

**EDU WORLD 2022****Edu World International Conference Education Facing Contemporary World Issues****SELF-ACCEPTANCE AND DECISION-MAKING CAPACITY IN  
ADOLESCENCE**

Darie Nadina (a)\*

\*Corresponding Author

(a) University of Pitești, Târgul din Vale, 1, Pitești, Romania, despa.nadina@yahoo.com

**Abstract**

Self-acceptance is associated with psychological well-being and at the same time influences decision-making capacity. The main objective of the paper was to research the relationship between the level of self-acceptance of adolescents and the level of decisional capacity. The two hypotheses tested during the study were: self-acceptance and self-esteem which are positively correlated with an efficient decision-making process; there is a statistically significant difference in the level of unconditional acceptance between boys and girls. An experimental program, based on Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, was implemented for 90 students from a high school (Pitești, Romania). The results obtained at the end of the personal development program highlighted the significant increase in the values of the variables pursued, resulting in a significant increase in the level of the decisional capacity and the unconditional self-acceptance. Higher level of unconditional self-acceptance predicts higher level of decision-making capacity (Spearman's  $\rho = .425$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). The conclusion of this study shows that the personal development program proved to be effective, with significant differences between pre- and post-test scores.

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## 1. Introduction

Self-acceptance is a central topic in academic and popular psychological and educational discussions in relation with adolescence. A major developmental task facing the adolescent is that of acquiring a stable sense of identity (LaVoie, 1976). Self-acceptance is an important and is associated with psychological well-being (mental health) and at the same time influences decision making process. Early studies (Berger, 1952; Fey, 1955; Suinn & Hill, 1964) have focused on the relationship between self-acceptance and acceptance of others (attitudes towards others), while more recent studies have attempted to understand the association of unconditional self-acceptance with the well-being and the differentiation that occurs between self-acceptance and self-esteem (Bernard, 2013; Popov, 2019). The self-concept notion had been extensively studied and its role in personality theorizing. Rogers' theory (1951) put emphasis on self-acceptance, one aspect of the identifying a relation between an individual's self-acceptance and his acceptance of others. Rogers (1951) identifies the concept of unconditional self-acceptance, as an important tool not only for the psychotherapeutic process, but also for the growth and development. Social identity theory (Hogg, 2016) is relevant to understanding the relationship between unconditional self-acceptance and their acceptance of others (Day & Maltby, 2003). Accepting the other person does not mean that we like or approve everything that a certain person does, but that we make a distinction between liking or disliking a person's trait or behavior, and liking or disliking the person as an entity. There is a need of educating teachers to accept youth and adolescent with difficulties (such as autism) to be able to help them become aware of themselves (Folostina et al., 2022). Vulnerable groups such as children form the social protection system undergo several issues in accepting themselves and developing unconditional acceptance, such as hardly-adoptable children (Dumitru & Ghițulescu, 2019), or victims of bullying (Dumitru & Ciucă, 2019). Unconditional acceptance involves accepting the person with all his problems, accepting him as a whole, without this implying that we agree with his thoughts or behaviors. As human beings, we are all equally valuable.

### 1.1. Self-acceptance

Self-acceptance is defined by an accurate self-attitude that ease the process of self-evaluation of strengths and limits of one's personality, in order to accept them as a part of personal identity (Neff, 2003). Self-acceptance is very closely related to the feeling towards oneself. In its most fundamental sense, self-acceptance is associated with an attitude of self-worth and commitment to oneself, an attitude that is rooted in the fact that I am alive and aware. Thus, self-acceptance is, in a certain sense, accordingly to Branden (1994) more primitive, than self-esteem. It is a pre-rational, pre-moral act of self-assertion, a kind of natural selfishness given to every human being by birth, although we all have the power to act in defiance of it. Self-acceptance of a person gives him a sense of integrity and consistency, harmony and autonomy, independence from the social environment. Self-acceptance is both an act of self-knowledge and a mechanism for self-development., and it can be supported by a strong connection by parents and by peers (Constantinescu et al., 2017).

## **1.2. Self-esteem**

What is self-esteem and what is the difference between self-acceptance and self-esteem? Self-esteem is what we feel, self-acceptance is what we do. If you use the method of denial, then self-acceptance is my refusal to be at enmity with myself. Neff (2003) identified several critics of using self-esteem as a primary measure of psychological health. Self-esteem is a construct that helps us dealing with self-acceptance, as self-esteem represents a subjective assessment of oneself, which can be misevaluated positive or negative (Sedikides, 1993). Studies identified that self-esteem is associated with positive mental health and highlight the impact of self-esteem in physical and mental health as a protective or a risk factor (Mann et al., 2004). Other studies identified self-esteem as the most dominant and powerful predictor of happiness (Furnham & Cheng, 2000), self-esteem correlates with lower levels of emotional distress (Sedikides et al., 2004) being a predictor of depression later in life (Shin, 1993). According to the findings of several studied self-esteem is perceived as a protective factor towards confrontation with various personal and social issues, and programs that develop and stimulate self-esteem are promoted in education, mental health, labor sectors (Baumeister et al., 2003). However, further studies need to be done to bring evidence for the efficacy of these programs' implementation. (Baumeister et al., 2003).

