THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNER SOCIAL SELF-CONCEPT AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Ignatius Isaac Dambudzo, Arthur Lewis and Salome Schulze
Poor academic achievement in Zimbabwe secondary schools prompted the study. Literature has documented the importance of social self-concept for academic achievement. The study investigated the relationship between learner social self-concept and academic achievement in secondary schools in Zimbabwe, and also compared social self-concepts and academic achievements on the basis of gender, age, form, school location, type and type of attendance. Data was collected from 1281 adolescent learners in urban and rural government and non-government schools using questionnaires. Results confirm positive and reciprocal relationship between academic achievement and learner social self-concept. Gender stereotyping appeared to influence subject choice and performance. School type alone appeared to account for significant differences in the learners’ academic achievements and social self-concepts. All the independent variables correlated positively and significantly with academic achievement and social self-concept. Results appear to emphasise the need to pay attention to social relationships when trying to improve the learners’ academic achievement.

Key words: social self-concept, academic achievement, school type/location, type of attendance, gender, age.

INTRODUCTION

The proportion of successful ‘O’ level candidates passing in five or more subjects has dropped significantly from about 63% in 1980 to about 19.5% in 2012 (Zimsec, 2012). High failure rate has aroused concern among parents, educationists, policy makers and the learners. Low pass rates have been attributed to poor human and material resources. The quest for a solution to the problem of underachievement is therefore imperative. Previous research focused on global issues such as resources, school factors, educator quality, family background and the school environment (Nyangura 1991, Nyagura and Reece, 1990, Nyagura and Riddell, 1991; Dambudzo, 1998; Gordon, 1995). A qualitative study by Gordon (1995) referred to the self-concept as one of the causes of underachievement by girls in Zimbabwean secondary schools. Furthermore, there is an increasing awareness that individual differences in intelligence alone can no longer account for all or even the majority of differences in learners’ scholastic achievement (Myburgh, Grobler and Niehaus, 1999). There is a dearth of research on social self-concept and academic achievement in Africa. It was the intention of the current study to investigate the relationship between social self-concept and academic achievement in order to obtain more information to explain underachievement by secondary school learners in Zimbabwe.

Literature on the relationship between social self-concept and academic achievement

According to Hay et al., (1998); Wiest, Wong and Kreil, (1998); Mboya (1989); Mwamwenda (1995); Howcroft (1996); Hamachek (1995) and Trusty et al., (1996), the social environment is a significant agent that influences the self-concept and academic achievement. For example, learners who became discouraged in the face of social challenges had low expectations of future success as well as self-worth. According to Myburgh et al., (1999) a positive social self-concept was associated with a higher level of academic achievement. In other words, learners who deemed themselves to be effective, were accepted, respected and appreciated by others in a social context experienced a high standard of academic achievement at school. In addition the National Education Service of the United States of America (2001:2) reiterated the point when they stated that all human beings especially young people had strong needs for achievement and approval. Consequently educators who showed interest in the learners and appreciated their
effort and performance were likely to encourage positive behaviour and enhanced their abilities and performance while detachment and lack of interest weakened social and personal bonds leading to poor academic performance.

Furthermore the support and feedback for one's academic accomplishments by parents, educators and friends were regarded as the primary determinants of positive academic self-concept that led to greater motivation. Biehler and Snowman (1997) underscored the role of significant others when they said:

"...support and feedback for one's academic accomplishments by parents, educators and friends were primary determinants of a positive academic self-concept which leads to the feeling of being satisfied and pleased about one's accomplishments and motivation."

Similarly, the value placed by parents on academic achievement by parents, and positive relations correlated significantly with children's perception of their competencies and academic achievement (Biehler and Snowman, 1997; Buhs and Ladd, 2001; Pettit, 1996; Wiest et al., 1998). Supportive parents who were involved in school activities, set reasonable and achievable expectations developed positive social self-concepts in their children leading to better academic performance than those whose parents were less involved and supportive. Involvement and supportive behaviour were proxies for acceptance while less involvement and support are symbolic of rejection. These sentiments underlined the importance of parents in both self-concept development and academic achievement. Educators also have a crucial role to play as illustrated in the section that follows. (Babad, 1995; Gordon, 1995, Kaur, J; Rona, JS; and Kaur, 2009)

