THE PERCEIVED STYLE OF PUPIL LEADERSHIP IN TERMS OF THE X/Y THEORY IN RELATION TO SLOVAK TEACHERS’ SELF-ESTEEM

Lenka Ďuricová

Abstract:
Research objective: The study addresses the correlations within the selected leadership model in the educational environment. The goal of the research study was to verify the relationship between the general self-esteem in Slovak teachers and their pupil leadership style in terms of D. McGregor’s theory. In the Slovak cultural environment, antecedent variables pertaining to the X/Y Theory have not yet been studied in the school organisational environment, i.e. where the teachers actually work. Besides teachers’ self-esteem, the study also addresses the concept of leadership and other contextual variables (age, length of teaching practice, school type, managerial experience).

Based on the relevant theory and available research stating the existence of connections between the leader’s self-perception and their followers’ perception (Whitney, 1990; Matzler et al., 2015; Ďuricová & Šugereková, 2017), the following hypotheses has been formulated:

RH1: A positive correlation between a teacher’s self-esteem and their pupil/student leadership style in terms of the Y Theory.

Based on further contextual variables (age, length of teaching practice, school type, managerial experience), the research questions have been formulated as follows:

RQ1: Does the teacher’s leadership style correlate with their age in terms of the Y Theory?

RQ2: Does the teacher’s leadership style correlate with the length of their teaching practice?

RQ3: Is there a difference between leadership styles of primary and high school teachers in terms of the Y Theory?

RQ4: Is there a difference between leadership styles of teachers with and without managerial experience?

Research method: The method of available selection was used to build the research sample of form teachers working at the secondary level of education (N=142, higher secondary level = 56%, lower secondary level 44%). Two questionnaires were administered to collect data:

1. The RSES/Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Halama & Bieščad, 2006) was used to evaluate the emotional aspect of the self-concept and self-esteem. This one-dimensional scale consists of 10 items and the respondent is asked to express how much they agree on the scale from 1 to 4 (1 – strongly disagree, 4 – strongly agree). The reliability (internal consistency) of the research tool expressed by Cronbach’s alpha showed an acceptable level (α=.72).

2. The X/Y Leadership Style Questionnaire was created by merging two original instruments: Theory X/Y Behavior (Kopelman et al., 2010) and Theory X/Y Managerial Assumptions (Kopelman et al., 2012). Items 1–13 focused on leader’s specific behaviours (e.g. Pupils/students need to be constantly checked to ensure that they work as they are supposed to) and items 14–23 express the leader’s assumptions (e.g. Pupils/students naturally like learning). The respondents expressed their agreement on a 5-point scale (1 – strongly agree; 5 – strongly disagree). The total raw score represents the respondent’s Y pupil/student leadership style. The internal consistency of the adapted Slovak version of the instrument as a whole proved very good (α=.86).

Research results: Data distribution normality testing (Kolmogorov–Smirnov test) in terms of individual variables showed that the data did not fulfil the requirements of a normal distribution (p = .00), therefore it was necessary to use non-parametric tests.

The correlation analysis indicated that the relation between teachers’ self-esteem and their pupil/student leadership style in terms of the Y theory closely correlated and showed statistical significance (.614; p<.01). The analysis showed a medium close positive statistically significant correlation of the leadership style with the teacher’s age.
(.406; \( p \leq .01 \)) and a slightly weaker correlation with the length of their practice \((.288; \ p \leq .01)\). The linear regression analysis showed that out of these three determinants, teachers’ self-esteem predicts their Y-leadership style. This determinant explains approx. 31% of the variability in the teachers’ Y-leadership style.

The analysis of the differences showed a statistically significant difference in the Y-leadership style in favour of primary school teachers, which can be explained by their statistically significant higher self-esteem, age, and length of practice in comparison to high school teachers. The second contextual variable showed a statistically significant difference in terms of the Y-leadership style between the two teacher groups in favour of those who had managerial experience in comparison to those who did not.

