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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Self-esteem: A Quantitative Study Among Teachers in Sabah, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the self-esteem among 69 teachers who responded to the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale on Google Forms. Data were subsequently transferred onto a spreadsheet and analyzed using SPSS 26.0. Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if significant gender differences existed in teacher self-esteem, while Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to determine if significant differences existed in terms of age and work experience. Wilcoxon signed rank test was conducted to determine if significant differences existed in the self-esteem items according to a hypothesized value of 3.5. Percentages of agreement (strongly agree and agree) were collapsed to gain an overview on teacher self-esteem. Findings revealed nonsignificant gender and age differences in self-esteem; however, significant differences were found in terms of job experience. Additionally, findings showed that nine out of 10 self-esteem items were significantly different at $p < 0.001$. About 84 percent of teachers admitted that they tend to be able to do things as well as most other people, while another 88 percent felt that they tend to be persons of worth, at least on an equal plane with others. Lastly, 93 percent maintained that they tend to have a lot of respect for themselves as well as having a positive attitude toward themselves. In light of the findings, some recommendations were made on how to enhance teacher self-esteem in Sabah, Malaysia.

Contribution/Originality: This research offers a valuable contribution by examining

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teacher self-esteem in Sabah, Malaysia. Besides narrowing the gap that exists in educational psychology in the Malaysian context, it is the first quantitative study that examines teacher self-esteem in Sabah. Therefore, it adds to the very limited evidence base on teacher self-esteem, which is crucial for creating a learning environment that is conducive to enhancing student motivation, engagement, and intellectual development, besides enabling teachers to become more resilient, change-capable, and self-assertive in their pedagogic practices.

1. Introduction

Maslow's hierarchy of needs categorizes esteem as one of the fundamental motivations that revolves around self-respect, self-worth, recognition, achievement, and reputation (Maslow, 1954; McLeod, 2025), while Rosenberg (1965) defined it as an individual's favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the self. Like most people, teachers generally need both self-respect and appreciation from others to establish a healthy esteem, while striving to satisfy these needs to grow and eventually attain self-actualization. In general, teachers with positive self-esteem tend to demonstrate teaching efficacy, achievement motivation and respect for others. Kohn (2005) asserted that teachers with positive self-esteem often engage in unconditional teaching by validating the identities of all students. In the same vein, students who know that they are unconditionally accepted will show genuine interest and derive joy in learning difficult concepts. According to Ackerman (2018), teachers with positive self-esteem not only value themselves, but also appreciate other people, while finding contentment and purpose in their own lives. They are able to delve deeply within themselves to make their own decisions instead of just conforming to others' demands. They perceive the world in realistic terms, accepting students as they are, while providing them with guidance and constructive feedback. As self-assertive problem-solvers, they are able to develop meaningful relationships to make a difference in students' lives, while remaining firm in their own values and living their lives accordingly.

Mbuva (2016), who appraised self-esteem as an integral part of teachers' professional and personal growth, asserted that it tends to be related to self-concept, which is contingent upon how teachers think and how they evaluate themselves. Moreover, teachers need to develop a positive self-image of themselves to become more capacitated in their professional and personal lives. Additionally, self-esteem is also associated with teachers' self-image, which is how they truly perceive their own selves. While self-esteem is the way teachers value their own selves, self-image and self-concept often add to the concurrence because they influence how teachers regard themselves as professionals and how they perceive themselves as individuals, respectively. Therefore, teacher preparation programs should strive to enhance teacher candidates' self-concepts so that they can model self-esteem to students, besides disseminating subject matter content. In brief, enhancement of self-concept and self-esteem among teacher trainees and teachers should be evidence-based and conscientious to make them feel more confident in their abilities, leading more engaging and effective instruction that yields higher levels of teaching and learning outcomes.

In a survey, Suma (2020) explored the scope of teacher self-esteem and its impact on student learning in terms of teaching style, communication, teacher-student interaction, and assertiveness. Findings revealed that teachers with high self-esteem tend to motivate students more effectively by accommodating to their preferred learning styles;

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for example, they often use task analysis to help students set realistic goals and gain a sense of responsibility for their own accomplishments. In addition, they often prompt students to overcome major barriers to learning, while increasing their opportunities for success without lowering any aspirations. Besides, teachers with high self-esteem tend to effectively use verbal and non-verbal communication to instill a strong feeling of self-worth amongst students by using of words or phrases to encourage, praise, and appreciate, besides displaying appropriate facial expressions, direct eye contact, and other types of body language to facilitate teacher-student interactions.

Additionally, teachers with high self-esteem strive to establish good rapport with students by using praise or encouragement to effect positive change amongst students. By providing constructive feedback and setting realistic expectations, they tend to strengthen students' self- esteem and significantly influence their learning. Besides, their high self-esteem also enables them to deal with students' cultural and individual differences, regard self-esteem as a channel for promoting equity, improving their own interpersonal communication skills, and displaying appropriate pedagogic attitudes. They are also able to adequately establish the zone of proximal development by determining the gap between what students can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance and support. Lastly, teachers with high self- esteem tend to be self-assertive in terms of defending their own rights without violating others' rights by expressing their desires, needs, feelings, and viewpoints in direct, authentic, and appropriate ways (Suma, 2020).