## **1.3. Decision-making capacity**

The Self is expressed in our ability to make and take decisions (Branden, 1994), and a good self-esteem increase the ability to make quick and well-informed decisions. Positive and realistic self-esteem increases the ability to make responsible decisions and the ability to cope with peer pressure (Redish, 2013). Lifelong learning, personal development, decisions, job choice, development and career advancement are some of the main alternatives that young people and adults need to deal with by making rational and responsible decisions. Decision making is central to many learning and professional activities. To a large extent, success in various fields depends on building the ability to make decisions. In psychology, decision-making involves various conceptualizations, being described as a cognitive process, a process of identifying alternatives, or a dynamic and rational process of choosing a line of action or the ability to solve a problem. The decision-making process is also described as a process of identifying and selecting alternatives, depending on the value orientations and preferences of the decision-makers.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Theoretical analysis showed that self-acceptance and self-esteem have an impact on the decision-making capacity. Adolescence is a vulnerable age for consolidating self-acceptance and self-esteem and a personal development program with focus on self-acceptance and on boosting self-esteem impacts the decisional efficiency of them. It is well-known that at this age, adolescents have to make several decisions regarding their professional development, their future direction of training and also various decisions with regards to personal life. The exercises proposed, in the framework of the present research, represent a real opportunity for adolescents to engage in several activities and exercises to better understand themselves, to analyze and to get in touch with parts of their personality that they were not aware of, to understand the implications of their behaviors on those with whom they interact, to practice and develop various personal

skills, to be able to express feelings and thoughts that they do not usually express, to desensitize themselves to certain situations or to be able to talk about certain feelings or events, to be able to get over certain personal blockages encountered in daily life, to improve certain problem behaviors, to identify certain strategies that could help them in solving personal problems.

### **3. Research Questions**

Based on the theoretical framework and problem statement, our study aimed to test the following hypothesis:

- i. Self-acceptance and self-esteem are positively correlated with an efficient decision-making process.
- ii. There is a statistically significant difference in the level of unconditional acceptance between boys and girls.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the study was to determine the degree of unconditional self-acceptance and the decision-making capacity of adolescents in the 10th grade from a high school from Pitești; to elaborate a personal development program that could impact self-acceptance and self-esteem; to study the effectiveness of the personal development program on increasing the degree of unconditional self-acceptance, self-esteem and decision-making capacity in adolescents.

### **5. Research Methods**

Based on the objectives and on the hypothesis posed during the research, it was used the following instruments: The Unconditional Self-Acceptance Questionnaire (USAQ) (Chamberlain & Haaga, 2001) and the Test of Decisional Capacity from Cognitrom Assessment System Case Testing (Miclea & Cognitrom Group, 2009). The research was organized on the implementation of an experiment, where a six-session personal development program for adolescents was implemented. The program was run as a group counselling activity, once a week, from October to December 2017. Prior to the start of the research, the students and their parents were informed about the objectives of the study, and the consent of the parents regarding the participation of minor students in the study was obtained.

The USAQ, based on Albert Ellis's theory of unconditional acceptance (2005), contains 20 items which provide a valid tool to assess the level of unconditional self-acceptance, and it was validated for adolescents as well. The decision-making test aims to assess the decision-maker's rationality, which means minimizing sensitivity to decision biases (strategies used to make decisions without accurately analyzing all information about the situation). The test includes 14 items that describe situations for decision-making and present the alternatives that participants can select. The two questionnaires were administered in pencil-paper version, in groups of 15 participants. The questionnaires were administered without time limit.

Experimental program consisted of 11 psychological counseling groups with the objective to develop unconditional acceptance and increase self-esteem level, based on Rational Emotive Behavior

Therapy (Ellis, 2005), comprising workshops on reducing negative feelings, fear of trying, fear of judgement, and increasing self-monitoring skills, self-care, resilience, communication skills etc. Students had opportunities for a better knowledge and interconnection, to facilitate adaptation and integration within a group, to develop expressive, authentic communication skills.

