


Foundation phase learners' view of learning support and self-esteem

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Background: Learning support in South Africa is a phenomenon where learners who experience barriers to learning are withdrawn from the mainstream class and receive support in their home language and mathematics. A need for learning support surfaced when emphasis was placed on inclusivity in mainstream schools. The efficacy of this withdrawal on self-esteem has however not been investigated.

Aim: This study sought to investigate the learners' experiences of withdrawal for learning support and the relationship with their self-esteem.

Setting: A primary school in the Western Cape.

Methods: This qualitative design aimed to determine the perspective of the learners. Purposive sampling was used to identify five learners who received learning support. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to analyse data gleaned from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), which had been adapted into an informal interview schedule.

Results: Participants in this study did not report negative experiences of learning support. Learners identified that issues of negative self-esteem were unrelated to learning support, but were attributed to school culture, mainstream teachers' attitudes, family relationships, peer comparisons and social competencies.

Conclusion: Participants reported that learning support rarely caused negative self-esteem, but rather heightened confidence in their academic abilities regardless of their need for learning support, holding social factors responsible for their negative self-esteem. The implications of these findings allude to the fact that withdrawal for learning support continues regardless of popular beliefs reported to the contrary. Schools should however monitor these learners in order to determine individual differences and needs.

Keywords: barriers to learning; learning support; Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale; self-esteem; withdrawal; Foundation phase.

Introduction and background

The Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 2009:8) refers back to international policies, such as The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action: On Special Needs Education for inclusive education (UNESCO 1994:12). This policy states that learning support (LS) should be provided in mainstream schools and classrooms. Learning support can however be given in various forms. Primary schools in the Western Cape, South Africa, are encouraged to follow a specific LS model. In South African primary schools, an LS model is suggested. Learners who experience barriers to learning are withdrawn from the mainstream class in small groups in order to receive extra support from a specialist (Mahlo 2016:7). Nel et al. (2016) however point out that learning support teachers (LSTs) are only stationed at a few schools. As pointed out by Mahlo (2016), there remains a division between theory and practice. The job description of LSTs (Western Cape Education Department [WCED] 2017) stipulates that this support should be in their home language and/or mathematics.

The researcher as an LST was also caught between the practice of withdrawing learners for support and the policies of inclusive education moving towards providing all support in the mainstream classroom. Contradictory statements between campaigners for inclusive education, policies and those in favour of withdrawal brought about a need for a qualitative study. It is thought that learners experiencing barriers to learning often have low self-esteem, and it is argued that LS is a possible cause of low self-esteem. This is especially true in cases where learners are withdrawn from the mainstream classroom, in order to be taught in a separate LS classroom.

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International campaigners for inclusive education such as Condren et al. (2000) and Takala, Pirttimaa and Törmänen (2009) argue that withdrawal from the mainstream classroom often goes hand-in-hand with 'labelling' of learners. With this in mind, labelling is often linked to negative self-esteem. These campaigners are trying to put an end to the withdrawal of learners from the mainstream classroom for support. They encourage LS to remain in the mainstream classroom.

Polat (2011) however highlighted that the necessary support is not always given in the mainstream classrooms with full inclusion. Therefore, inclusive education policies and South African researchers such as Dreyer (2008:212) argue that learners experiencing barriers to learning have the right to receive additional support outside of the classroom. Policies for inclusive education include withdrawal from the mainstream class for specialist support (Polat 2011). An international statement by UNESCO (2000:3) suggested that learners experiencing barriers to learning can receive support in the mainstream classroom or on a withdrawal basis. The Screening Identification Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy also suggests this form of support as Level 2 support which is a temporary withdrawal from the mainstream classroom for small-group support by the LST (Department of Basic Education [DBE] 2014:19–21). This allows the researcher to investigate the actual experiences of learners who are withdrawn for LS, instead of making assumptions about their experiences.

Conceptual framework

Social inclusion was used as a paradigmatic lens with which to underpin the elucidation of the conceptual framework of self-esteem and LS in this study. The idea that all members of society including learners who receive LS should have equal access to institutions and resources and take part in the activities of the mainstream school and classroom (Mahlo 2016:8) is a central tenant of social inclusion. Society should ensure that people are included as this leads to improved self-esteem (Cobigo et al. 2012).