An investigation by Fernandez-Castillo, Chacon-Lopez and Fernandez-Prados (2022) disclosed that teachers with positive self-esteem tend to be more capable of executing tasks, expressing differing opinions, and sharing creative ideas. They also self-regulate better, exhibit less fear or anxiety, and are more motivated in goal setting. Overall, self-esteem tends to act as a psychological buffer against negative events, allowing teachers to effectively cope as they progress through their training or work. Additionally, teachers with positive self-value tend to demonstrate a higher level of adaptability to the teaching profession, which in turn, facilitates their perceived competence. In brief, teachers who are skillful in adapting to curricular changes and classroom challenges tend to exhibit higher self-esteem. On the other hand, Xue (2022) postulated that teachers' self-esteem tends to be strongly interrelated with career adaptability and social support; teachers with high self-esteem and career adaptability often experience greater social support from colleagues. By the same token, those with high social support tend to exhibit higher self-esteem and career adaptability since their psychosocial attributes are greatly influenced by social interactions.

According to Cherry (2024), self-esteem is a subjective sense of overall personal worth or value that describes the level of confidence in one's capabilities and characteristics, which exerts an influence on teachers' motivation, mental wellbeing, and overall quality of life. It also motivates them to attain lifelong goals by being able to face the unknown, knowing that they are capable of achieving what they have planned. Additionally, their healthy self-esteem enables them to set appropriate boundaries to maintain favorable intra- and inter-personal relationships with themselves and others, which impact their decision-making, emotional health, and their overall life satisfaction. While a healthy, positive view of themselves enables teachers to discern their own potential, feel more motivated to accept new challenges, and overcome difficult obstacles, a firm understanding of their inner strength and expertise enables them to set realistic expectations to address their own needs.

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1.1. Significance of the Study

A review of literature showed that research on self-esteem among Malaysian teachers is lacking. It is important to gain greater insight into their self-esteem because the way they perceive themselves tends to have a significant impact on the teaching and learning process. As aforementioned, teachers with positive self-esteem tend to exhibit greater self-respect and self-assertiveness, besides being satisfied with themselves and their abilities. Besides, self-esteem has serious implications on teachers because it affects not only their perceptions and thinking, but also their emotions and behavior. In brief, it affects their professional and personal lives in terms of relationships, job performance, and wellbeing, besides how they care for themselves and their students. Findings of this study would provide a framework for policymakers and teacher trainers to design courses, seminars, or workshops pertaining to teacher self-esteem development as a multifaceted factor that significantly influences teaching performance, job satisfaction, and teacher retention. Lastly, this study would also provide a basis for teachers to use self-esteem as a tool to develop the strength and resilience needed to exert greater control over their undertakings, including leading their own lives autonomously and learning through trial and error with courage and tenacity.

1.2. Research Questions

To provide direction, concentration, and clarity to the study, three research questions were formulated. They enable the authors to define the scope of the study, select an appropriate methodology, and ensure that the research is relevant and on track. Overall, the research questions help ensure that the study is focused, thus leading to productive effort and meaningful results. The research questions are as follows:

i. Were there any significant differences in self-esteem in relation to gender, age, and job experience?
ii. Were there any significant differences in the self-esteem items based on a hypothesized value of 3.5?
iii. What were the percentages of agreement on self-esteem and their implications?

2. Review of literature

A literature review was conducted to help the authors establish the context and background of the study. It also helped the authors gain deeper understanding in the existing body of knowledge on teacher self-esteem, including its key concepts and prominent arguments. Further, it allowed them to situate their study within the Malaysian context and demonstrate its relevance. Lastly, it enabled them to identify gaps in the existing knowledge on self-esteem, while justifying the need for the new study. Overall, it helped the authors build a theoretical framework for the study by researching the relevant theories and concepts of self-esteem, besides providing a foundation for developing the research questions and methodology.

2.1. Self-esteem and Job Satisfaction

In a survey, Ahmed (2012) studied the impact of self-esteem and optimism on university teachers' job satisfaction. Findings revealed that self-esteem tends to be significantly associated with job satisfaction, the nature of work, and promotion, while optimism tends to be significantly and positively correlated with supervision, promotion, rewards, interactions with colleagues, and nature of work. Additionally, the impact of self-esteem,

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self-efficacy, and job stress on primary school teachers' job satisfaction was investigated by Reilly, Dhingra, and Boduszek (2014). Findings indicated that teachers tend to exhibit high levels of self-esteem and job satisfaction, besides average self-efficacy and moderate stress. Findings imply the importance of raising teacher self-esteem and self-efficacy to enhance their job satisfaction and organizational commitment, while alleviating their perceived stress.

In an investigation on teachers' self-esteem, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, Sentuna (2015) disclosed that male teachers tend to have significantly higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment than their female peers. Additionally, a significant and positive relationship was also found between self-esteem and organizational commitment, and between self-esteem and job satisfaction among female teachers. Similarly, a significant and positive relationship was found between self-esteem and job satisfaction, and between self-esteem and organizational commitment among male teachers. On their other hand, Sarpkaya and Kirdök (2019), who examined the mediating role of self-esteem in understanding the relationship between the job satisfaction and life satisfaction among primary school teachers, revealed that self-esteem tends to be significantly related to job satisfaction, while life satisfaction tends to have a significant effect on job satisfaction. Besides, self-esteem was found to assume a partial mediating role in the relationship between job satisfaction and life satisfaction. Similarly, Mocheche, Bosire, and Raburu (2017), who examined the influence of self-esteem on secondary school teachers' job satisfaction, asserted that self-esteem tends to be significantly correlated with job satisfaction.

