

An Integrative Conceptual Model of Adolescent Self-Concept Development in Malaysian Boarding Schools

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence represents a critical developmental stage in which individuals construct a coherent and stable sense of self through continuous interaction with their social environment. In structured educational settings such as Malaysian boarding schools (Maktab Rendah Sains MARA, MRSM), adolescents are exposed to intensive academic and social demands that may significantly shape their self-concept development. Despite extensive empirical attention to adolescent development, existing studies remain fragmented, often examining parenting style, peer relationships and teacher support in isolation rather than within an integrated framework. This article proposes an integrative conceptual model of adolescent self-concept development within the MRSM context, grounded in a synthesis of quantitative and qualitative findings from a mixed-method study. The model conceptualizes self-concept as a psychological structure that develops through a meaning-making process, where adolescents interpret and integrate social experiences derived from three primary social ecosystems: family, peers, and teachers. These interactions contribute to the development of key psychological attributes, including self-confidence, emotional regulation, coping strategies and identity awareness. Importantly, the model introduces school counseling services as a systemic support mechanism that regulates and strengthens this developmental process through structured intervention, guidance and reflective support. By positioning counseling as a regulatory layer within the broader educational ecosystem, the model extends existing literature beyond fragmented perspectives and offers a more comprehensive understanding of adolescent development in residential school environments. The proposed framework provides significant implications for educational practice and counseling interventions aimed at promoting adolescents' psychological well-being and self-concept development.

Keywords: Adolescent self-concept, parenting style, peer attachment, teacher support, school counseling, social ecosystem, adolescent development

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is widely recognized as a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid cognitive, emotional and social changes that shape identity formation and psychological well-being (Sawyer et al., 2022). Central to this developmental process is self-concept, which refers to individuals' perceptions and evaluations of themselves across multiple domains (Rogers, 1959; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). Contemporary longitudinal evidence further identifies adolescence as a formative period for self-concept development, during which self-evaluations become increasingly differentiated and contribute to greater self-concept clarity over time (Van der Cruijsen et al., 2023).

Concerns regarding adolescent psychological well-being have intensified globally and within Malaysia. National evidence indicates that approximately one in six children experience mental health-related difficulties, including emotional distress, behavioral problems, and challenges in peer relationships (Institute for Public Health, 2023). These concerns reflect the psychosocial pressures adolescents may encounter while adapting to academic expectations and social demands (World Health Organization, 2021), highlighting the importance of understanding developmental processes associated with their self-concept.

Within educational contexts, particularly residential schools, adolescents are embedded in highly structured and socially intensive environments where interactions with significant others form an important part of their daily experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In Malaysia, students in Maktab Rendah Sains MARA (MRSM) navigate rigorous academic demands alongside sustained engagement with peers, teachers and institutional expectations. Such environments provide a distinctive context for examining self-concept development (Eccles & Roeser, 2011).

Existing literature highlights the importance of key social agents in adolescent development, particularly parents, peers and teachers (Bandura, 1977). Parenting provides foundational socialization experiences (Baumrind, 1991), peer relationships offer contexts for acceptance, belonging and social validation (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), while teachers provide guidance, encouragement and interpersonal support within educational settings (Wentzel, 2012). Contemporary research similarly indicates that adolescent self-concept is responsive to multiple social and environmental influences across family, peer and school contexts (Paskova & Ďuricová, 2024).

Despite substantial empirical attention to these influences, they have often been examined separately, limiting understanding of how adolescents' experiences across multiple relational contexts can be integrated within a coherent developmental framework. There remains a need for an integrative conceptual perspective that explains how adolescents interpret experiences across family, peer and educational environments, particularly within structured residential-school settings.

Addressing this gap, the present article proposes an integrative conceptual model of adolescent self-concept development within Malaysian residential schools (MRSM), developed by integrating quantitative and qualitative findings from a mixed-method study. The model brings together parenting style, peer attachment, and teacher support as interconnected relational contexts, while positioning school counseling as a systemic and facilitative support mechanism within the broader educational environment. In doing so, it provides a contextually grounded framework for understanding adolescent self-concept development within residential schooling.