Self-esteem

Lawrence (2006:13) proposes that *self-esteem* is an underlying part of *self-concept*, together with *self-image* and *the ideal self*. According to Lawrence (2006:13), *self-image* is a person's belief in him or herself, while the 'ideal self' is the belief of what he or she should be like. Self-esteem is thus seen as the 'gap' between *self-image* and *ideal self*. Minton (2012:34) claimed that Lawrence's self-esteem theory is excellent to help teachers grasp the concept of self-esteem.

Theories and models of self-esteem

There are various perspectives of self-esteem. The multidimensional view of self-esteem entails that self-esteem is formed by a combination of various contexts, including: peers, school, parents and personal interests (Miller & Moran 2012). This view of self-esteem was originally proposed by

Stanley Coopersmith. Coopersmith (1967:6) discovered that children do not distinguish between their self-esteem in various contexts before reaching adolescence and this led to the researcher choosing to focus on the global self-esteem of the learners, rather than multidimensional self-esteem. Rosenberg's (1965) perspective is the most widely accepted and states that self-esteem is global and unidimensional. It was confirmed by Descartes, Ramesar and Mills (2018) that global self-esteem is a more accurate predictor of children's self-esteem than domain-specific self-esteem. Rosenberg (1965:30–31) defines self-esteem as the positive or negative attitude towards oneself as an object, therefore referring to whether a person feels that he or she is good enough compared to others. Researchers have labelled the Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), which defines self-esteem as global and unidimensional, as the most widely used measure of self-esteem (Hyland et al. 2014). However, Tafarodi and Milne (2002:444) claim that global self-esteem is two-dimensional and has two aspects, namely, self-competence and self-liking. Self-esteem is therefore formed by what a person can do, including abilities, skills and talents, as well as what they are, referring to moral character, attractiveness and social acceptance (Tafarodi & Milne 2002:444).

Learning support

A thorough understanding of LS is also necessary in order to understand the phenomena under scrutiny. Learning support aims to improve teaching and learning and can be defined as 'supplementary', 'remedial' or 'extra class instruction' (Mashau et al. 2008:416). Transformation of the education system in South Africa has led to policy reviews with regard to inclusive education in order to meet the diversity of learning needs in the mainstream classroom. White Paper 6 was published in 2001 and aimed to support the national curriculum in promoting education for all learners (Department of Education [DoE] 2001:5). As a result, a need for LS in the mainstream class came to the fore. Inclusive education policies require that all learners are accommodated in mainstream classrooms, irrespective of their abilities (DoE 2001).

Four different levels of LS are described in the SIAS policy (DBE 2014:19–21). Level 1 refers to LS by the LST in the classroom. Level 2 refers to temporary withdrawal from the mainstream classroom for small-group support by the LST. Policy, however, does not specify the schools, grades or size of groups in which learners should receive this support. In the researcher's experience as an LST, these schools are mostly previously disadvantaged schools, and learners are withdrawn in groups of between 1 and 12 learners.

Dreyer (2008:60) is of the opinion that full inclusion (level 1 of LS) will lead to the teasing of these learners, causing them to be reluctant to participate in the mainstream class. This view is supported by Hornby (2015:240) who is of the opinion that learners experiencing barriers to learning will be labelled in the mainstream class whether they are withdrawn or not.

Overcrowded classroom is another issue raised by Mahlo (2016:11) and Everling (2013) as it often leads to disciplinary problems of learners (both mainstream and LS) which makes it extremely difficult for the LST to offer effective LS to the learners in his or her care. According to Bojuwoye et al. (2014:9), LS in the mainstream classroom is problematic, because learners are afraid to ask for support, be labelled as the weak learners and be teased by their peers. Condren et al. (2000:3) argue that withdrawal of learners (level 2 of LS) is often unsuccessful, because of discontinuity with the programmes followed in the mainstream and in the LS classroom. Takala et al. (2009:167) also stressed that learners miss out on work done in the mainstream classroom, and teachers do not have time to plan together in order to align their curriculums. Condren et al. (2000) however concluded that although collaborative support in the mainstream classroom improves learners' self-esteem and participation, literacy and numeracy remained a major problem. Dreyer (2008:166) on the other hand found that in the most cases, these learners, who were withdrawn from the mainstream class for LS, showed academic improvement and even those who did not show academic improvement still seemed to develop emotionally. Uszynska-Jarmoc (2008:13) and Pullmann and Allik (2008:562) further found that age plays a role in the relationship between academic abilities and self-esteem.