According to Babad (1995) the educator's affective behaviour, especially towards low and high achievers and the learners' subsequent reaction to it, were critical in shaping the learners' social self-concept. Educators were said to transmit more negative behaviour to lower achievers and more positive to higher achievers. Consequently lower achievers tended to decline in their academic performance while the high achievers excelled. Thus, the educator's behaviour and treatment of the learners could either raise or lower their social self-concept and subsequently their academic achievement in school. Apart from parents and educators, peers had significant influence on both the social self-concept and academic achievement as illustrated in the following section. Gender and relations with significant others correlated significantly with scholastic achievement (Myburgh et al., 1999; Park, 1998; Buhs and Ladd, 2001; Huit, 1998). Grade, age and participation in high ability schools led to a decline in self-concept as one progressed from junior to senior high school (Dembo, 1994; Huit, 1998; Marsh, 1990 and 1996; Mboya, 1999 and Craven, Marsh and Print, 2000). Marsh (1992) found no relationship between age and non-academic self-concepts.

Satisfaction with peer relationships, acceptance by peers were generally associated with high popularity and academic achievement while negative relationships and peer rejection led to isolation and declines in performance (Hunt, 1997; Huit, 1998:4; Woofool, 1995; Trusty et al., 1996). However, Marchant (in Trusty et al., 1996) in a study of Afro-American elementary school learners reported of a negative relationship between social self-concept and academic achievement. This was attributed to the fact that academic achievement among Afro-American learners was not consistent with their racial and cultural goals and that a negative social stigma was attached to academic achievement. Consequently, lower academic achievement was generally common among the Afro-American adolescents. Buhs and Ladd (2001) reported that rejected learners were more likely to experience negative peer treatment, participated less in class and even expressed the desire to avoid school and performed more poorly on achievement measures. The examples cited above serve to illustrate the existence of a link between social skills and academic achievement and that the link was inconsistent. Similarly school settings also influenced academic performance. For example, settings that encouraged mastery, understanding and improvement of knowledge and skills stimulated positive motivation and learning patterns. On the other hand, high schools that encouraged competition for grades motivated a few while the majority experienced diminished motivation and performance. (Meece, Anderman and Anderman, 2006).

In view of the above background, rationale and literature the researcher sought to investigate the problem: Is there a significant relationship between learner social self-concept and academic achievement in Zimbabwean secondary schools?

**Hypotheses**

There is no significant relationship between social self-concept and academic achievement of learners in Zimbabwean secondary schools.

**METHOD**

The traditional quantitative method of measuring the relationships by means of statistical correlation research design was used for the study.

**Sampling**

A total of 1281 junior (Form 1 and 2: 52.5%) and senior (Form 3 and 4: 47.5%) secondary school male (48.9%) and female (51.0%) learners participated in the study. The average age of the respondents was about 14.5 years, with the youngest being 13 years and the oldest 16 years plus. Participants were drawn from ten purposely-selected schools to represent the wide range of secondary schools by type (government: 68.9% and non-government: 31.1%), location (urban: 57.6% and rural: 41.4%), type of attendance (boarding: 24.5%; day: 74.2%). Responses were used to answer research questions/problems and to test hypotheses 1 to 7 of the
current study presented in the sections that follow. School mid-year examination results in compulsory subjects (English, math, Shona/Ndebele, science and history) were used as measures of academic achievement.

**Instrument: Self-Description Instrument (SDI)/Questionnaire**

The SDI was divided into two sections. The first section comprises (1-6) questions on biographical data (moderator variables), second twenty-five questions each for the social self-concept (1-31). There are 31 questions. For ease of response, the questions on the biographical data were coded as follows; gender: male (1), female (2), school location: urban (1), rural (2), form/grade: junior (1), senior (2), type of attendance: boarder (1), day scholar (2), school type: Government (1), Non-government (2). For the rest of the questionnaire, responses on the five-point Likert scale applied: strongly agree=5, strongly disagree=1. For questions stated in the negative, scoring was reversed such that strongly agree was scored as (1) to strongly disagree (5). The distribution and examples of the questions are presented below.

**Social self-concept (SSC)**

Questions sought information on the learners' relationships with parents, educators and peers. For example, "I have a good relationship with my parents," "I often quarrel with my parents." "Educators like me," "I am very popular with members of the opposite sex." "My peers reject me."