Guided by the identified theoretical and empirical gaps, this article addresses the following research questions:

1. How do parenting style, peer attachment and teacher support contribute to adolescent self-concept development within the context of Malaysian residential schools?
2. How can the influences of family, peers and teachers be conceptually integrated to explain adolescent self-concept development across interconnected social environments?
3. How can school counseling be conceptualized as a systemic and facilitative support mechanism within an integrative model of adolescent self-concept development?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-Concept In Adolescence

Self-concept is a multidimensional construct reflecting individuals' beliefs, perceptions and evaluations of themselves across different domains of functioning (Rogers, 1959; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). Rather than remaining static, self-concept develops through ongoing self-evaluation and becomes increasingly differentiated during adolescence as individuals interpret experiences across personal and social contexts (Van der Crujisen et al., 2023; Paskova & Ďuricová, 2024). A coherent and positive self-concept is important for psychological adjustment, with longitudinal evidence indicating that more positive self-evaluations contribute to greater self-concept clarity over time (Van der Crujisen et al., 2023).

Adolescence represents a critical developmental period during which both self-concept and personality undergo important changes. Although related, these constructs are conceptually distinct and should not be used interchangeably. Personality refers to relatively characteristic patterns in how individuals think, feel, and

behave, whereas self-concept concerns the beliefs, perceptions, and evaluations individuals hold about themselves. Personality traits may therefore contribute to how adolescents define and evaluate themselves without constituting self-concept itself. Longitudinal research has examined personality traits and self-concept clarity as distinct constructs (de Moor et al., 2023), while Big Five personality traits have also been shown to predict dimensions of adolescent self-concept (Paskova & Ďuricová, 2024). Within the present model, self-concept—not personality—is the central developmental construct, referring specifically to how adolescents understand and evaluate themselves in relation to their experiences.

From a developmental perspective, Erikson's psychosocial theory identifies adolescence as the stage of identity versus role confusion, during which individuals engage in self-reflection and identity exploration to establish a coherent sense of self (Erikson, 1968). Adolescents also develop greater awareness of their strengths, limitations and personal values, contributing to their evolving self-evaluations (Harter, 2012). Contemporary longitudinal evidence similarly demonstrates developmental changes in self-evaluations across multiple domains during adolescence (Van der Cruisen et al., 2023).

Self-concept development occurs within multiple social environments that provide adolescents with ongoing relational experiences and feedback. Family, peer and educational contexts contribute to how adolescents perceive their abilities, social roles and personal worth (Bandura, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Supportive parenting, peer acceptance and teacher encouragement may contribute to more adaptive self-perceptions (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Baumrind, 1991; Wentzel, 2012), while contemporary research similarly recognizes the relevance of family relationships, peer interactions, school experiences and broader sociocultural contexts to adolescent self-concept (Paskova & Ďuricová, 2024).

Within structured educational environments such as residential schools, adolescents simultaneously navigate academic demands, social relationships and institutional expectations, creating sustained contexts for self-evaluation and identity development (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Self-concept is associated with students' motivation, engagement and adjustment within educational environments (Marsh & Martin, 2011). In residential settings, continuous interactions with peers, teachers and institutional structures may therefore provide particularly salient experiences through which adolescents develop and refine their understanding of themselves.

Despite substantial research on adolescent development, social influences are often examined separately rather than as interconnected relational experiences. An integrative perspective is therefore needed to explain how experiences across family, peer and educational contexts collectively contribute to adolescent self-concept development. Such a perspective provides the conceptual foundation for examining parenting style, peer attachment and teacher support as interconnected relational contexts within the proposed model.

Malaysian Sociocultural Context of Adolescent Development

Adolescent development is embedded within sociocultural systems of values and norms that shape how young people interpret themselves and their relationships with significant others. This is particularly relevant in Malaysia, where family and social relationships operate within a multicultural yet relatively collectivist context that emphasizes interpersonal connectedness, family relationships, and social harmony.

Within Malaysian families, parenting practices may carry culturally specific meanings that cannot be interpreted solely through frameworks developed in Western individualistic societies. Culturally grounded research indicates that Malaysian parenting incorporates dimensions associated with interdependence, family relationships, parental authority, and religious and cultural values, underscoring the importance of contextualizing parenting constructs within local sociocultural meanings (Zulkefly et al., 2021). Research involving Malaysian adolescents similarly demonstrates the relevance of parenting styles within a collectivist cultural setting and the importance of cultural context when interpreting parent–adolescent relationships (Ho & Jaafar, 2022).