Learning support and self-esteem

In a research conducted by Condren et al. (2000:6), self-esteem was identified as a factor that is equally as important as a learner's intelligence in ensuring academic achievement. They argue that continuous failure will have a negative effect on a learner's self-worth and self-esteem. Mashau et al. (2008:416) argue that LS will help learners to overcome their barriers to learning. This view of additional instruction to improve specific knowledge is supported by Everling (2013). According to Condren et al. (2000:5) it is important to strengthen a child's self-esteem as well as social skills while focussing on literacy and numeracy. They argue that it is essential for the learner to believe in himself in order to learn (Condren et al. 2000:35). Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2012:315) agree that improving the learner's self-esteem will help the learner to achieve academic success. As such, LS can then be seen as the vehicle by which either (1) academic achievement encourages vicarious improvement in self-esteem or (2) self-esteem leads to improvements in academic achievement. Therefore, it can be stated that these two factors shape one another.

Thus, we know that LS is provided in certain schools in the Western Cape to Foundation phase learners experiencing barriers to learning. Labelling due to withdrawal, teasing by more competent peers and age are factors that can contribute to negative self-esteem. The phenomenon under investigation has, however, not been investigated in South Africa.

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) design therefore was to discover how Foundation

phase learners experience LS and whether they feel it leads to negative self-esteem, in a mainstream primary school in the Western Cape. At this stage in the research, LS will generally be defined as learners who are withdrawn from their mainstream classroom for additional academic support. Self-esteem will be defined as global self-esteem that has two dimensions, self-liking and self-competence, and is formed by the cognitive bottom-up model. This model implies that success or failure linked to self-competence and social acceptance, also known as self-liking, is linked to self-esteem. The research questions 'How does Foundation phase learners' experience learning support?' and 'Is there a link between learning support and self-esteem?' were formulated to investigate this phenomenon.

Methodology

This study employed an IPA as research design. Interpretative phenomenological analysis is a phenomenological approach which involves a thorough investigation of the participants' world and the researcher aims to stand in the participants' shoes while continuing to ask critical questions (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2012:362–363). Interpretative phenomenological analysis uses small samples as it aims to let each participant's voice be heard and does not intend to create a theory which can be generalised over the population (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2012:364). The researcher chose this approach because she aimed to determine the experiences of learners towards LS and also asked critical questions with regard to withdrawal from the mainstream class for LS. The researcher argues that it is of utmost importance to give the Foundation phase learners a voice, to share their own experiences of LS as they are the subjects of this support service.

The learners came from one no-fee, primary school in Circuit 3 of the Cape Winelands Education District. As this study dealt with minors, ethical clearance certificates were obtained from the university and the DoE. Purposive sampling was used to identify five learners who had been withdrawn from the mainstream classroom for LS in their home language and mathematics for at least a year in order to determine how they experienced LS. Learner 1 was a boy who was repeating Grade 1, Learner 2 was a girl who was repeating Grade 2, Learner 3 was a Grade 2 boy, Learner 4 was a girl who was repeating Grade 3 and Learner 5 was a boy who was repeating Grade 3. The self-esteem of the learners was explored by using the RSES (Rosenberg 1965:326) which was adapted into an interview schedule. The reason for the adaption of the test was firstly because the learner participants have academic barriers and, secondly, to acquire in depth experiences from the learners in order to improve the researcher's understanding of their personal experiences. Learners who receive LS usually experience difficulty with reading and the researcher wanted to ensure that the learner participants were as comfortable as possible, thus removing all stress from the process. Informal semi-structured interviews further allowed the researcher to delve into topics which came to the fore during the process. For example, if a learner responded that he did not like himself, the researcher could enquire

why not. The learners were introduced to the researcher and she became known to them as a 'teacher', to ensure that they would be comfortable speaking to the researcher. Audio recordings of the interviews and field notes made up the data collection instruments for this phase of the research.

The data analysis of this qualitative study was carried out as stipulated by interpretive phenomenological analysis procedures (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2012). Firstly, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings, leaving margins on both sides for comments. The researcher read the transcript of a single case, making notes in the left-hand margin. The themes which emerged were then written in the right-hand margin, clustering similar themes and identifying superordinate themes. Identifiers were added to the table to indicate where the original source of the theme could be found in the transcript. The remaining four learner interviews were then analysed individually and compared to each other in order to find similarities and differences. A final table of superordinate themes was constructed, containing the themes on which the researcher would focus. Themes were chosen to focus on frequency, richness of the transcript or contribution to other aspects. Themes were then converted to narrative accounts, linking these to the literature as each superordinate theme was discussed.