2.2. Self-esteem and Job Burnout

In their study, Bayani, Bagheri, and Bayani (2013) probed secondary school teachers' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and perceived school context as predictors of job burnout. Findings revealed that self-esteem and self-efficacy tend to be significantly correlated with burnout. Self-esteem, self-efficacy, and perceived school context also explained 68 percent of the variance of burnout. On the other hand, Glotova and Wilhelm (2014), who investigated teachers' self-esteem and self-concept in relation to pedagogical communication disclosed that communicative competences tend to vary according to different levels of self-esteem. Low self-esteem tends to be significantly correlated with such competences as empathy, patience, and listening ability, while average self-esteem tends to be significantly correlated with dialogue, listening ability, and student diagnostics. Lastly, high self-esteem tends to be significantly correlated with the ability to motivate students and to practice effective communication.

In their investigation, Méndez et al. (2020) examined the latent profiles of self-esteem, burnout, and depression among secondary school teachers. Findings revealed significant differences in self-esteem and depression; teachers with significantly better scores on self-esteem tend to experience lower burnout than those with lower self-esteem scores. Besides, teachers with higher self-esteem and lower burnout were also found to obtain higher scores in career achievements, which tend to be associated with feelings of work competence and a tendency to assess themselves in a more favorable manner. Lastly, higher self-esteem was found to alleviate burnout among teachers by improving their quality of life, feelings of competence, and efficacy on the job.

On the other hand, Pereira, Gonçalves, and de Assis (2021) investigated the organizational self-esteem, self-efficacy, and job exhaustion among teachers during the

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pandemic. Findings indicated that a majority of teachers tend to demonstrate high self-esteem and occupational self-efficacy, with low job exhaustion. Further, organizational self-efficacy and job exhaustion were found to explain 55 percent of the variance of self-esteem. Overall findings indicated that the majority of teachers tend to possess moderate levels of occupational self-efficacy, while their high self-esteem tends to mitigate the effects of stress. Besides, organizational self-efficacy was found to be positively correlated with self-esteem, implying that teachers with higher self-esteem tend to experience less job exhaustion, while demonstrating higher levels of organizational self-efficacy. Lastly, Fu et al. (2021), who analyzed the mediation effect of self-esteem on self-efficacy and job exhaustion among special education teachers, revealed positive correlations between self-esteem and personal teaching effectiveness, and self-esteem and general teaching effectiveness. Lastly, teachers with higher general teaching effectiveness or higher personal teaching effectiveness were found to exhibit higher self-esteem, which tends to significantly mediate the effects of personal and general teaching efficacy on job exhaustion.

2.3. Attitudes Toward Teaching and Teaching Efficacy

In a quantitative study, Dursun (2019) studied the self-efficacy, self-esteem, and teaching attitudes of preservice information technology teachers. Findings revealed a significant and positive relationship between GPA and teaching attitudes among junior-year preservice teachers. Additionally, a significant and positive relationship between GPA and attitudes toward teaching was also found among senior-year preservice teachers. Overall, the relationships between GPA with self-esteem, attitude, and self-efficacy tend to become stronger with more exposure and experience. Similarly, Byra and Domagała-Zyśk (2021), who analyzed the relationship between the self-esteem and attitudes toward inclusion among student teachers, revealed significant correlations between self-esteem and attitudes toward inclusion, and between self-esteem and attitudes toward people with special needs. Higher self-esteem tends to be associated with more positive attitudes, reflected by positive perceptions of people with special needs, feelings toward them, and behaviors directed at them. Moreover, findings also showed that the relationship between self-esteem and positive attitudes toward inclusion tends to be mediated by favorable attitudes toward persons with special needs, reflecting self-esteem as a crucial psychological strength influencing teachers' perceptions of challenges, life events, and people around them.

On the other hand, Khan, Fleva, and Qazi (2015) investigated the influence of self-esteem and general self-efficacy on the teaching efficacy among public school teachers. Findings revealed that self-esteem tends to influence teachers' decision making, education self-efficacy, disciplinary self-efficacy, capacity to obtain community cooperation, and positive school environment. Further, positive and significant correlations were found between teachers' efficacy and self-esteem, and between self-esteem and general self-efficacy, implying that teachers' strong efficacy tends to result in favorable self-esteem and powerful general self-efficacy. Moreover, Jan et al. (2015), who analyzed the self-esteem among university academics in relation to self-confidence, performance, and empowerment, affirmed that self-esteem tends to be highly associated with self-confidence and empowerment, suggesting the importance of raising academics' self-esteem to enhance their self-assertiveness and empowerment in their delivery of content, while fostering critical thinking, facilitating student development, and contributing to the broader academic community as instructors, mentors, curriculum developers, and researchers.