Conclusion: The study has confirmed the assumed positive correlation between teachers’ general self-esteem and pupil/student leadership style in terms of the Y Theory. This result is consistent with other research results (e.g., Whitney, 1990; Matzler et al., 2015; Šuríková & Šugereková, 2017), thus confirming the importance of leaders’ positive self-esteem. The results can be interpreted as follows: as the teacher-leader’s self-esteem increases, so does the probability that they lead the pupils/students using the Y Theory, which is based on faith in the pupil/student’s abilities, character, and motivation. The regression analysis has also confirmed that teachers’ self-esteem predicts whether they apply the Y-leadership style or not. Correlation and comparative analyses outlined a broader context of this leadership style in the teaching practice. It seems that the teacher’s age and length of teaching practice indirectly promote the Y-leadership style in relation to their pupils/students, and they both positively correlate with the teacher’s self-esteem. This finding is consistent with Kale and Özdel’s study (2014), which states that with a growing length of practice, primary school teachers develop a more democratic and participating leadership style – as described by the Y Theory. Therefore, it can be assumed that increasing age, maturity, and expertise allow the teacher to improve their self-esteem and leads their pupils/students toward the same philosophy. The influence of the school type on the Y-leadership style is merely a secondary consequence of the fact that in this testing, older and more experienced teachers worked at primary schools, which also reflected in their higher self-esteem in comparison with their high school colleagues. As for managerial experience (higher positions in school management), it seems that teachers who possess it may be able to effectively use the related skills in student/pupil leadership, i.e., direct teaching activity.

Despite the limits of this research study (size and selection of the research sample, using self-assessment scales), it can contribute to the research of professional teaching skills. To increase the validity of measuring leadership style, it would be useful to collect feedback also from the pupils/students.

Key words: Teacher. Self-esteem. X/Y Theory. Assumptions. behaviours.

Introduction

This study follows our previous research of the correlation between managers’ self-perception and the perception of their employees (Ďuríková & Šugereková, 2017). It showed that managers’ self-esteem positively correlated with their leadership style in terms of McGregor’s Y Theory (1960). A form teacher also performs certain managerial activities in relation to their pupils/students, including leadership. The correlation between self-concept and leadership behaviour was also confirmed by Whitney (1990) whose research sample consisted of lecturers. McGregor (1960) studied managers’ opinions on the human personality, their work motivation, and in this context the type of leadership they apply at work. He summarised the prevailing opinion on the organisational leadership at the time as Theory X – a radical extreme, drawing mainly from the human preference for convenience and a tendency to avoid work if possible. However, most employees and managers did not follow his X Theory in practice. Therefore, McGregor simultaneously created another opposite theory based on which humans are dynamic beings who perceive work as natural. Thus, the Y Theory originated. It claims that humans like to work, they are motivated, capable of self-management and taking responsibility; they have potential and ambitions, and put simply, they are trustworthy. The author assumes that this general positive attitude towards people, which reflects in the manager or teacher’s leadership style, is related to their own self-esteem.

Rosenberg (1965) defines self-esteem as an individual’s general awareness of their own competency. Individuals with high self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1979) respect, value, and consider
themselves worthy. Shamir, Arthur, and House (1994) claim that people’s respect and faith in their leader is incompatible with anxiousness and neuroticism, which are typically in contradiction with high self-esteem. Based on studies by Shamir, Arthur, and House (2012) and Matzler, Bauer, and Mooradian (2015), it can be assumed that leaders with high self-esteem can transfer positivity and enthusiasm to their followers more easily. House and Howell (in Resick, Whitman, Weingarden, & Hiller, 2009) found that a leader’s self-confidence and self-assurance provide their followers with psychological comfort. Spitzmuller and Ilies (2010) state that without positive self-assessment and strong belief in the declared values, it would be difficult for the leader to express and trigger effective emotions with motivating potential. According to Hu et al. (2012), leaders who perceive themselves as competent and capable are more motivated to search for new challenges and ways to perform their work tasks.

McGregor’s X/Y Theory has significantly influenced later research and practice in a variety of areas related to management and organisational behaviour. His work also largely affected the leadership theories, specifically transformational leadership. Several authors (Forrester, 2000; Kochan, Orlikowski, & Cutcher-Gershenfeld, 2003; Schein, 2004; Russ, 2011; Gurbuz, Sahin, & Koksal, 2014; Lawter, Kopelman, & Prottas, 2015) confirm the probability that behaviours based on the Y Theory are more efficient than those based on the X Theory in today’s organisations. This fact also motivates this research of antecedent Y-theory variables in schools as a type of organisational environment where teachers work. So far, the X/Y leadership theory has been researched in the context of teaching in a single study (Kale & Özdelen, 2014). In the Slovak cultural environment, a similar study addressing self-esteem has not been available until now.

