented the list to a sample of 252 respondents, consisting of 76.6% women and 23.4% men, all of whom were adult foreign language students. The sample included students of English ($n = 173$, 68.7%), French ($n = 52$, 20.6%), Portuguese ($n = 12$, 4.8%), Italian ($n = 9$, 3.6%), German ($n = 4$, 1.6%), Japanese ($n = 1$, 0.4%), and Russian ($n = 1$, 0.4%). These students came from various training centers: 21% from universities, 53.5% from language schools, 12.3% from other educational institutions, and 11.9% unspecified. We then conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the degree of fitness between the theoretical model and empirical reality. JASP (2020) was used to calculate several indexes: the comparative fit index (CFI); the non-normed fit index (NNFI), the Tucker Lewis index (TLI); the standardized root means square residual (SRMR); the root means square error of approximation (RMSEA); and the goodness of fit index (GFI).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research team encountered a number of difficulties due to the complexity of the self-concept and self-esteem. First, it was necessary to establish an operational definition of the terms. The conceptualization is quite abstruse in the literature, although it is extensive. Self-concept and self-esteem are sometimes described as synonyms, but also as distinguishable entities, one being more affective and the other more cognitive, and vice versa. This dichotomy seems impractical (i.e., non-operational) for research purposes because the two processes are not separate (Schumann, 1997). We used Rubio-Alcalá's (2014) conceptualization to refer to self-concept as the actual dimensions that are self-assessed for a resulting level of self-esteem. In summary, self-concept refers more to structure and self-esteem to process.

Other terms also create conceptual confusion. In particular, self-efficacy is sometimes described in the literature as a separate phenomenon or as more or less task-specific. We strongly advocate that self-efficacy be viewed as a factor that influences self-esteem within the structure of the competence dimension and relates to the performance of specific tasks ('I think I can answer this question'), as opposed to more global self-assessments ('I am good at English').

Our findings resulted in the development of a theoretical model consisting of three dimensions, as illustrated in Figure 2:

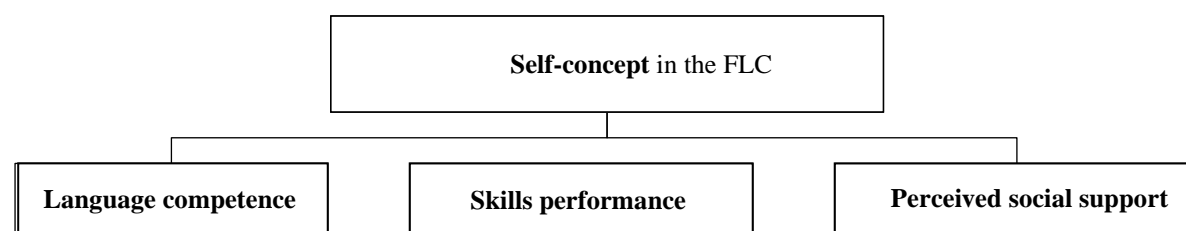


Figure 2. Dimensional model of self-concept in the FLC (Cano-Jiménez & Rubio-Alcalá, 2022: 197).

A review of the literature pointed to specific domains within those dimensions, as is shown in Table 1. These showed the most plausible and parsimonious combination of the three interrelated dimensions as well as the greatest metric guarantees and maximized the psychometric properties of the model.

Table 1. Specific domains of the self-concept dimensions in the FLC.

Dimensions	Specific domains
Language competence	Self-efficacy
	Language aptitude

	Communicative competence
Skills performance	Speaking
	Listening
	Reading
	Writing
Perceived social support	Belonging
	Communicative abilities
	Rapport

However, when we conducted Confirmatory Factor Analysis in order to construct a scale, which involved assessing the model's fit to empirical data, evaluating the fit indices of the structural models, and interpreting the results, some of those specific domains were dropped. Thus, after removing redundant factors, the list was streamlined to 10 (c.f. Cano-Jiménez & Rubio-Alcalá, 2022: 207). Language competence emerged as the strongest dimension, comprising six items, with two items each for skills or task performance and perceived social support. Notwithstanding, it is important to distinguish between the theoretical model and the scale: the former is composed of the main dimensions and factors that constitute self-concept, while the latter consists of individual factors (i.e., items) used to measure self-concept. Given the multi-dimensional and domain-specific nature of self-concept (Mercer, 2012; Rubio-Alcalá, 2014), it is challenging to claim that one dimension holds more influence than others. Consequently, the level of self-esteem varies according to specific and often unpredictable circumstances, with the factors interacting differently in various situations.