**Procedure**

Permission to administer the questionnaire was sought from the Zimbabwe Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture's Head Office. The individual respondents were told that participation was optional. The purpose of the study was explained and each participant was asked to indicate the response to each question by writing down a number in the box corresponding to the chosen response to every question, on the answer sheet. Questionnaires were self-administered and took between 5 to 10 minutes to complete. All questionnaires and answer sheets were collected soon after completion.

Focus group interviews were conducted with six groups of eight to ten male and female learners at each of the conveniently selected centres in urban and rural areas. Interviews were recorded on tape.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In order to test the hypotheses, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was computed to determine the direction of correlations between the learners' social self-concepts and academic achievement. Separate t-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were also carried out to determine (a) the significance of the relationship between the learners' social self-concepts and academic achievements, (b) whether gender, age, school location, school type, standard (grade/form) and type of attendance (boarder/day) accounted for any significant differences in the social self-concepts and academic achievements. Where the ANOVA identified differences, Bonferroni post hoc analysis was carried out to locate the differences. Overall results are summarised in tables 1-6.

**Research hypothesis 1**

H01. There is no significant correlation between the social self-concepts and academic achievement.

Data was collected on the learners' social self-concepts. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was used to test the hypothesis.

Results showed that the social self-concept was significantly and positively correlated with the academic achievement of adolescent learners considered in the study. The null-hypothesis was therefore, rejected on the 1%-level of significance. Correlation was however, low (r=0.204, p<0.01) suggesting that social self-concept may have some influence on the overall academic achievement of learners in Zimbabwe secondary schools.

**Research hypothesis 2**

H02. There is no significant correlation between the social self-concept and academic achievement of both genders separately.

The social self-concept of male and female learners correlated positively and significantly with their academic achievement. The null-hypothesis was therefore, rejected on the 1%-level of significance. The correlation was low for both (male: r= 0.233, p<0.01; female: r= 0.182, p<0.01) though marginally higher for males. The results suggested a weak overall influence of gender on social self-concept and academic achievement of learners considered in the study.

**Research hypothesis 3**

H03. There is no significant correlation between the social self-concepts and academic achievement of junior and middle learners.

Results showed significant and positive correlations between the social self-concepts and academic achievements of junior and middle learners. Consequently, the null-hypothesis was rejected on the 1%-level of significance. Once again the correlations were weak (junior: r= 0.266, p<=0.01; seniors: r= 0.120, p<0.01). The relationship appeared to be stronger for juniors than middle learners. Overall the results appeared to suggest possible influence of social self-concept on the academic achievement of both junior and middle learners.

**Research hypothesis 4**

H04. There is no correlation between the social self-concept and academic achievement of urban and rural learners.

The correlation between the social self-concept and academic achievement of urban and rural learners was significant and positive. Correlations were significantly
higher for rural learners (r= 0.304, p<0.01; urban: r=0.111, p<0.01) suggesting a possible and more significant influence of the rural school location on the learners’ social self-concept and academic achievement. The null-hypothesis was rejected on the 1%-level of significance for both the urban and the rural learners. Overall academic achievement was similar for both locations.

**Research hypothesis 5**
H₅: There is no significant correlation between the social self-concept and academic achievement of learners from different school types.

Results indicated that the social self-concept was significantly and positively correlated with academic achievement of learners in Government A (r=0.248, p<0.01; C (r=0.282, p<0.01) and Non-government (r=0.180, p<0.01) schools. Correlation with the Government B schools (r=0.114) did not reach statistical significance. The null-hypothesis was rejected on the 1%-level of significance for Government A, C and Non-government schools but could not be rejected for the Government B schools. Results appeared to suggest that school type one attended may have some influence on the social self-concept and academic achievement of learners in Government A, C and Non-government schools but not for those in Government B schools. Results also showed that correlations between social self-concept and academic achievement varied by school type and could not be generalised.

**Research hypothesis 6**
H₆: There is no significant correlation between the social self-concept and academic achievement of boarders and day scholars.

A two-tailed Pearson’s correlation coefficient test was administered. Results showed that social self-concept was significantly and positively correlated with the academic achievement of boarders and day scholars. Boarders had the higher (boarder: r = 0.245, p<0.01; day: r=0.187, p<0.01) correlation coefficient between the social self-concept and academic achievement.

The correlation coefficients were higher for the boarders suggesting a better learning and social environment than for day scholars. The null-hypothesis was rejected on the 1%-level of significance. Results showed that the type of attendance may have some influence on the learners' social self-concepts and academic achievement.