Research objective

The main goal of this work is to verify the correlation between the self-esteem of Slovak teachers at the secondary level of education and their pupil/student leadership style in terms of the X/Y Theory. Based on the relevant theory and previous research declaring the existence of connections between the leader’s self-perception and their followers’ perception (Whitney, 1990; Matzler et al., 2015; Řuricová & Šugereková, 2017), the following hypothesis has been formulated.

RH1: There is a positive correlation between a teacher’s self-esteem and their pupil/student leadership style in terms of the Y Theory.

The study also addresses the concept of leadership in terms of other contextual variables (age, length of teaching practice, school type, managerial experience).

RQ1: Does a teacher’s leadership style correlate with their age in terms of the Y Theory?
RQ2: Does a teacher’s leadership style correlate with the length of their teaching practice?
RQ3: Is there a difference between the leadership styles of primary and high school teachers in terms of the Y Theory?
RQ4: Is there a difference between leadership styles of teachers with and without managerial experience?

Research sample selection and research method

The research file was assembled by means of available selection; it consists of 142 form teachers working at the secondary level of education in Košice, Slovakia. A more detailed characteristics in terms of the selected contextual variables can be seen in Table 1.
The research data were collected between August and September 2019. The questionnaires were administered by authorised and trained persons. The respondents filled them voluntarily and anonymously, mostly collectively, during teacher meetings focused on preparing for the upcoming school year. Besides instructions, demographic, and introductory contextual items, the battery included two research instruments.

1. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES, Halama & Bieščad, 2006) was used to evaluate the emotional aspects of self-concept and self-esteem. This one-dimensional scale consists of 10 items and the respondent is asked to express how much they agree on a scale from 1 to 4 (1 – strongly disagree, 4 – strongly agree). The higher the score, the higher the individual’s global self-esteem. The lower the score, the higher they underestimate themselves. The reliability (internal consistency) of the research instrument expressed by Cronbach’s alpha showed an acceptable level (α=.72).

2. The X/Y Leadership Style Questionnaire consists of 23 items. It is a back-translation of the English originals – Theory X/Y Behaviour (Kopelman et al., 2010) and Theory X/Y Managerial Assumptions (Kopelman et al., 2012). Items 1–13 focus on leader’s specific behaviours (e.g. Pupils/students need to be constantly checked to ensure that they work as they are supposed to) and items 14–23 express the leader’s assumptions (e.g. Pupils/students naturally like learning). For the purpose of this research, the items have been slightly altered and the terms “employee” and “organisation” were substituted with “pupil/student” and “class/school” respectively. The respondents expressed their agreement on a 5-point scale (1 – strongly agree; 5 – strongly disagree). After reversing the respective items, the raw score was calculated, which represented the respondent’s Y-leadership style. The research instrument has been adapted in the standard way. Translation and back-translation were performed by two different professional translators. The internal consistency of the adapted Slovak version of the instrument as a whole proved very good (α=.86).

Research results

Descriptive characteristics of all observed variables can be found in Table 2. Data distribution normality testing (Kolmogorov–Smirnov test) in terms of individual variables showed that the data did not fulfill the requirements of a normal distribution (p<.001), therefore it was necessary to use non-parametric tests.
Table 2: Descriptive statistics pertaining to all variables observed in the file (N=142)

|                          | M    | MDN  | SD   | MIN | MAX |
|--------------------------|------|------|------|-----|-----|
| age                      | 40.04| 37.50| 9.37 | 24  | 61  |
| length of practice       | 12.89| 9.50 | 9.10 | 0   | 45  |
| RSES                     | 30.37| 30.00| 3.83 | 25  | 40  |
| Y-leadership style       | 69.13| 71.00| 13.82| 49  | 97  |

Note. M = mean, MDN = median, SD = standard deviation, MIN = minimum, MAX = maximum, RSES = self-esteem