We also found it difficult to set clear boundaries between specific domains. For instance, self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's perception of their performance or potential for success (Bandura, 1987), is closely linked to language aptitude and communicative competence. Moreover, language aptitude and communicative competence are two sides of the same coin: the former represents an innate capability, while the latter reflects a proficiency level acquired at a particular point in time. Consequently, the interactions between these specific domains should be understood as non-linear and dynamic. In fact, for instance and contrary to common belief, Sáfár and Kormos' (2008) study demonstrated that language learning experience influences language aptitude.

Skills and task performance have also been portrayed as major influential factors in shaping foreign language self-concept and the resulting level of self-esteem. The literature generally emphasizes the impact of oral skills—particularly speaking, interaction, and pronunciation—on self-concept, which in turn either facilitates or undermines the willingness to engage in communication (MacIntyre et al., 1998). The Self-Esteem in the Foreign Language Classroom Scale (SEFLS) (Cano-Jiménez & Rubio-Alcalá, 2022) includes two items representing this dimension, focusing on pronunciation and oral activities in general. While the literature often highlights the strong influence of oral skills, other skills or specific integrated activities may exert a greater influence depending on external and internal factors affecting the learner (Mercer, 2012).

Perceived social support represents the third dimension of the theoretical model. The foreign language classroom offers a unique experience where the need to communicate and interact with others in order to practice the language exposes learners to critical psychological conditions. In our study, feeling a sense of belonging within the class, being able to openly communicate with others, and establishing rapport (through teacher supportiveness and care) were identified as major influences on self-concept. Specifically, the two items included in the final scale address the perception and feelings of belonging to the group.

The sense of belonging has been a central component in major theoretical models of learning (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979), motivation (e.g., Maslow, 1962; Bowlby, 1988), and academic self-esteem (e.g., Reasoner, 1983). Additionally, feelings of connectedness to school have been shown to be crucial in fostering self-esteem and self-identity (Lee & Robbins, 1998; Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). This sense of belonging can lead to more positive attitudes towards learning and, specifically, to greater academic self-efficacy (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996), which is a specific domain within the language competence dimension in this model.

In sum, using a conceptualization that views self-concept as structural and self-esteem as a process, we developed a theoretical model comprising three dimensions: language competence, skills performance, and perceived social support. A literature review identified specific domains within these dimensions. Language competence emerged as the strongest dimension, though the interaction between factors is dynamic and domain-specific, making it difficult to assert the dominance of any one dimension. The sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and language aptitude were also highlighted as critical factors influencing self-concept in the foreign language classroom.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PEDAGOGY

This paper proposes a theoretical model of self-concept and self-esteem in the FLC. The model draws on previous contributions in the field, in particular Rubio-Alcalá (2007; 2014), Mercer (2011; 2012), and Habrat (2018). The structure consists of three main dimensions that exert a

major influence on the learning process in the FLC: language competence, task performance skills, and perceived social support. Other models agree with ours, e.g., Shindler (2009) recognizes the sense of competence, the locus of task control, and the sense of belonging and acceptance. Similarly, Mruk (2009) indicates that self-esteem is formed by competence, daily challenges, and acceptance by others.

Some factors are embedded in these dimensions, such as self-efficacy, language aptitude and communicative competence (language competence), speaking, listening, reading, writing (task performance skills), and belongingness, communicative abilities and rapport (perceived social support). Thus, self-concept is multidimensional and the process of developing self-esteem is complex. Other factors may also play a role (e.g., learning orientations: anxiety, self-confidence, learning styles, etc.), but should be considered as independent constructs. The paper also pointed out that self-esteem in the FLC is a domain-specific phenomenon and therefore much more dynamic than other types of global self-concepts. Thus, self-assessments are continuously made in this context, and as a result, the influence of self-esteem on language learning is important for failure or success.