Ethical considerations

Ethical protocols were adhered to and parents and principals signed informed consent forms. Ethical clearance was granted by the Faculty of Education, Cape Peninsula University of Technology as well as the WCED (Western Cape Government, Education) (reference numbers: WCED: 20150826-2741; EFEC 6-8/2015).

Results

The researcher aimed to get an indication of the learners' levels of global self-esteem by asking the questions which were adapted from the RSES during an interview. Follow-up questions were asked in order to determine how the learners experienced LS in order to determine whether withdrawal for LS can be associated to learners' self-esteem.

The RSES (Rosenberg 1965:17–18) consists of 10 questions. Questions 1, 3, 4, 7 and 10 are positively stated and scored from left to right (4 to 0), while questions 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 are negatively stated and reverse-scored from left to right (0 to 4). The higher the learners' score, the higher their self-esteem. The highest self-esteem score that could be achieved was 40, while the lowest score is 0. Self-esteem scores that were less than half of the possible maximum score (thus less than 20) were considered as low self-esteem. Self-esteem scores from 20 to 30 were considered normal self-esteem, while scores over 30 were considered high self-esteem. Two learners (one boy and one girl) had normal global self-esteem, and three learners (two boys and one girl) had high global self-esteem. None of the learners who received LS in this study were perceived to have low global self-esteem. However, all of these learners indicated a low level of self-esteem in some of

the questions, but when the researcher inquired about the reasons for their low self-esteem, it was found that the causes were often unrelated to LS or even to the school context. The causes of low self-esteem as identified by the learners were placed in groups of superordinate themes. Although all these learners received LS, they often referred to other experiences when discussing positive or negative self-esteem statements. These experiences included personal experiences, family issues and school-related occurrences, which were often unrelated to LS. The main themes that emerged from the merging of the data were behavioural characteristics, self-competence, self-liking, family relationships, mainstream teachers' attitudes, perceptions of experienced success and comparison to peers.

Personal experiences

The majority of the learners made statements that indicated that behaviour can be associated with low self-esteem. Four learners made positive statements indicating behaviour and characteristics of high self-esteem. Two of these learners however also made negative statements on behaviour and characteristics associated with self-esteem. Therefore, learners portray a combination of behaviour and characteristics that can be associated with low and high self-esteem. Learner 5 indicated that he does not always feel he have good characteristics. He gave the following explanation:

'Sometimes I'm a bit lazy, but other times I'm not lazy. Sometimes when my grandma gives me work while I have a friend over, and then we will do the work together.' (Learner 5, boy, Grade 3)

Learner 3 indicated positive self-esteem at various questions. His responses indicated that this is because of good behaviour.

'I do not hit other children.'
'I share with my friends.' (Learner 3, boy, Grade 2)

These comments indicate that learners consider their behaviour when judging their self-esteem. Good behaviour contributes towards positive self-esteem, whereas disobedient behaviour contributes to negative self-esteem.

Four of the five learner participants made statements that indicated high self-liking. Two learners however also made statements, which indicate low self-liking. When asked why they feel good about themselves they made positive statements about their physical appearance and gender.

'Because I like my body.' (Learner 1, boy, Grade 1)
'I am a beautiful child. (Learner 4, girl, Grade 3)
'Because I am a boy.' (Learner 5, boy, Grade 3)

Learner 2 (girl, Grade 2) once again made contrasting statements; although she was too shy to talk, she first nodded that she never feels like a failure and then later shook her head when asked if she feels good about herself.

The fact that the majority of the learners made statements about self-liking (whether positive or negative) indicates that self-liking can be associated with self-esteem, although it is often completely unrelated to school or LS.

Family issues

It seems that the family circumstances at home, although unrelated to LS, play a major role in the self-esteem of young learners. Learner 5 scored high self-esteem when asked whether he has good characteristics and explained that it is because his grandma cares about him, and he likes his grandma.

One learner scored a low self-esteem when asked if she is happy with herself. She explained her negative response as follows:

'My dad used to live with me and then when he got that new wife he did not want me anymore.' (Learner 4, girl, Grade 3)

Once again, good family relationships seem to be coupled with positive self-esteem, whereas bad family relationships seem to be linked to negative self-esteem.