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Additionally, the self-esteem, creative self-efficacy, and creative teaching among in-service teachers were investigated by Nemeržitski and Heinla (2020). Findings indicated that self-esteem tends to be significantly correlated with self-efficacy, environmental encouragement, and student potential. Overall, in-service teachers with higher self-esteem tend to display more favorable attitudes toward students' latent creativity compared to those with lower self-esteem. Lastly, Melekeowei (2023) evaluated the impact of self-esteem and teaching anxiety on teaching efficacy among preservice teachers. Findings revealed a significant joint effect of self-esteem and teaching anxiety on self-efficacy. Besides, self-esteem and self-efficacy were found to be significantly related. Findings imply that training and intervention programs should be implemented to enhance preservice teachers' self-esteem so that they become more confident in their pedagogic abilities, which can translate into better classroom management, more effectual teaching strategies, and improved student motivation and achievement, besides lowering their own stress levels through accurate self-appraisal.

2.4. Help Seeking Behavior, Emotional Intelligence, and Wellbeing

In an earlier study, Huang, Liu, and Shiomi (2007) analyzed the relationships between teacher self-esteem, teaching efficacy, and propensity to seeking help. Findings showed that the correlation coefficients between self-esteem and efficacy tend to be significant. Moreover, a significant and positive correlation was also revealed between self-esteem and propensity to seeking help. On the other hand, preservice teachers' self-esteem and emotional intelligence in relation to self-efficacy were scrutinized by Şahin (2017). Findings showed that self-esteem and emotional intelligence tend to explain nearly 38 percent of the total variance in self-efficacy, while significantly and positively predicting self-efficacy, with self-esteem as the third significant predictor after wellbeing and sociability. Additionally, Kılıç, Sökmen, and Şükrü (2013), who examined the relationships among self-esteem, self-efficacy, and subjective wellbeing among prospective teachers, disclosed that the self-efficacy of first-year and third-year prospective teachers tends to be average, while self-esteem of male prospective teachers tends to be higher than that of their female counterparts. Overall, positive and significant relationships were found between self-efficacy and subjective wellbeing, and between self-esteem and subjective wellbeing.

2.5. Resilience, Hope, and Optimism

Precious research showed that self-esteem tends to be significantly related to resilience, disposition hope, and optimism. In their investigation on the resilience and self-esteem among student teachers, Ferna´ndez-Castillo, Chaco´n-Lo´pez, and Ferna´ndez-Prados (2022) discovered that resilient student teachers tend to have the capability to confront adversity and become even more assertive in the process, with their self-esteem grounded on their general assessment of themselves. Findings also revealed that a significant and positive relationship tends to exist between resilience and self-esteem, with both improving along with student teachers learning progress, which reflects their ability to face adverse situations and incorporate their newly developed competencies into their future pedagogic practices. On the other hand, Baguri et al. (2022) examined the influence of self-esteem, mattering, and dispositional hope on secondary school teachers' resilience. Findings affirmed that the three psychosocial variables tend to have a positive and significant influence on resilience. Besides, gender differences were found to significantly moderate the impact of self-esteem and dispositional hope on resilience. Lastly, self-esteem, mattering, and dispositional hope were found to explain 35 percent

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and 40 percent of the variance in self-efficacy and resilience, respectively, implying that teachers' psychological wellbeing can be augmented by boosting their self-esteem and self-perceived value.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Approach

This study adopted a quantitative research approach, which allowed for the systematic investigation of teachers' perceptions of the attributes associated with self-esteem. The research design was directly related to the primary purpose of the current study, which was to investigate 69 secondary school teachers' self-esteem using a validated questionnaire. Besides, the quantitative survey method permitted the practice of numerical evaluation and reliable measurement of teacher self-esteem in Sabah, Malaysia. Lastly, the research approach was appropriate to determine if significant differences existed in teacher self-esteem in relation to gender, age, and job experience by using SPSS 26.0.

Besides, a Likert-scale questionnaire was administered on Google Forms, which facilitated efficient data collection from teachers, while warranting adequate representation within the sample. The survey method could enhance not just the reliability and validity of the research findings, but also their generalizability to broader educational contexts. Furthermore, this study design also permitted effective statistical analysis via SPSS 26.0, which could furnish numerical-based information required to interpret data and report findings, derive meaningful conclusions, and make recommendations on how teachers can enhance their self-esteem to positively influence students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development, besides managing their own psychological wealth.

3.2. Research Location

This study was conducted in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, the capital city of the island state where quantitative research on teacher self-esteem is scarce. Kota Kinabalu was chosen for its distinctive educational milieu, which includes 18 large secondary schools (N = 18) that can provide a sufficiently representative sample of the teacher population in Sabah, thus allowing for a relatively accurate assessment of teacher self-esteem.

3.3. Sample and Justification

A total of 69 teachers (n = 69) from three large secondary schools in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah participated in the study. All teachers possess at least a bachelor's degree and are currently working full-time in their respective schools. Initially, principals of nine randomly chosen secondary schools were contacted via email and phone, but eventually, only three agreed to render assistance. Subsequently, principals who exhibited interest in the study shared the survey link with teachers and asked them to complete a simple questionnaire. Additionally, the first writer also shared the survey link with 15 secondary school teachers via Messenger and urged them to share it with teaching colleagues; all were reminded to complete the questionnaire seven days later. The selection procedures prioritized voluntary participation and convenient access, thus yielding a realistic and contextually relevant sample (see Table 1).