Quantitative research has found that there is a lack of domain-specific instruments to measure self-esteem. As a result, most studies have used questionnaires, scales, and other instruments appropriate for assessing global self-esteem, general academic self-esteem, or some other domain that is not specific to the FLC. These studies may not accurately measure the target variable. The consensus in the literature is that foreign language self-esteem is a domain-specific process (e.g., Mercer, 2011; Mercer, 2012; Rubio-Alcalá, 2014, Arens et al., 2020) and should be treated with its context-dependent characteristics and features. Consequently, the contribution of a theoretical model of self-concept and self-esteem in the FLC serves as a step toward developing other instruments (i.e., scales, questionnaires, etc.) to collect quantitative data for research purposes.

From an educational perspective, this model has identified dimensions and domain-specific factors that can be further explored to understand the affective domain in the FLC and design appropriate curricula, methods, activities, and materials within the curriculum (Andrés & Arnold, 2009). Specifically, innovative activities and tasks can be developed to provide learners with enriching experiences in which both language learning and affective well-being can be aligned. Ultimately, learners are likely to evaluate their learning efforts positively, engage in the process, and likely develop appropriate attitudes toward repeating the experience.

Despite these findings, further research is needed to replicate studies. Specifically, a systematic review should be conducted to examine the quality of the research and determine the degree of bias in this topic, especially confirmation bias, which arises to confirm the researcher's pre-existing beliefs. For example, unlike most studies, Dev and Qiqieh (2016) found no positive correlation between self-esteem and language proficiency or academic

achievement. The research team also took several approaches to reviewing and using the literature. We have endeavoured to create a sound theoretical model but feel that this area needs further development and replication. This is because most studies have used instruments to measure global self-esteem, whereas we are concerned with a specific type of measurement instrument (Mercer, 2011). In addition, some of the main reference points in the literature are based on qualitative studies that used a very small sample and need triangulation with quantitative data to provide more robust results and increase the potentiality of extrapolation to other contexts. In this way, a more accurate structure of the self-concept could be obtained.

Finally, the researchers juggled the numerous variables or factors that influence self-concept. Despite the fact that we have presented a theoretical model of the structure of self-concept, we believe that further work, probably performed throughout multivariate analysis, is needed to understand the nature of self-esteem development, factor interactions, and structure.

REFERENCES

- Ahour, T., & Hassanzadeh, Z. (2015). An investigation of the relation between self-esteem, indirect strategy use and Iranian intermediate EFL learners' oral language proficiency. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 5(2), 442-451.
- Al-Ariqi, I. Y., & Sharyan, A. (2022). Self-esteem and its relationship to English oral performance among Yemeni EFL undergraduate learners. *Studies in Humanities and Education*, 3(2), 13-31.
- Andres, V. d. and Arnold, J. (2009). *Seeds of Confidence. Self-esteem Activities for the EFL Classroom*. Rum, Austria: Helbling languages.
- Arifin, S. & Pertiwi, L. 2017. The influence of self-esteem in speaking skill at the second grade students of Man2 Madiun. *English Teaching Journal*, 5(2), 43-49.
- Arnold, J. (Ed.). (1999). *Affect in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- , A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. New York: W H Freeman/Times Books/ Henry Holt & Co.
- Battistich, V., Solomon, D., Kim, D., Watson, M., & Schaps, E. (1995). Schools as communities, poverty levels of student populations, and students' attitudes, motives, and performance: A multilevel analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 627– 658.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497-529. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>
- Bowlby, J. (1988). *A Secure Base: Clinical Applications of Attachment Theory*. London: Routledge Publishers.
- Bong, M., & Skaalvik, E.M. (2003). Academic self-concept and self-efficacy: How different are they really? *Educational Psychology Review* 15(1), 1-40. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021302408382>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cano-Jiménez, P. A. & Rubio-Alcalá, F. D. (2022). Construction and validation of self-esteem in the foreign language classroom scale (SEFLS). *Porta Linguarum*, 38(June), 191-207. <https://doi.org/10.30827/portalin.vi38.22447>

- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2002). *Handbook of Self-determination Research*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.
- Dev, S., & Qiqieh, S. (2016). The relationship between English language proficiency, academic achievement and self-esteem of non-native-English-speaking students. *International Education Studies*, 9(5), 147-155.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ryan, S. (2015). *The Psychology of the Language Learner Revisited*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315779553>
- Ghafoori, N., & Nourelahi, G. (2015). Investigating the relationship between self-esteem and reading performance of Iranian EFL learners. *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods*, 5(4), 254-259.
- Gardner, R. C., & Lambert, W. E. (1959). Motivational variables in second-language acquisition. *Canadian Journal of Psychology/Revue Canadienne de Psychologie*, 13(4), 266-272. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0083787>
- Gkonou, C., Dewaele, J-M. & King, J. (Eds.). (2020). *Language Teaching: An Emotional Rollercoaster*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Gultom, S., & Oktaviani, L. (2022). The correlation between students' self-esteem and their English proficiency test result. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, 3(2), 52-57.
- Habrat, A. (2018). *The Role of Self-esteem in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Harter, S. (1992). The relationship between perceived competence, affect, and motivational orientation within the classroom: Processes and patterns of change. *Achievement and Motivation: A Social-Developmental Perspective*, 2, 77-114.
- . (1999). Symbolic interactionism revisited: Potential liabilities for the self constructed in the crucible of interpersonal relationships. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 45(4), 677-703.
- Hassan, B. A. (2001). The relationship of writing apprehension and self-esteem to the writing quality and quantity of EFL university students. Unpublished research report at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED459671.pdf>
- Heyde-Parsons, A. (1983). The relationship between self-esteem and the acquisition of French. In K.M. Bailey, M.H. Long & S. Peck (Eds.), *Second Language Acquisition Studies* (pp. 175-187). Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.
- Khansir, A. A., & Abdolahi, Z. (2014). Self-esteem and writing achievements of Iranian EFL learners. *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 3(2), 155-164.
- Higgins, E. T. (1987). Self-discrepancy: a theory relating self and affect. *Psychological Review*, 94(3), 319-340. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.94.3.319>
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125-132.
- Juyandegan, M. (2016). The relationship between self-esteem and reading comprehension of EFL Iranian pre-university learners. *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, 6(5), 303-313.
- Koosha, B., Ketabi, S., & Kassaian, Z. (2011). The effects of self-esteem, age and gender on the speaking skills of intermediate university EFL learners. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 1(10), 1328-1337. <http://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.1.10.1328-1337>
- Koosha, M., Abdollahi, A., & Karimi, F. (2016). The relationship among EFL learners' self-esteem, autonomy, and reading comprehension. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 6(1), 68-78. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0601.09>
- Lau, I. C., Yeung, A. S., Jin, P., & Low, R. (1999). Toward a hierarchical, multidimensional English Self-Concept. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 91(4), 747-755. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.91.4.747>
- Leary, M. R. (1999). Making sense of self-esteem. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 8(1), 32-35. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.00008>
- Lee, R. M. & Robbins, S. B. (1998). The relationship between social connectedness and anxiety, self-esteem, and social identity. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 45(3), 338-345.
- León, I. (2007). Teacher's self-esteem: the role of confirmation. In F.D. Rubio-Alcalá (Ed.), *Self-esteem and Foreign Language Learning* (pp. 192-205). Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