School-related occurrences

The majority of learners commented on their academic incompetence. Learners also referred specifically to their incompetence in the mainstream class. Some learners however made contrasting statements in this specific domain where they referred to their academic incompetence and at another stage to their academic competence. For instance, learner 1 made the following statements:

'I struggled with the writing.' (Learner 1, boy, Grade 1)

When asked at a later stage: What are you proud of? He replied:

'When I write.' (Learner 1, boy, Grade 1)

Therefore, it can be argued that although these learners have barriers to learning, they still experience success with academic work positively.

Teacher attitudes is a possible cause of the contrasting statements learners make about their experiences of support at school. One of the learners was upset about the way that his mainstream teacher treated him when he had to leave the class for LS. Learner 5 was asked if there was anyone who teased or treated him badly for leaving the class for LS, and he responded that the teacher sometimes did:

'She says I must leave the class, but other times she says we must wait till the teacher finishes with the other group. If I'm not done with my work she says I must come again. Sometimes when I'm busy with my last sentence she says I must go, and then she gives us other work to do and tell me to leave that sentence and finish the other work. Then she wipes that sentence off the board.' (Learner 5, boy, Grade 3)

The deduction is made that the mainstream teacher is not responding consistently. Sometimes she would not allow him to go to LS, because he is still busy with work and other times she sends him off but then does not give him the opportunity to complete his work in the mainstream class.

In the light of the learner's experience with the mainstream teacher, a follow-up question was asked to determine learners' general feeling towards LS. The majority of learners made statements that they enjoy LS and experienced success in the LS class. Learners indicated that LS gave them the confidence to take part in the mainstream and LS classes and thus experience success in learning and class integration. Their statements included:

'It is fun.' (Learner 1, boy, Grade 1)

'We learn.' (Learners 3, boy, Grade 2)

'When I go out of my class to the other teacher she gives work that is fun and we learn and we read in the class.' (Learner 5, boy, Grade 3)

A general positive feeling towards LS is found in the learners' experiences. One learner however revealed that she does not want to go to LS anymore, but her explanation made it clear that it is not because of a negative experience of LS. Her reason was as follows:

'Because I have learned.' (Learner 2, girl, Grade 2)

It seems that learner 2 realised that the LS group is for improving her academic skills, and as it has, she is now satisfied with herself. She later also explained that she has now moved to the middle ability group in the mainstream classroom.

Learner 4 was the only learner in this study who mentioned a negative experience of LS. When asked why she does not think she is just as good as her peers, she replied that she has to go to LS. However, in other questions she responded that she enjoys LS.

Learner 4's answer indicates that she compared herself to her mainstream peers. This finding of peer comparison however was true for the majority of learners. This was predominantly a negative experience, as most of them did not feel they were as good as their peers. All of these learners were either grade two or grade three learners, indicating that age can play a role in self-esteem. This highlights the importance of the LS group where learners will compare themselves to peers who work more or less on the same level.

Learner 3 was asked: 'Do the other learners struggle as well?' And he replied, 'No teacher'. (boy, Grade 2)

Learner 5 compared himself to his mainstream peers and felt that: 'Sometimes they do things well and then I do poorly.' (Learner 5, boy, Grade 3)

Learning support creates a group of learners with more or less similar capabilities, implying that comparison to peers within this group will not have such a negative impact on the learners' self-esteem (Hornby 2015). Thus at least for part of the day, the learners will feel competent when compared to their peers.

Learners mentioned various experiences that can be associated with self-esteem. Learning support seems to be

experienced in a positive manner and is found to be enjoyed by learners and perceived as a vehicle through which to improve their academic abilities. Negative experiences that the learners linked to their self-esteem were behavioural characteristics, self-competence, self-liking, family relationships, mainstream teachers' attitudes, perceptions of experienced success and comparison to peers.

Discussion

The global self-esteem assessment found that all the learners portrayed a combination of high and low self-esteem aspects. However, their global self-esteem seemed to be high. It can thus be concluded, that the learners' self-esteem varies in different environments and domains, which are included in global self-esteem. The majority of the learners mentioned that they enjoyed LS and experienced success in LS. Various learners however also mentioned that they did not feel they were as good as their mainstream peers and struggled in the mainstream class. Only one learner indicated that she did not want to receive LS anymore, but she explained that it was only because she felt she has learned enough. Learning support does not seem to cause low global self-esteem; however, individual differences should be kept in mind.