As for the planned analysis of the teachers’ leadership style in terms of the X/Y Theory, certain other contextual variables are of interest as well; descriptive characteristics of the two teacher subgroups can be found in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics pertaining to the variables observed – teachers according to school type (nPS = 63; nHS = 79)

|                          | M    | MDN  | SD   | MIN | MAX |
|--------------------------|------|------|------|-----|-----|
| age                      |      |      |      |     |     |
| PS                       | 41.54| 42.00| 8.68 | 24  | 61  |
| HS                       | 38.84| 35.00| 9.77 | 25  | 59  |
| Length of practice       |      |      |      |     |     |
| PS                       | 15.27| 15.00| 9.13 | 0   | 45  |
| HS                       | 11.00| 7.00 | 8.68 | 1   | 31  |
| RSES                     |      |      |      |     |     |
| PS                       | 31.76| 31.00| 3.35 | 25  | 40  |
| HS                       | 29.25| 27.00| 3.84 | 25  | 38  |
| Y-leadership style       |      |      |      |     |     |
| PS                       | 74.84| 77.00| 10.09| 54  | 97  |
| HS                       | 64.58| 69.00| 14.73| 49  | 87  |

Note. M = mean, MDN = median, SD = standard deviation, MIN = minimum, MAX = maximum, PS/HS = primary/high school, RSES = self-esteem

Table 4: Descriptive statistics pertaining to the variables observed – teachers according to managerial experience (nME- = 111; nME+ = 31)

|                          | M    | MDN  | SD   | MIN | MAX |
|--------------------------|------|------|------|-----|-----|
| age                      |      |      |      |     |     |
| ME-                      | 38.46| 35.00| 9.21 | 25  | 59  |
| ME+                      | 46.74| 47.00| 6.84 | 24  | 61  |
| length of practice       |      |      |      |     |     |
| ME-                      | 11.40| 7.00 | 8.97 | 0   | 45  |
| ME+                      | 19.26| 17.00| 6.64 | 1   | 31  |
| RSES                     |      |      |      |     |     |
| ME-                      | 29.90| 30.00| 3.70 | 25  | 38  |
| ME+                      | 32.33| 31.00| 3.78 | 27  | 40  |
| Y-leadership style       |      |      |      |     |     |
| ME-                      | 67.30| 69.00| 13.85| 49  | 92  |
| ME+                      | 76.96| 79.00| 10.77| 55  | 97  |

Note. M = mean, MDN = median, SD = standard deviation, MIN = minimum, MAX = maximum, RSES = self-esteem, ME/ME+ = without/with managerial experience

In accordance with the research goal of this study, results of the correlation analysis are listed in Table 5. They indicate a close correlation between teachers’ self-esteem and their pupil/student leadership style in terms of the Y theory; statistical significance level – 1%. The analysis showed a medium close positive statistically significant correlation of the leadership style with the teachers’ age and a slightly weaker correlation with the length of their practice.
Table 5: Correlation analysis of the teacher’s leadership style, their self-esteem, and other contextual variables (N=142)

|                   | ρ       | Y-leadership style | RSES  | age    | length of practice |
|-------------------|---------|--------------------|-------|--------|-------------------|
| Y-leadership style|         |                    |       |        |                   |
| RSES              | 0.614** |                    |       |        |                   |
| age               | 0.406** | 0.473**            |       |        |                   |
| length of practice| 0.288** | 0.403**            | 0.898**|        |                   |

Note: RSES = self-esteem, ** p≤0.01

Linear regression (Table 6) also confirmed that certain independent variables predict the Y-leadership style. The determinants in model 1 explain 31% of the Y-leadership style variability. Estimated regression coefficients for the Y-leadership style as the dependent variable can be found in Table 7. The linear regression analysis shows that only self-esteem predicts the Y-leadership style at the p≤0.01 level of significance.

Table 6: Linear regression

| Model | R  | R² | R² adj. | F  | p   |
|-------|----|----|---------|----|-----|
| 1     | 0.56 | 0.31 | 0.29 | 20.59 | 0.000 |

Note. R – multiple regression coefficient, R² – determination index, R² adj. – adjusted determination index, F – total F-test value, p – total F-test significance

Table 7: Estimated regression coefficients for the Y-leadership style as the dependent variable

| Y-leadership style model | Beta-coefficients | t    | p    |
|--------------------------|--------------------|------|------|
| (constant)               | 1.44               | 0.151|      |
| RSES                     | 0.43               | 5.37 | 0.000|
| age                      | 0.12               | 0.82 | 0.412|
| length of practice       | 0.09               | 0.67 | 0.506|

To identify the differences in the pupil/student Y-leadership style between the teacher groups in terms of school type and managerial experience, the Mann-Whitney U-test was used. The analysis of the differences (Table 8) showed a statistically significant difference (significance level of 1%) in the Y-leadership style in favour of primary school teachers (Table 3). The second contextual variable also showed a statistically significant difference (significance level of 1%) in terms of the Y-leadership style between the two teacher groups in favour of those who had managerial experience in comparison to those who did not (Table 4).