Cultural influences also extend to adolescents' broader social and emotional experiences. Evidence from Malaysian parents and teachers suggests that the expression of social and emotional competencies may be shaped by culturally embedded expectations concerning interpersonal relationships, emotional expression and

socially appropriate behaviour (Abd Hadi et al., 2023). Recent research involving Malaysian adolescents further highlights the interconnected roles of family relationships, peer interactions, academic demands and culturally shaped emotional expectations in their psychosocial experiences (Mohd Hasni et al., 2025). Thus, experiences across family, peer and educational contexts should be understood as relational experiences embedded within broader sociocultural expectations rather than as culturally neutral influences.

This perspective is particularly relevant within Malaysian residential schools such as MRSM, where adolescents maintain family relationships while engaging intensively with peers, teachers and the wider school community. Experiences of parental expectations, peer belonging, teacher guidance and institutional support may therefore acquire meaning through both the immediate residential-school environment and the broader sociocultural context in which adolescents have been socialized. Accordingly, the proposed model positions the Malaysian sociocultural context as an interpretive lens rather than a separate causal variable, recognizing that parenting, peer attachment and teacher support may be experienced and interpreted within culturally situated relational contexts.

Parenting Style and Adolescent Self-Concept

Parenting style represents a fundamental context for adolescents' psychological and social development by shaping early socialization experiences through which values, beliefs and behavioral patterns develop (Baumrind, 1971, 1991). Parents create an emotional and relational environment that influences how adolescents perceive themselves and their roles in relation to others (Durbin et al., 1993). Baumrind conceptualized parenting style through variations in parental responsiveness and demandingness, commonly reflected in authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive typologies (Baumrind, 1971, 1991).

Parenting style has been associated with adolescents' emotional, behavioral and psychosocial development across cultural contexts (Pinquart, 2021). Authoritative parenting, characterized by high responsiveness and appropriate behavioral control, is generally associated with favorable outcomes, including self-confidence, emotional regulation, prosocial behavior and psychological well-being (Steinberg, 2001; Harter, 2012; Carlo et al., 2018). Recent evidence similarly associates parental warmth, involvement and supportive parenting practices with more favorable adolescent adjustment (Bačíková-Šlěšková & Janovská, 2024). Such relational experiences may contribute to positive self-evaluations and a more coherent self-concept.

In contrast, authoritarian parenting, characterized by greater control and lower emotional responsiveness, has been associated with less favorable developmental outcomes in various contexts (Baumrind, 1991; Pinquart & Gerke, 2019), while permissive parenting may present challenges for behavioral regulation and adjustment (Baumrind, 1991; Garcia & Serra, 2019). Parenting characterized by rejection, excessive control, or negative interaction patterns has likewise been associated with poorer behavioral and psychological outcomes (Wang et al., 2024). However, parental control, authority and responsiveness should not be assumed to carry culturally uniform meanings or developmental implications.

This qualification is particularly relevant in Malaysia, where parenting occurs within a relatively collectivist context emphasizing interdependence, family relationships, parental authority and culturally or religiously informed socialization. Culturally grounded research demonstrates that locally meaningful parenting includes dimensions that may not be fully represented by frameworks developed primarily in Western contexts (Zulkefly et al., 2021). Research involving Malaysian adolescents also supports the relevance of Baumrind's parenting typologies while emphasizing the importance of interpreting parent-adolescent relationships within their cultural setting (Ho & Jaafar, 2022). Thus, similar parenting behaviors may acquire different relational meanings across sociocultural contexts.

Parental influence continues throughout adolescence through interactions, communication and emotional support that contribute to adolescents' perceptions of their competence, value and identity (Steinberg, 2001; Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017). Warmth, consistent guidance and open communication may support self-worth and adaptive psychosocial development, whereas rejecting or unsupportive relationships may contribute to less adaptive self-perceptions (Bi et al., 2018; Sahithya et al., 2019). Maternal and paternal parenting should also be considered within the broader family system, as their patterns of interaction may contribute differently to

adolescent developmental outcomes (Wang et al., 2024).