- Littlewood, R., & Lipsedge, M. (1981). Some social and phenomenological characteristics of psychotic immigrants. *Psychological Medicine*, 11(2), 289-302. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291700052119>
- MacIntyre, P.D., Clement, R., Dörnyei, Z., & Noels, K., (1998). Conceptualizing willingness to communicate in a L2: A situational model of L2 confidence and affiliation. *The Modern Language Journal*, 82(4), 545-562.
- Mandokhail, S., Khan, F. R., & Malghani, M. (2018). Impact of ESL learners' self-esteem on their oral proficiency. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 8(3), 210-222.
- Markus, H., & Kunda, Z. (1986). Stability and malleability of the self-concept. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51(4), 858-866. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.51.4.858>
- Markus, H., & Wurf, E. (1987). The dynamic self-concept: A social psychological perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 38(1), 299-337.
- Maslow, A. H. (1962). *Towards a Psychology of Being*. Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10793-000>
- Mercer, S. (2009). The dynamic nature of a tertiary learner's foreign language self-concepts. In M. Pawlak. (Ed.), *New Perspectives on Individual Differences in Language Learning and Teaching* (pp. 205-220). Poznań – Kalisz: Adam Mickiewicz University Press.
- . (2011). *Towards an Understanding of Language Learner Self-concept*. Dordrecht: Springer Science and Business Media.
- . (2012). Self-concept: Situating the self. In S. Mercer, S. Ryan & M. Williams. (Eds.), *Psychology for Language Learning: Insights from Research, Theory and Practice* (pp. 10-25). London: Palgrave MacMillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137032829>
- Mercer, S., & Williams, M. (2014). *Multiple Perspectives on the Self in SLA*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Mruk, C. J. (1999). *Self-esteem. Research, Theory, and Practice*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Naranjo, M. (2007). Autoestima: Un factor relevante en la vida de la persona y tema esencial del proceso educativo. *Revista Electrónica Actualidades Investigativas en Educación*, 7, 1-29.
- Nutbrown, C., & Clough, P. (2009). Citizenship and inclusion in the early years: Understanding and responding to children's perspectives on 'belonging'. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 17(3), 191-206.
- Reasoner, R. W. (1983). Enhancement of self-esteem in children and adolescents. *Family & Community Health: The Journal of Health Promotion & Maintenance*, 51(64), 51-64.
- Roeser, R. W., Midgley, C., & Urdan, T. C. (1996). Perceptions of the school psychological environment and early adolescents' psychological and behavioral functioning in school: The mediating role of goals and belonging. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 88(3), 408-422.
- Rojas, E. (1989). *La Ansiedad: Cómo Diagnosticar y Superar el Estrés, las Fobias y las Obsesiones*. Madrid: Temas de Hoy.
- Rosalina, E. (2019). The correlation between self-esteem and student's reading comprehension. *English Language Teaching Educational Journal*, 2(2), 70-78.
- Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the Adolescent Self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Rubio-Alcalá, F. D. (2004). *La Ansiedad en el Aprendizaje de Idiomas*. Huelva: University of Huelva.
- . (Ed.). (2007). *Self-esteem and Foreign Language Learning*. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- . (2014). Self-esteem and self-concept in foreign language learning. In S. Mercer & M. Williams (Eds.), *Multiple Perspectives on the Self in SLA* (pp. 41-58). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- . (2017). The links between self-esteem and language anxiety and implications for the classroom. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney & J.M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New Insights into Language Anxiety: Theory, Research and Educational Implications* (pp. 200-218). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Ryan, S., & Mercer, S. (2012). Implicit theories: Language learning mindsets. In S. Mercer, S. Ryan & M. Williams (Eds.), *Psychology for Language Learning: Insights from Research, Theory & Practice*. (pp. 74-89). London: Palgrave MacMillan.

- Sáfár, A. & Kormos, J. (2008). Revisiting problems with foreign language aptitude. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 46(2), 113-136. <https://doi.org/10.1515/IRAL.2008.005>
- Sampasivam, S., & Clément, R. (2014). The dynamics of second language confidence: Contact and interaction. In S. Mercer, & M. Williams (Eds.), *Multiple Perspectives on the Self in SLA* (pp.23-40). Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783091362-004>
- Sarkhoush, H. (2013). Relationship among Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy in writing, attitude towards writing, writing Apprehension and writing performance. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research*, 4(5), 1126-1132. <https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.4.5.1126-1132>
- Satriani, I. (2014). Correlation between students' self esteem and English language proficiency of Indonesian EFL students. *ELTIN Journal: Journal of English Language Teaching in Indonesia*, 2(2), 68-73.
- Schumann, J. (1997). *The Neurobiology of Affect in Language*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Shindler, J. (2009). *Transformative Classroom Management: Positive Strategies to Engage all Students and Promote a Psychology of Success*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Soureshjani, K. H., & Naseri, N. (2011). An investigation into the relationship between self-esteem, proficiency level, and the reading ability of Iranian EFL language learners. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2(6), 1312.
- Swain, M. (2013). The inseparability of cognition and emotion in second language learning. *Language Teaching*, 46(2), 195-207.
- Utami, B. R., & Wahyudin, A. Y. (2022). Does self-esteem influence student English proficiency test scores? *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, 3(2), 16-20.
- Wen, Z. E., Biedroń, A., & Skehan, P. (2017). Foreign language aptitude theory: Yesterday, today and tomorrow. *Language Teaching*, 50(1), 1-31.