Table 8: Test results: differences in the pupil leadership style according to school type and managerial experience

|                | U-test | Y-leadership style | d_{Coh} |
|----------------|--------|--------------------|---------|
| primary/high school | Z      | -3.71              | 0.65    |
|                | p      | 0.00               |         |
| without/with managerial experience | Z      | -3.39              | 0.72    |
|                | p      | 0.00               |         |

Based on the results of the correlation analysis (Table 5) and testing of the planned differences (Table 8), the author opted for additional testing of the differences between the primary and high school teachers in terms of independent variables. The results (Table 9) show statistically
significant differences in teachers’ self-esteem and length of practice at the significance level of 1%, and their age at the significance level of 5%. All differences in descriptive indicators (Table 3) are in favour of primary school teachers.

Table 9: Differences in terms of self-esteem (RSES), age, and length of practice between primary and high school teachers

| U-test          | Z   | p     | dCohb |
|-----------------|-----|-------|-------|
| RSES            | -5.04 | 0.000 | 0.92  |
| age             | -2.22 | 0.026 | 0.38  |
| length of practice | -2.89 | 0.004 | 0.50  |

Discussion

The goal of this correlative/comparative study was to investigate the leadership attitudes and behaviours of form teachers at the secondary level of education in terms of the X/Y Theory. Using correlation analysis, the study has confirmed the assumed positive correlation between teachers’ general self-esteem and pupil/student leadership style in terms of the Y Theory. This result is consistent with previous research (e.g. Whitney, 1990; Matzler et al., 2015; Dušicová & Šugereková, 2017), thus confirming the importance of leaders’ positive self-esteem. The results can be interpreted as follows: as the teacher-leader’s self-esteem increases, so does the probability that they lead the pupils/students using the Y Theory, which is based on faith in the pupil/student’s abilities, character, and motivation. The regression analysis has also confirmed that teachers’ self-esteem predicts whether they apply the Y-leadership style or not. Correlation and comparative analyses outlined a broader context of this leadership style in the teaching practice. It seems that the teacher’s age and length of teaching practice indirectly promote the Y-leadership style in relation to their pupils/students, and they both positively correlate with the teacher’s self-esteem. Therefore, it can be assumed that increasing age, maturity, and expertise allow the teacher to improve their self-esteem and lead their pupils/students toward the same philosophy. In future, mediation analysis could clarify the relationships between these variables.

Attention was paid to other contextual variables as well – school type and managerial experience. In terms of Y-leadership style, primary school teachers scored significantly higher than their high school colleagues. However, it can be explained by the self-esteem level as in this research sample, primary school teachers showed statistically significant higher self-esteem as well as age and length of practice. Measurements indicate that in the differences between primary and high school teachers in terms of the Y-leadership style, the three aforementioned variables play a more significant role than the school type and level of education at which the teacher works. As for managerial experience (higher positions in school management), it seems that teachers who possess it may be able to effectively use the related skills in student/pupil leadership, i.e. direct teaching activity. In this sample, respondents with managerial experience scored better than those who lack it. However, due to the limits of the study, this finding cannot be safely generalised to the whole population of teachers. Further verification is desirable.
Conclusion

This research has shown that the optimistic style of pupil/student perception and leadership as described by the Y Theory is closely related to the affective component of the teacher’s self-perception, i.e. their self-esteem. To increase the validity of measuring leadership style, it would be useful to collect feedback also from the pupils/students. Further research could focus on the correlations between variables pertaining to teachers working at primary and tertiary levels of education. Despite certain limits such as the size and selection of the research sample, this study may have contributed to the research of professional teaching skills. Teachers’ leadership style (regardless of the preferred concept) represents a desirable psychological insight into educational leadership as a complex topic (Sollárová, Poliach, Pašková, Heinzová, & Žitniaková Gurgová, 2019a).

In times when society calls for changes to the system of education, the author believes that the most effective and persistent changes come not from the top but from the bottom – the individual. From this viewpoint, ordinary form teachers can be considered as potential educational leaders and bearers of the change. In accordance with the front line standards of educational leadership (Sollárová, Poliach, Pašková, Heinzová, & Žitniaková Gurgová, 2019b), the authors believe that pupil/student leadership in terms of the Y Theory corresponds with the idea of personalised, pupil-centred education.
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