The researcher concluded that LS can be associated with the self-esteem of learners but that most of the learners experienced LS positively. They seemed to enjoy it and experienced academic success because of it. It seemed that most of the learners did not get labelled and teased about leaving the class for LS. Only one learner mentioned that he was sometimes teased for going to LS. However, she still said that she enjoys going to LS. Therefore, the concern of Takala et al. (2009:167) is valid, although it was seldom experienced by learners in this research context. It seems that most of the mainstream teachers contributed to the positive experience of LS. However, one learner did have a negative experience in this regard. Bojuwoye et al. (2014:9) also raised the issue that learners in need of support are sometimes afraid to ask the mainstream teacher for help, indicating a possible negative attitude of mainstream teachers towards LS. Behavioural aspects, social acceptability and family relationships were mentioned more often as negative experiences than LS and other school-related factors.

Although the findings of this study cannot be generalised to the broader population, it can be noted that LS, within the context of this study, does not seem to be a negative undertaking. However, a caveat that must be added is that the LST needs to be cautious when withdrawing learners for LS. One learner commented that she did not want to go to LS anymore; although she did not experience lowered self-esteem, she just felt that she has learned enough as she had been moved to the middle ability group in the mainstream class. This finding agrees with Dreyer (2008), Mashau (2008) and Everling (2013) that withdrawal for LS improves academic ability, and as discovered by many researchers such as Condren et al. (2000:30), Mashau et al. (2008:416) and Donald et al. (2012:315), improvement of academic abilities

and self-esteem goes hand-in-hand. Mainstream teachers and LSTs should be aware of these negative experiences that learners may have of LS. They must ensure that no learners who are withdrawn for LS does not regard LS as a negative incident in their school day.

Limitations

Certain limitations were identified in this study. The learners' poor language ability might have influenced their responses and led to the possibility of inaccurate results. Owing to the nature of the qualitative IPA study, a very small sample was used. The small size of the sample did not allow the researcher to generalise the findings to the greater population. In order to accommodate the learners' linguistic ability, the internal reliability of the RSES needed to be forfeited to change the survey to an interview.

Implications and recommendations

Further research should be conducted to compare Foundation phase learners and intermediate and senior phase learners' experiences of LS. As Uszynska-Jarmoc (2008:13) pointed out, various domains of self-esteem are important in different developmental stages of the learner. The younger the learners, the less differentiation could be found between the domains that defined self-esteem. Schools should monitor the self-esteem of learners' who receive LS to ensure that it is not harmful to the individual's self-esteem. Where a learner experiences LS negatively, the learner should no longer be withdrawn for LS. The school should rather investigate alternative methods of LS in the mainstream classroom. Learners and their parents should be consulted and given a choice with regard to the inclusion in a LS group. Family relationships have a strong link to learners' view of their self-esteem. The LSTs, in cooperation with the school psychologists and school social worker, should therefore suggest the compilation of a parent training guide and/or training sessions to equip the parents on how to treat the learners in a way that will enhance their self-esteem.

Conclusion

Withdrawal for LS as found in the Western Cape, South Africa, is a reality. Learning support aims to include all learners, irrespective of their barriers to learning, in the mainstream school closest to where they live and provide the support that the learner needs at that school. This research aimed to determine the learners' experience of withdrawal from the mainstream class, for LS, and their self-esteem in order to have informed discussions about the relationship between LS and self-esteem.

The researcher found that none of the learners in this study had low global self-esteem. Further exploration however was done in order to determine which of the learners' experiences can be linked to self-esteem, thus allowing informed discussions to proceed. This study has found that LS is experienced positively by most learners and can be linked to both the self-esteem components of self-competence and

the self-liking. It can be concluded that a connection between LS and self-esteem does exist. However, all learners do not have identical experiences. Learning support itself is rarely linked to negative self-esteem. Rather, it is the way in which the school culture and teachers handle the LS that sometimes creates a negative experience for the learners. The learners' family relationships, behavioural characteristics, self-liking, self-competence, achievement of success and comparison to peers seem to be linked to the learners' self-esteem. These aspects can thus be identified as common experiences that the learners' link to their self-esteem and should be taken into consideration when decisions are made with regard to LS within this research context.

Most of the learners feel rather confident about their academic competence, although they need academic support. In the researchers' opinion, the learners enjoy the LS. It is something in their day to look forward to. They get a break from the pressure of the mainstream curriculum with which they are not coping and experience success. No matter how small the success is, if it is accompanied by praise and love from the LST, the learner's self-esteem will improve as he or she starts to feel worthy and confident. The correct attitude towards LS will lead to improved academic competency as well as positive self-esteem.

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Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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