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Table 1: Demographic information on the Sample (n = 69)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	23	33.3%
	Female	46	66.7%
Age	25-35	13	18.8%
	36-45	25	36.2%
	46-55	20	29.0%
	56-60	11	15.9%
Job title	Inclusive teacher	5	69.6%
	Regular teacher	48	7.2%
	Special education	16	23.2%
Job experience	6-10 years	11	15.9%
	11-15 years	18	26.1%
	16-20 years	9	46.3%
	More than 20 years	23	11.6%

Teachers come from culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse communities in Sabah. The sample size was based on both theoretical and statistical criteria. According to the central limit theorem, a minimum of 30 participants is generally adequate to ensure sufficient statistical power and generalizability for basic survey research (Roscoe, 1975; RUBIKTOP, 2023). Additionally, the sample was deemed representative of teachers from the local secondary schools in Kota Kinabalu; hence, selection bias was minimized. Systematic random sampling of schools was conducted to obtain a wide range of perspectives across different age, gender, and work experience among teachers. By allowing all 18 secondary schools an equal chance of selection could prevent the under- or over-representation of specific groups, while increasing the generalizability of findings to a broader population of teachers.

Additionally, schools were chosen based on their physical proximity to the university college where the first author serves as program leader in its Master of Education in Leadership. In general, the study was delimited by proximity, accessibility, and principals' willingness to participate in the research study. A total of 69 teachers responded to the survey online; completion of the questionnaire was interpreted as informed permission, with all teachers assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

While the sample size seemed small, it met the minimum requirement for quantitative research in the social sciences, particularly in educational psychology. For example, Roscoe (1975) recommended a sample size of 30 to 500 for most statistical research. This rule of thumb is supported by the central limit theorem, which stipulates that sampling distributions will approach normality when there are 30 or more respondents, allowing for acceptable statistical inference. Furthermore, the current sample size ensured a reasonable margin of error and enough power to identify modest effects in nonparametric analyses, such as Kruskal-Wallis, Mann-Whitney U, and Wilcoxon signed rank tests, which were used to interpret data in the current study.

3.4. Instrument

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), designed by Rosenberg (1965), was used to collect data. The unidimensional, 10-item scale measures global self-worth by assessing

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people's feelings about their own selves. For this study, all items were answered using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5.

Mohammadi (2005) investigated the psychometric properties of the RSES among 185 college students who also completed the SCL-90-R (for anxiety and depression) and the Coopersmith's Self-Esteem inventory (SEI). Findings showed that RSES had a Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.69, test-retest reliability of 0.7, and Spearman Brown's split-half reliability of 0.68. A significant positive correlation between the RSES and the SEI (r = +0.61) was found. Significant negative correlations between RSES and anxiety (r = -0.43), and depression (r = -0.54) were also found. On the other hand, Piyavhatkul et al. (2011) compared the validity and reliability of the RSES-Thai version with the Self-Esteem Visual Analog Scale (SEVAS) among 270 volunteers. Findings revealed that the Cronbach's alpha for the RSES-Thai version was 0.849, while the Pearson's correlation between RSES-Thai version and the SEVAS was 0.618.

3.5. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected by administering the RSES on Google Forms and were subsequently analyzed by using SPSS 26.0. First, Mann-Whitney U was conducted on self-esteem to determine if there were any significant gender differences, while Kruskal-Wallis H test was run to determine if there were any significant differences in terms of age and job experience. Second, Wilcoxon signed rank test was conducted to determine the significance level of each self-esteem item based on a hypothesized value of 3.5. Third, percentages of agreement (strongly agree/agree) were collapsed to get a general impression on teacher self-esteem.

4. Findings

4.1. Gender, Age, and Job Experience

Mann-Whitney U results showed nonsignificant differences in self-esteem in relation to gender. Kruskal-Wallis H results showed nonsignificant age differences, but significant differences by way of job experience (see Table 2).

Table 2: Nonparametric Test Results on Self-Esteem

Age	Sample size	Mean rank	Test statistic	*df*	*p*-value
25 - 35	13	28.85			
36 - 45	25	36.38			
46 - 55	20	34.63	2.005	3	0.571
56 - 60	11	39.82			
Gender	**Sample size**	**Mean rank**	**Test statistic**	***df***	***p*-value**
Male	23	33.15			
Female	46	35.92	0.646	1	0.518
Job experience (years)	**Sample size**	**Mean rank**	**Test statistic**	***df***	***p*-value**
1-5	8	27.69			
6-10	11	32.55			
11-15	18	41.67	12.29	4	0.015*

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16-20	9	17.06
More than 20	23	40.52

*$p < .05$

4.2. Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Results

Wilcoxon signed rank test, a nonparametric method equivalent to *t*-test, was conducted to determine the significance of each self-esteem item. A hypothesized value of 3.5 was chosen as the neutral score for each item. A value that was significantly smaller than 3.5 would indicate that most teachers tend to select Likert scores that are less than 3.5 for the item. On the other hand, a value that was significantly larger than 3.5 would indicate that most teachers tend to select Likert scores that are more than 3.5 for the item. A nonsignificant value would indicate that most teachers tend to be neutral toward the item. Findings showed that nine out of 10 self-esteem items were significantly different at $p < 0.001$ (see Table 3).