**Research hypothesis 7**
H₇: There is no significant correlation between the social self-concept and academic achievement of learners of different ages.

Results showed that correlation between social self-concept and academic achievement was not consistent for all age groups. For example, the social self-concept was significantly and positively correlated with the academic achievement of the learners aged (13: r=.332, p<.01); (14: r=.301, p<.01); (15: r=.121,p<.05); and (16: r=.173, p<.01); but not for those aged over 16 years (r: .043).

The null-hypothesis was therefore, rejected on the 1%-level of significance for the learners aged 13, 14 and 16, and on the 5%-level of significance for the 15 year olds. The null-hypothesis could not be rejected for the learners aged above 16. Further investigations may be necessary for this age group. Results also showed a general decline in social self-concept with age. Once the significance of the relationship between social self-concept and academic achievement had been described, it was also the objective of the study to find out if there were significant differences between average achievement and social self-concept of the learners with regard to moderator variables (gender, grade/form, school location and type, type of attendance and age).

For this purpose, a two-tailed test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) of unrelated groups were computed. The results are shown in tables 1 to 6.

**Research hypothesis 8**
H₈: There is no significant difference between the academic achievement and social self-concepts of male and female learners.

According to the results in table 1, there were no significant gender differences in average academic achievement and the social self-concepts of adolescent learners. The mean marks for males (56.43) and females (56.34) also confirmed the result. The same trend was observed for the mean scores for social self-concepts. The null-hypothesis could not be rejected on the 5%-level of significance.

**Research hypothesis 9**
H₉: There is no significant difference between the academic achievement and the social self-concepts of junior and middle learners.

A two-tailed t-test was administered to test the hypothesis (Table 2 illustrates the results). Table 2 shows no significant differences between average social self-concepts and academic achievement of junior and middle learners. Mean scores for the social self-concepts and overall academic achievement were similar. Consequently the null-hypothesis could not be rejected. Results also showed that junior learners had consistently higher averages for academic achievement and the social self-concepts than middle learners suggesting an apparent decline in the influence of significant others such as parents and educators on learning as one progresses through the school.

**Research hypothesis 10**
H₁₀: There is no significant difference between the academic achievement and the social self-concepts of urban and rural learners.

A two-tailed t-test was used to analyse the responses from urban and rural learners. According to table 3 there was no significant difference between the academic
Table 1: Significance of differences of average achievements and social self-concepts of males and females (N=1280)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>56.43</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>1278</td>
<td>p&gt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>653</td>
<td>56.34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social self concept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>3.6476</td>
<td>-1.100</td>
<td>1278</td>
<td>p&gt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>653</td>
<td>3.6769</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Significance of differences of average achievements and social self-concepts of junior and senior learners (N=1281)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>57.18</td>
<td>1.694</td>
<td>1279</td>
<td>p&gt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>55.48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social self concept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>3.6645</td>
<td>.120</td>
<td>1279</td>
<td>p&gt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>3.6613</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Significance of differences of average academic achievements and self-concepts of urban and rural learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>738</td>
<td>56.40</td>
<td>-.106</td>
<td>1266</td>
<td>p&gt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>56.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social self concept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>738</td>
<td>3.7364</td>
<td>6.418</td>
<td>1266</td>
<td>p&gt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>3.5652</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Achievement and social self-concepts of urban and rural learners. Overall urban and rural learners were similar in their academic performance and social self-concepts and the null-hypothesis could not be rejected on the 1%-or 5% level of significance for the social self-concept and academic achievement respectively. Better social self-concepts for urban learners did not however, translate into significantly better test scores suggesting little influence of school location on the learners’ social self-concepts or academic achievements.

**Research hypothesis 11**

H11: There is no significant difference between the academic achievement and social self-concepts of learners of different ages.

ANOVA for learners of different ages was carried out and results are shown in table 4. Table 4 also shows significant differences in the academic achievements of adolescent learners of different ages in this sample. However, there were no significant differences in social self-concepts for the adolescent learners of different ages in this sample. The null-hypothesis could not be rejected on the 5% level of significance for the social self-concepts but rejected for the academic achievement on the 5%-level of significance. The results seemed to suggest that age may influence the academic achievement of adolescent learners and that the young and mature adolescents had similar perceptions about the importance of social relations in their academic performance. ANOVA demonstrated significant differences between the average academic achievements but not social self-concepts of adolescent learners of different ages.