Parenting also operates alongside other social influences within adolescents' broader ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Values, behavioral norms and relational patterns may be transmitted across generations and contribute to adolescents' developing orientations and self-evaluations (Peterson & Rollins, 1987). This continuing family influence is particularly relevant in boarding-school contexts, where reduced daily parental contact coincides with greater immersion in peer and school relationships (Zhang et al., 2026). For Malaysian adolescents in residential schools, family values and expectations may therefore remain an important interpretive frame even as peer and institutional experiences become increasingly salient.

From an integrative perspective, parenting style represents a culturally embedded relational context through which adolescents encounter formative experiences that contribute to their developing understanding and evaluation of themselves. Its influence operates alongside peer attachment and teacher support rather than in isolation, positioning parenting within the proposed model as one component of an interconnected system of relational experiences contributing to adolescent self-concept development.

Peer Attachment and Adolescent Self-Concept

Peer relationships become increasingly salient during adolescence as individuals expand their social engagement beyond family-centered interactions and develop meaningful relationships with peers. This transition reflects adolescents' growing need for acceptance, belonging and emotional support, positioning peer relationships as an important context for psychosocial development (Laursen & Hartl, 2021). Peer attachment refers to emotional bonds characterized by trust, communication and closeness, providing adolescents with experiences of social acceptance, emotional security and interpersonal connection (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).

Grounded in attachment theory, supportive interpersonal relationships function as a "secure base" that facilitates emotional exploration, identity development and adaptive functioning (Bowlby, 1988). During adolescence, peers increasingly become important sources of validation, understanding and emotional support alongside family relationships. Contemporary research further demonstrates associations between attachment relationships, resilience and coping processes that support adolescents in navigating social and emotional challenges (Godor et al., 2024).

High-quality peer relationships are associated with positive developmental outcomes, including greater self-confidence, emotional adjustment and psychological well-being (Laible et al., 2000; Wang et al., 2018). Interactions characterized by trust, communication and acceptance can reinforce belonging and self-worth while contributing to prosocial development through empathy, cooperation and social competence (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2016). Stronger peer attachment has also been associated with adaptive emotional regulation, particularly cognitive reappraisal (Muntamah & Pratama, 2025). Conversely, rejection, exclusion and peer pressure are associated with lower self-esteem, emotional distress and maladaptive behavioral tendencies (Rubin et al., 2006; McGloin & Thomas, 2019). Recent qualitative evidence similarly indicates that peer acceptance may enhance belonging and self-worth, whereas rejection and negative interactions are associated with loneliness, lower self-esteem and concerns about social acceptance (Montecillo et al., 2024). Together, these contrasting relational experiences may contribute to how adolescents perceive and evaluate themselves.

The significance of peer experiences should also be understood within their sociocultural context. Malaysian evidence indicates that social and emotional development is embedded within culturally shaped expectations concerning interpersonal relationships, socially appropriate behavior and relational harmony (Abd Hadi et al., 2023). Local qualitative evidence further highlights the importance of peer-group dynamics, belonging and social inclusion, alongside the emotional and social consequences of exclusion and negative peer interactions (Assom & Mohd Noor, 2024). These findings position peer attachment as a culturally embedded relational experience through which acceptance, belonging and interpersonal feedback acquire meaning within adolescents' broader social environment.

Peer relationships also contribute to self-development through social comparison and behavioral modeling.

Social comparison enables adolescents to evaluate aspects of themselves relative to others (Festinger, 1954), while social learning processes involve acquiring behaviors, values and attitudes through observing significant others, including peers (Bandura, 1986). Repeated experiences of comparison, feedback and interaction may therefore provide social information that contributes to adolescents' developing understanding and evaluation of themselves.

Within residential schools such as MRSM, prolonged academic, residential and social interaction creates sustained opportunities for peer feedback, social comparison, emotional support and interpersonal influence. These interactions occur within a broader Malaysian sociocultural environment in which interpersonal connectedness and group relationships may carry particular significance (Abd Hadi et al., 2023). Peers may therefore function as significant socializing agents within the residential-school environment, contributing to adolescents' social adjustment and self-perceptions.