Table 3: Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Results (Hypothesized Value = 3.5)

Item	*p*-value	Conclusion
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	< 0.001**	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
All the time I think I am good	0.228	Not significantly different
I feel that I have a number of good qualities	< 0.001**	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
I am able to do things as well as most other people	< 0.001**	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
I do feel I have a lot to be proud of	< 0.001**	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
I certainly feel useful at most times	< 0.001**	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others	< 0.001**	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a successful person	< 0.001**	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value
I take a positive attitude toward myself	< 0.001**	Significantly larger than the hypothesized value

$p < 0.001$**

4.3. Percentages of Agreement

Percentages of agreement (strongly agree and agree) were collapsed to gain an overview on teacher self-esteem. A low proportion (46.3 percent) of teachers strongly agreed/agreed that they were good all the time. An average proportion (71 to 78.3 percent) strongly agreed/agreed that they felt (1) they were successful, (2) useful at most times, (3) they had a lot to be proud of, (4) they had a number of good qualities, and (5) satisfied with themselves on the whole. Only two items evidenced an above-average proportion of agreement (84.1 to 88.4 percent), whereby teachers strongly agreed/agreed that they were (1) able to do things as well as most other people and (2) a worthy person on an equal plane with others. Lastly, only two items showed a high proportion of agreement (92.7 to 92.8 percent), whereby teachers agreed/agreed that

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they had (1) a positive attitude toward themselves and (2) a lot of respect for themselves (see Table 4).

Table 4: Percentages of Agreement on Self-esteem

Item	1	2	3	4	5	4+5 (collapsed)
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	1.4%	2.9%	17.4%	60.9%	17.4%	78.3%
All the time I think I am good	2.9%	14.5%	36.2%	39.1%	7.2%	46.3%
I feel that I have a number of good qualities	2.9%	4.3%	13.0%	66.7%	13.0%	79.7%
I am able to do things as well as most other people	1.4%	1.4%	13.0%	69.6%	14.5%	84.1%
I do feel I have a lot to be proud of	1.4%	1.4%	24.6%	55.1%	17.4%	72.5%
I certainly feel useful at most times	1.4%	2.9%	23.2%	59.4%	13.0%	72.4%
I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others	1.4%	2.9%	7.2%	72.5%	15.9%	88.4%
I have a lot of respect for myself	1.4%	0.0%	5.8%	65.2%	27.5%	92.7%
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a successful person	1.4%	2.9%	24.6%	55.1%	15.9%	71%
I take a positive attitude toward myself	1.4%	0.0%	5.8%	63.8%	29.0%	92.8%

Strongly agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly disagree = 1

5. Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

5.1. Nonsignificant Differences and Average Self-esteem

Current findings were supported by previous research. Several studies revealed nonsignificant differences in self-esteem in relation to gender, age, and job experience. Marcic and Grum (2011), who examined gender differences in self-concept and self-esteem, found no significant gender differences among respondents. Tamini and Valibeygi (2011), who examined the influence of gender, age and academic branch on self-esteem among university students, found nonsignificant age differences. Zafar et al. (2014), who investigated the effects of gender and school characteristics on teachers' self-esteem and job satisfaction, concluded that self-esteem was not affected by gender. Similarly, Jain and Dixit (2014), who studied college students' self-esteem, found no significant gender differences.

Findings imply that Malaysian teachers tend to have an average level of self-esteem (male mean = 37.78/60, female mean = 39.33/60), with only two items reflecting high self-esteem. Overall findings imply that Sabahan teachers need to boost their self-esteem to experience its benefits, which include increased resilience to cope with stress, improved interpersonal relationships, enhanced decision-making, and raised intrinsic motivation, while developing a more positive outlook on life to reduce the likelihood of anxiety and depression (Blouin, 2022; Orth & Robins, 2022; Zeigler-Hill, 2013).

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5.2. Ramifications of Positive Self-esteem

First, high self-esteem acts as a buffer against such mental health challenges as fear, anxiety, and clinical depression, thus helping them maintain a more positive outlook on life, while coping with stress, setbacks, and disappointments. It can reduce vulnerability to negative life events, as teachers with strong self-worth are less likely to produce cortisol. Second, it influences how teachers connect with others; teachers with healthy self-esteem are more likely to build strong, positive relationships, besides navigating conflicts effectively. Third, teachers with confidence stemming from high self-esteem tend to be more enthused in pursuing professional and personal goals, facing new challenges, and persevering through obstacles. Besides, it can boost productivity and work performance since it makes them feel more capable and motivated to succeed. Fourth, with high self-esteem, teachers tend to be more effectual in critical decision-making and innovative problem-solving. They are more likely to make choices that are aligned with their values, while feeling confident in their decisions. They are also empowered to assert their needs, set boundaries, and resist manipulation or negative influences. Fifth, higher self-esteem tends to be linked to overall happiness and life satisfaction, thus helping teachers to gain a sense of purpose, fulfillment, and a positive self-image. Sixth, teachers with healthy self-esteem tend to be better equipped to rebound from failures and setbacks, viewing them as learning opportunities rather than personal shortcomings or flaws (Blouin, 2022; Orth & Robins, 2022; Zeigler-Hill, 2013).