**Bonferroni post hoc** tests carried out to determine exactly where the significant differences were revealed no significant differences in social self-concepts among learners of different ages.

**Research hypothesis 12**

H12: There is no significant difference between the academic achievement and the social self-concepts of learners of different school types.

The results in table 5 demonstrate significant differences between the average academic achievements and social self-concepts of adolescent learners in different school types. The null-hypothesis was therefore, rejected on the 1% level of significance. Government B schools registered superior social self-concepts and Government C schools the least.

**Post hoc Bonferroni** tests revealed the following.
Table 4: Significance of differences of average achievements and social self-concepts of learners of different ages (N=1281)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>59.60</td>
<td>3.074</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>p&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>57.87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>55.16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>55.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16+</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>54.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social self concept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.936</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>p&gt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>3.7264</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>3.6644</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>3.6560</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>3.6532</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16+</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>3.6324</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Significance of differences of average achievements and social self-concepts of learners of different school types (N=1280)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government A</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>52.15</td>
<td>31.814</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government B</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>54.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government C</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>52.89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-government</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>63.24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social self concept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government A</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>3.6837</td>
<td>5.756</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government B</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>3.7412</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government C</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>3.5808</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-government</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>3.6648</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key:
Government A= Schools located in low density and more affluent urban residential areas
Government B= Schools located in high density urban residential areas for low income earners
Government C= Schools located in rural areas
Non-government= Independent or private schools located in urban or rural areas

Table 6: Significance of differences of average achievements and social self-concepts of boarders and day scholars (N=1265)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarder</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>65.01</td>
<td>10.102</td>
<td>1263</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day Scholar</td>
<td>951</td>
<td>53.70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social self concept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarder</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>3.6971</td>
<td>1.327</td>
<td>1263</td>
<td>p&gt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day Scholar</td>
<td>951</td>
<td>3.6560</td>
<td>1.334</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

instances of significant differences in social self-concepts of learners in different school types for example, Government B and C, and Government A and C schools (Table 5). While social self-concepts were significantly different between Government urban and rural school learners they were similar for Government and Non-government schools, and Government A and B schools.

Research hypothesis 13
H13: There is no significant difference between the academic achievement and the social self-concepts of boarders and day scholars.

Analysis of variance revealed significant differences in academic achievement of boarders and day scholars but not social self-concepts (Table 6). The null-hypothesis was rejected on the 1%-level of significance. Boarders achieved significantly better academically. Their social self-concepts were similar to those of day scholars. Therefore, the null-hypothesis could not be rejected on the 5% level of significance. The following section presents results from the interviews.

DISCUSSION
Social self-concept and academic achievement
Quantitative results of this study have demonstrated a
significant and meaningful relationship between social self-concept and academic achievement of adolescent learners in Zimbabwe schools in the study. Support and encouragement received from parents, educators and peers have been described as significant and that in their absence performance would decline. Support and encouragement were regarded as motivational. The relationship was also reciprocal. Lack of collaboration with peers in the classroom has been described as having a negative effect on learning and overall academic performance. Results supported earlier research which emphasised the significant role of social relationships and the social environment as a whole in influencing the social concept and academic achievement (Biehler and Snowman, 1997; Myburgh et al., 1999; Babad, 1995; Trusty et al., 1996; Hamachek, 1995; National Education Service, 2001; Howcroft, 1991; Mboya, 1989; Mwamwenda, 1995). Results however, appeared to contradict research findings by Marsh (1992:35) who reported that non-academic self-concepts which include the social self-concept were not related to academic achievement.

The role of moderator variables: gender, grade/form, school location, school type and type of attendance were also discussed in relation to the social self-concept and academic achievement in the following paragraphs.

Self-concepts, academic achievement and gender
Overall the results did not show statistically significant gender differences between the academic performance and social self-concepts of adolescent learners considered in the current study. Similarity in overall academic performance for both genders is a possible reflection of the apparent success of affirmative action introduced in all spheres of life at independence in 1980 in favour of girls. The relationship between social self-concept and academic achievement was positive and weak. The results supported an earlier study that reported a weak, positive and significant relationship between gender and scholastic achievement among African adolescents (Mboya, 1999). Male and female learners' relations with significant others and belief in academic competence appeared to influence their academic achievement. This is in agreement with literature (Myburgh et al., 1999; Park, 1998; Buhs and Ladd, 2001; Huitt, 1998).