The research was comparative and cross-cutting and is based on the implementation of a personal development and optimization program to 90 adolescents from the 10th grade of a high school from Pitești, Romania. The gender was equally distributed for the two groups, experimental and control groups (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Participants' socio-demographic data

Variable	n = 90 (%)
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	46.7
Male	53.3
<i>Age</i>	
15	14.4
16	73.3
17	12.2

## 6. Findings

Descriptive statistics of the results were performed to determine the level of unconditional acceptance among high school students included in the group of participants (n = 90). As we can see arithmetic mean at the level of unconditional acceptance before the personal development program (M=80,26) is lower than the arithmetic means for the degree of unconditional acceptance after the personal development program (M=98). Also, the arithmetic mean of the decision-making capacity of high school students (M=4.45) before the personal development program is lower than the arithmetic means of the decision-making capacity (M=6.12) at the end of the experimental program (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics on the degree of unconditional acceptance and of the level of decision-making capacity

Variable	Mean		SD	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	
USA Q	80,26	98	13,69	10,95
Decision-making capacity	4.45	6.12	1.29	1.15

The scores of the two variables the level of acceptance and the decision-making capacity were correlated using some statistical tests using SPSS version 24. The correlational analysis served as a tool to examine the relationships between the level of acceptance and the decision-making capacity of male participants (Table 3) and female participants (Table 4).

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics on the degree of unconditional acceptance (for male participants)

	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
USA Q Pretest	.123	42	.113	.950	42	.064
USA Q Posttest	.183	42	.001	.886	42	.001*

\*Note: Correlation is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics on the degree of unconditional acceptance (for male participants)

	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
USA Q Pretest	.162	48	.003	.955	48	.064
USA Q Posttest	.117	48	.097	.970	48	.259

\*Note: Correlation is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level

The results show that there is no significant difference in the results of unconditional self-acceptance based on gender. The scores for the USA Q posttest show a significant difference for the male participants.

Independent Samples Tests was performed to identify differences among the demographic characteristics of the participants on the factors of unconditional self-acceptance. The results of Independent Samples Tests show no statistically significant differences ( $p = .985$ , for  $p < 0.05$ ), thus the first research hypothesis was not confirmed, the null hypothesis is confirmed: (there are no statistically significant differences in the level of unconditional acceptance between male and female participants).

For the second hypothesis, a non-parametric Spearman test was applied, to identify the correlation between unconditional acceptance and decision-making capacity. The results are shown below (Table 5).

**Table 5.** The correlation matrix between unconditional acceptance and decision-making capacity after experimental program

		USA Q Posttest	Decision-making Posttest
USA Q Posttest	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.425**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.00
	N	90	90
Spearman's rho Decision-making Posttest	Correlation Coefficient	.425**	1.00
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.
	N	90	90

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There is a statistically significant positive correlation between the variable's unconditional acceptance of one's own person and decision-making capacity after the implementation of the personal development program (Spearman's rho = .425;  $p < 0.01$ ), in the sense that in students whose level of unconditional acceptance increased, the level of decision-making capacity has also increased for those students. The second research hypothesis was confirmed.

The results of this study showed that among high school students, the level of self-acceptance correlates positively with the level of decision-making capacity, which means that if the degree of self-

acceptance increases, so will the level of decision-making capacity. Regarding the investigation of the level of self-acceptance of students, based on the hypothesis that the level of self-acceptance will increase if the adolescent takes part actively in a personal development program, based on Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, Ellis (2005). It emerged from the statistical processing of the data that the adolescents taking part in the personal development program have a higher level of self-acceptance and, implicitly, of decision-making capacity. Regarding the investigation of a certain connection between the level of self-acceptance and the level of decision-making capacity, in the 10th grade students, based on the hypothesis that there is a direct and significant correlation between these variables, the study findings show that adolescents with a high self-acceptance level, also have a high level of decision-making ability. Regarding the investigation of gender differences in the level of self-acceptance or decision-making capacity, the hypothesis has not been confirmed, therefore, there are no significant differences between boys and girls on self-acceptance. A personal development program, based on non-formal educational methods (Dumitru, 2018) can impact the self-acceptance and decision-making process for adolescents, due to its support in the learning process, in becoming more self-aware of their potential, issues mostly uncovered by the traditional educational activities done during high school period.

## 7. Conclusions

The research was an attempt to investigate aspects of the development of self-acceptance during adolescence, taking into account several variables according to the theoretical framework with regards to self-construction and the decision-making process. Through the specificity of decision-making process, adolescence comes with the need for students to reflect on their own identity, implying preoccupations for self-knowledge, self-definition, self-acceptation. This increased preoccupation towards personal identity, self-acceptance, self-esteem materializes in the adoption of important decisions related to the choice of the subsequent educational path, to the professional options, to the social status, even to the design of one's own way of life. The aim of the research was to show that there is a link between unconditional self-acceptance and the ability to make decisions for adolescents and that, and that, after stimulating adolescents with a personal development program, the level of unconditional acceptance of oneself increases, which also leads to an increase in the level of decision-making capacity (based on Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, Ellis (2005)). The research findings show that if the level of unconditional self-acceptance increases, the level of decision-making capacity increases as well. The objectives of the research were achieved, and the confirmation of the second research hypothesis show that there is a positive correlation between the two variables: the level of unconditional acceptance of one's own person and the level of decision-making capacity.

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