5.2. High Teacher Efficacy and Positive Self-esteem

High efficacy tends to reflect a high level of self-esteem (Khan, Fleva, & Qazi, 2015). Therefore, teachers can raise their self-esteem by improving their perceived self-efficacy. There are six strategies that school leaders and professional learning facilitators can use to enhance teacher self-efficacy (Withy, 2019). First, teachers need to establish a philosophy of education, including the forms, goals, pedagogy, culture, and meaning of education. Second, they need to master content knowledge by integrating subject expertise and instruction of their subject area. Third, they need to demonstrate engagement from both their own and students' perspectives by acting as an educator-learner in the classroom, while displaying empathy toward their students' perspectives. Fourth, they should reflect on learning within different contexts both as an educator and an educator-learner. Fifth, they should examine deep-rooted perceptions and beliefs, and investigate how they might influence their own actions, and consequentially, construct students' identities as learners. Sixth, they need to develop pedagogic competence and self-efficacy in implementing strategies to produce desirable outcomes for students, including vicarious learning, mastery experience, social persuasion, and interpretation of emotional and physiological states. In sum, it is imperative to provide training and support to educators-learners to maximize their risk-taking opportunities and innovative problem-solving.

5.3. Ways to Raise Self-esteem

According to Winch (2016), teachers can improve their self-esteem in five ways. First, they should use positive affirmations appropriately, for instance, by asserting that they are going to be a great success or that they are going to persevere until they succeed. Second, they can enhance their core competencies to accentuate their self-esteem, for example, by displaying their authentic capability and career potential. Third, teachers should earn to accept compliments by preparing a simple set of responses and train

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themselves to use them automatically whenever they receive favorable feedback, for example, by saying, "How kind of you to say", which in turn, exudes a positive self-esteem. Fourth, they should strive to replace self-criticism with self-compassion. To eradicate their self-critical inner monologue, they can visualize telling someone what they would do in their shoes and reflect on the words. Lastly, teachers should affirm their real worth by listing their qualities that are uplifting in specific contexts, for example, by pinpointing their valuable attributes, why they are meritorious, and likely to be acknowledged by others before a promotional interview.

On the other hand, Morin (2021) suggested three ways for teachers to increase their self-esteem. First, they should evaluate the people around them and the physical environment by surrounding themselves with people and things that can enhance their self-esteem. Second, teachers should possess self-compassion to help them feel more positive about themselves by counteracting negative thoughts with kinder, more compassionate statements by changing their inner dialogue to shift their mindset. Third, teachers should be proactive by confidently taking action. Self-confidence helps change their mindset to become more assertive in attempting novel things, meeting different people, and challenging themselves for growth.

5.4. Four Strategies to Improve Self-esteem

According to Finley (2023), there are four strategies for novice and experienced teachers to improve their self-esteem by way of self-efficacy. First, teachers should cue themselves to feel confident, which can be achieved in several ways. Appropriate attire conveys confidence; hence, they should wear clothes that make them feel self-assured, for example, a tailored outfit. Since teachers take average of 10,000 steps per day, they should choose leather shoes. Besides, they should also consider wearing a "work uniform" instead of trying to match their outfit every morning. Second, teachers should use positive affirmations to replace critical self-talk, for example, by assuring themselves that they possess the self-assertiveness, ability, and passion to help students and themselves succeed. Cognitive cueing enables them to concentrate and persevere through minor and major trials and tribulations, which protects their self-image and increases their courage, self-efficacy, and intrinsic motivation. Besides, teachers should also practice voice training to develop a more dynamic and authoritative vocal range to maintain effective tone quality, control, and affective connection. Fourth, they should develop strong interpersonal relationships in the classroom; for example, they should always prompt students to disclose problems to provide constructive feedback and guidance, while increasing their credence. They can also ask questions out of authentic curiosity and concern to forge more favorable relationships, focusing more on emphatic conversion rather than telling and commanding.

5.5. Mindfulness, Lifelong Learning, Feedback, and Self-acceptance

Additionally, teachers can boost their self-efficacy, hence self-esteem, by practicing mindfulness, engaging in lifelong learning, soliciting feedback, and avoiding perfectionism (Finley, 2023). First, mindfulness enables them to focus on the present moment in an intentional and nonjudgmental manner. For example, box breathing through gentle inhaling, breath holding, and exhaling, can enhance their self-confidence, calm their nerves, and increase their concentration and self-awareness. Second, by underscoring lifelong development through educational research and learning from experts and peers, teachers can solidify their professionalism without comparing their

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knowledge and abilities with others. Third, they should elicit constructive feedback from students and peers to identify specific areas where they need additional training. By regarding feedback as a catalyst for professional growth, teachers can acquire novel skills or knowledge, which in turn, bolsters their instructional efficacy and self-esteem. Fourth, they should avoid perseverating on achieving idealized standards to avoid burnout and attrition. Besides gaining collaborative support, they need to develop resilience to generate innovative solutions to augment their self-assurance. They should also embrace the gray area where they are neither failures nor superhumans, but are professionals who are fashioning their lives in the educational realm, while striving to become more competent professionals every day. By consistently improving and developing their faith and conviction, they will ultimately develop the congruous mindset to address seemingly insurmountable problems and issues.