Self-concepts, academic achievement and grade or form
Junior and middle learners were similar in overall academic achievement and social self-concept though juniors had marginally better academic and social self-concept scores. The results were in agreement with research that reported a general decline of self-concept as one progressed from junior to senior high school (Dembo, 1994:159; Huitt, 1998: 24; Marsh, 1990:74; Mboya, 1999:389) but contradicted findings by Marsh (1992) who reported that non-academic self-concepts had no significant relationship with academic achievement of the learners. Because they were young junior learners may have been more easily motivated and responded more positively to the influence of significant others, especially educators and parents. On the other hand, more mature adolescents tended to depend on peer influence and intrinsic motivation more for them to perform. Relations with significant others and belief in academic competence appeared to influence academic achievement of young adolescents more. Similarly, a supportive learning environment where there was collaboration and less disruption was likely to promote learning and achievement. Results supported earlier studies by Hunt (1997; Woolfolk, 1995; Clark in Trusty et al., 1996; Park, 1998; Buhs and Ladd, 2001; Ladd, 1990).

Once again, results emphasised the importance of parental, educator and peer relations for learning and academic achievement of both junior and middle learners in school. Based on these results, perhaps the changes junior learners experienced on transition from the primary school to the secondary school may have had a significant influence on the way they perceived themselves socially and intellectually. Thus, any negative experiences may slow down the junior learners' adjustment to the new environment leading to negative effects on learning and academic achievement.

Self-concepts, academic achievement of urban and rural learners
Results have shown positive and significant relationship between the social self-concepts and academic achievement of urban and rural learners. The results were in agreement with earlier literature (Dembo 1994:461, Mwamwenda 1995:68, Hamachek, 1995:420 and Mboya, 1996:388). This is one of the most significant results of this study because no previous studies had compared urban and rural learners in terms of social self-concept and academic achievement in Zimbabwe. Thus, satisfaction with social relations and academic competence may have a significant influence on the academic achievement of learners in both urban and rural areas. However, it should be pointed out that the inclusion of some high performing selective schools in both rural and urban samples may have been responsible for similar scores. In addition learners at boarding schools located in rural areas with an urban background may have been responsible for similar social self-concepts. Future studies may need to include questions on place of normal residence. Regardless of where one is attending school, it would appear that relations with significant others were regarded as beneficial to the learners' academic achievement.

Social self-concepts, academic achievement of learners in different school types
The study revealed significant differences between the overall academic achievement of learners in different school types and also their social self-concepts. Learners in non-government schools had higher average test scores than those in government schools, most probably
because they were high achievers in selective schools. Because the social self-concepts correlated with academic achievement in both government and non-government schools it would appear that learners in both school types acknowledged the importance of the supportive role of significant others: parents, educators and peers for their success in school. Results provided further evidence in support of earlier research on the importance of positive relations on academic achievement (McGrath and Repetti, 2000; Biehler and Snowman, 1997). Participants in high ability schools experienced declines in social self-concept (Marsh, 1996) probably due to the lack of regular contact with parents for feedback or competitive learning environment with less time for social interaction. The latter may have polarised relations instead of increasing collaboration among the learners. Low emphasis on sporting activities may also militate against informal social contacts in a more relaxed environment in these highly and academically competitive schools. Government B schools which registered the highest average social self-concept scores appeared to offer the best environment for developing the learners' social relations with parents, peers and educators. These are day and comprehensive or non-selective schools where learners have daily contacts with parents, and where learners of different abilities shared learning experiences daily. Lower average academic performance may be due the wide range of learners' abilities and poor learning resources. However, the relationship between the academic achievement and social self-concept did not reach statistical significance for Government B school learners. This was rather difficult to explain and could be a subject of future investigation. Literature and empirical evidence have shown that the school one attended, whether it was high or low achieving, played a significant role in shaping the learners' self-concepts and their academic achievement (Dembo, 1994).

Some learners in Government A schools lived in high density suburbs where the Government B schools are located hence similar social self-concepts. Similarly, most of the learners in non-government boarding schools in this sample had an urban background like those in Government A and B schools, hence similarity in their social self-concepts. Future studies may need to seek information on place of normal residence in order to tease out more clearly the influence of school type by excluding the influence of residential background. Regardless of this discrepancy, school type appeared to have some influence on both academic achievement and social self-concept of adolescent learners considered in this study.

**Social self-concept, academic achievement and learners of different ages**

According to Mboya, (1999); Dembo, (1994); Huitt, (1998); Craven, Marsh and Print, (2000) the relationship between social self-concept and academic achievement declined with age so did the current study. Better academic scores and social self-concepts for young adolescents confirmed the general decline of self-concepts with age. Once again results seemed to suggest that relations with significant others and belief in academic competence may have a significant influence on learners’ academic achievement. Correlations between social self-concepts and academic achievement did not reach statistical significance for the over 16 year olds and further research with a larger sample may be required. The results also showed that age accounted for significant differences in the academic achievement of adolescent learners considered in this study. Similarity in social self-concepts implied similarity in the way young and more mature adolescents felt about their relations with significant others in academic situations. Overall the study appeared to show that while age may have some influence on the social self-concept and academic achievement, the evidence is rather weak. Results are in accordance with findings by Mboya (1999:388) who reported a weak but significant relationship between age and scholastic achievement.

**Social self-concept, academic achievement of boarders and day scholars**

The study showed significant and positive relationship between the academic achievement and the social self-concepts of both day scholars and boarders. Thus, the type of attendance, as a boarder or day scholar may have some influence on academic achievement and social self-concepts of adolescent learners considered in this study. Higher correlation coefficients and mean marks for boarders were to be expected since boarding schools were selective and offered better learning environments leading to better academic achievements. Boarders and day scholars appeared to view the importance of significant others in their academic work in a similar way. The results supported earlier findings that the school attended shaped learners’ specific self-concepts (Dembo, 1994:456). Because they were high achievers, learners in boarding schools may not have felt the absence of their parents or educators, could work independently, and relied less on feedback for motivation and higher achievement.

**CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS**

The current study supported Gordon (1995) and other research that the social self-concept may play a significant role in the academic achievement of adolescent learners in secondary schools. Supportive role of parents, educators and peers and success in social relations at home and school appeared to motivate and improve the learners’ confidence leading to better academic achievement. Improved academic achievement at school may improve relations with significant others leading to even higher achievements. In addition, it has emerged that learners in the current study equally valued the role of significant others for their success in school. It is incumbent upon all educators therefore, to ensure that
learners experienced success more often than not in order to enhance acceptance of learners by both parents and educators leading to better social self-concepts and even better academic achievement. Educators should cultivate cooperation and learning environments that are free from disruptive behaviour for better results. Conclusions were also made with regard to the relationship of social self-concept, achievement and moderator variables: gender, grade/form, school location and type, type of attendance and age.

The study has also shown that (a) gender stereotyping still has a significant and meaningful influence on subject choice and performance in specific subjects in Zimbabwe secondary schools though overall performance may be the same, (b) the grade or form one was in may influence the academic achievement of junior and middle adolescent learners in the current study. Similarly, grade or form may not explain differences in either academic achievement or social self-concepts of adolescent learners considered in this study, (c) learners may benefit from confidence building by attending urban schools though school location could not account for differences in social self-concepts. These results must be read with caution since location of the school was considered without investigating the learners' place of ordinary residence, (d) the school type one attended may influence the academic performance and social self-concepts of adolescent learners. Therefore, the practice of transferring children from one school to another is wise in terms of achieving better academic results and social development as well, (e) the type of attendance accounted for significant differences in overall academic performance but not social self-concept, and (f) young and more mature adolescents equally needed family, educator and peer support for them to achieve at their best. The family and the school should always work together for the benefit of the learner.

Overall the study has demonstrated that social self-concept appeared to be important for academic achievement overall and for individual moderator variables, and that the relationship was reciprocal. The study has also demonstrated that teacher made tests can be reliable and valid measures of achievement and for testing learner self-concepts.

In view of the findings of this study, it was recommended that measures to improve learner social self-concepts involved (a) sensitising educators, parents and learners themselves on the importance of the social relationships for learning and academic achievement (b) the educators ensuring learners experienced success more often to raise their confidence in other spheres of life (c) more research focusing on individual subjects and social self-concept and moderator variables in different schools and locations, in the form of intervention studies as well as replication of the current study in an African context. Since analysis of variance did not yield consistent results for all moderator/independent variables it may be necessary to conduct further studies with each one of them, and covering different parts of the country.

Though the study did not cover the whole country it is felt that the results were likely to reflect the general situation in schools in the areas chosen for the current study and possibly other parts of the country.

REFERENCES