5.6. Practical Steps to Increase Self-esteem

According to Wiącek (2025), individuals who want to improve their self-esteem should enumerate the admired attributes, stop being a pleaser, abandon their comfort zone, and perform physical exercise. First, teachers should modify or challenge their defeatist perceptions of themselves. While they may be shy to highlight their commendable characteristics and values, acknowledging the favorable aspects of themselves can positivize their inner voice. Further, teachers should keep a gratitude journal that catalogues their capabilities and accomplishments, which can enhance their outlook, besides recognizing the things that they should be appreciative. Second, teachers should avoid saying “yes” to others all the time; instead, they should prioritize their own physical and mental health at work or in their personal life to avoid being overwhelmed or stressed out. While it is commendable to be helpful and generous, they should not associate their self-worth to how often they sacrifice for others. Third, teachers should challenge the unknown or self-doubt by accepting fresh challenges and novel opportunities to demonstrate that they can persevere through life's difficult or distressing moments. Fourth, teachers can augment their self-esteem by setting realistic fitness goals, which can release “happy” hormones, improve body image, and yield a sense of achievement.

Additionally, individuals can further boost their self-esteem by forgiving themselves for their dismissive perceptions, setting boundaries, volunteering, and displaying kindness and empathy (Wiącek, 2025). First, teachers should forgive themselves for “maltreating” themselves previously by acknowledging that they used to appraise themselves too harshly; this will increase their self-compassion, grit, and tenacity by allowing them to appraise themselves more positively and by developing a more robust and wholesome relationship with themselves. Second, teachers should set the boundaries in their personal and professional life by aligning them with their values, which enables them to assert internal locus of control, while avoiding manipulation and exploitation. Third, through volunteering, teachers often get an unparalleled opportunity to enhance their self-esteem via interacting with others and creating a meaningful existence. By contributing to their own community freely, they can gain a sense of purpose and perspective. By choosing causes that resonate with their values, whether it is sponsoring local charities, cleaning humane shelters, or mentoring youth, teachers are reminded of their inherent value and capacity to bring desirable outcomes. Fourth, by performing something propitious for others, teachers can boost their self-esteem. Small acts of kindness, for example, assisting persons with special needs, sending thoughtful

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messages, or offering sincere compliments can ripple off positivity, which not only makes others feel good, but also reinforces own sense of dignity, worth, and merit.

Celebrating small wins, letting go of contentious people, being mindful of the quality of positivity, auditing information sources, and avoiding needless comparison are other means to improve self-esteem (Wiącek, 2025). First, teachers need to acknowledge that successes manifest in varying degrees, and that all should be celebrated. By practicing unequivocal inner conversation and eliminating conflicting or dissenting thoughts, they can increase their self-assertiveness and feel more ascertained of their own abilities. Second, teachers should surround themselves with people who have a commendatory impact on their mood and perceptions. By avoiding people who constantly pinpoint their flaws, poke fun of their mishaps, or inflate them with self-doubt, teachers will feel more optimistic to face unpleasant situations, which enhances their perceived competence and efficacy. Third, teachers should welcome authentic encouragement and genuine support, which make them feel more affirmative and decisive about themselves. While confronting challenges and issues, they should also be expectant and progressive by soliciting realistic, compassionate guidance, while avoiding supercilious platitudes. Fourth, by periodically reviewing the media, relationships, and content that occupy their mental space, teachers can determine if a particular source makes them feel empowered or helpless. Lastly, instead of linking individual progress and self-worth to how well others are doing, teachers should accept that there will always be someone better at something than they; however, that does not reflect any personal inadequacy or flaws. While it is tempting to compare with or against others, they should remind themselves that most people tend reveal the most presentable or admirable aspects of their life in public. Instead of letting Facebook "likes" on their photos or posts dictate their self-worth, they should try establishing a healthy sense of self and become more autonomous without contending with anyone else.

5.7. Final Thought

To conclude, this study, while yielding some interesting results on teacher self-esteem in Sabah, has a few limitations that may affect generalizability of findings. The self-esteem questionnaire used in the research, while useful, poses some inherent weaknesses. Response bias could occur due to teachers' reluctance to respond truthfully and potential to experience survey fatigue, which could yield rushed or inaccurate responses. Further, sampling might pose a problem; obtaining a truly representative sample could be challenging, while non-response or low response rates could skew results, thus reducing the generalizability of findings. Besides, some teachers might regard self-esteem as a sensitive and personal issue and might be reluctant to answer questions honestly, thus leading to data inaccuracy. Though it has high reliability, the questionnaire might lack depth in terms of capturing the full complexity of teachers' opinions or experiences, especially on a nuanced topic like self-esteem. Moreover, the questionnaire could make teachers feel impersonal, thus leading to their lack of engagement and tendency to give inaccurate responses. Sabahan teachers tend to bear a heavy teaching load; hence, they might feel the need to invest a significant amount of time on the questionnaire, which could lead to decreased participation or hurried responses. Lastly, to increase generalizability of findings, future research on teacher self-esteem should employ a mix-method design that permits the concurrent collection of both quantitative and qualitative data to be analyzed separately, with results compared to identify convergence or divergence.

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Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study has strictly adhered to all ethical procedures involving the use of human subjects. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents who were ascertained of their anonymity, with their responses kept strictly private and confidential. They were also informed that the study was of low risk and that they could stop participating any time without any repercussions.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no potential conflict of interest regarding this study in terms of the research or publication of this article.

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