From an integrative perspective, peer attachment represents a culturally embedded relational context operating alongside parenting experiences and teacher support. Within the proposed model, peer experiences of acceptance, belonging, feedback and social evaluation contribute to the interconnected relational processes through which adolescent self-concept develops.

Teacher Support and Adolescent Self-Concept

Teachers represent important adult figures within adolescents' educational environments, with roles extending beyond instructional responsibilities to include guidance, encouragement and emotional support. Teacher support refers to students' perceptions of their teachers as caring, responsive, encouraging and accessible, and has been associated with students' academic engagement, emotional well-being and broader developmental experiences (Malecki & Demaray, 2003; Wentzel, 2012). Through everyday interactions, teachers provide adolescents with interpersonal experiences and feedback that may contribute to how they perceive their competencies, social roles and personal value within the educational environment.

Supportive teacher–student relationships provide an important relational context for adolescents' psychological and academic adjustment. When students perceive their teachers as supportive and approachable, they are more likely to experience competence, relatedness and belonging within the learning environment (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Contemporary evidence reinforces these associations, with supportive student–teacher relationships linked to more favorable self-esteem, emotional health and academic outcomes (Podiyya et al., 2025). Conversely, negative or unsupportive teacher–student interactions have been associated with emotional distress, disengagement and poorer psychosocial adjustment (Malecki et al., 2000; Rudasill et al., 2010; Wentzel, 2012; Longobardi et al., 2018). Longitudinal evidence further indicates that teacher–student conflict may have implications for subsequent student well-being, including physical complaints and social difficulties (Saxer et al., 2025). Together, these findings suggest that the quality of teacher–student relationships may contribute to adolescents' developmental experiences beyond academic instruction alone.

Teacher support may take various forms, including academic encouragement, constructive feedback, emotional understanding and recognition of students' efforts. These practices can foster an environment in which adolescents feel accepted, respected and psychologically safe to participate, express themselves and seek guidance (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Recent large-scale evidence indicates that adolescents who perceive stronger teacher support report a greater sense of school belonging (Elizondo-González et al., 2025). Teacher support has also been associated with adolescents' emotional outcomes both directly and indirectly through school belonging (Chen et al., 2025). Such experiences of support, recognition and belonging may provide adolescents with social information through which they evaluate their competence and position within the school community.

The meaning of teacher support should also be considered within the sociocultural context in which teacher–student relationships are embedded. Malaysian evidence suggests that adolescents' social and emotional development occurs within culturally situated expectations concerning interpersonal relationships, socially appropriate behavior and relational responsibilities (Abd Hadi et al., 2023). Experiences of teacher guidance, feedback and support may therefore acquire meaning within broader cultural understandings of adult guidance,

interpersonal relationships and appropriate social conduct. This does not imply that teacher support is experienced uniformly by Malaysian adolescents, but highlights the importance of interpreting teacher–student relationships within their broader social and cultural context.

Teachers may also influence adolescents through social learning processes. Behaviors, attitudes and interpersonal patterns displayed by significant adults provide models that adolescents can observe and interpret within their social environments (Bandura, 1977). Through repeated interactions, teacher feedback, expectations and responses become part of the social information available to adolescents as they evaluate themselves and their position within the school environment. Teacher support can therefore be understood as an ongoing relational process through which adolescents encounter social cues that may contribute to the construction and refinement of self-concept.

Within residential school environments such as MRSM, teacher support may become particularly salient because students spend extended periods within a structured institutional and communal environment. Residential students encounter distinctive social, emotional and educational demands as they adapt to structured routines, greater independence and sustained interactions within the school community (Azad, 2024). Teachers may consequently serve as accessible adult figures who provide ongoing academic guidance, interpersonal feedback and emotional support. Within the Malaysian sociocultural context, these sustained interactions are embedded within broader social expectations and institutional norms (Abd Hadi et al., 2023), positioning teacher support as part of a culturally situated educational environment in which adolescents develop and interpret their social experiences.

School counseling complements teacher support by providing a distinct layer of structured and professional assistance. Existing literature highlights the developmental value of comprehensive school counseling programs for students' academic, behavioral and psychosocial outcomes (Stone & Dahir, 2006; Lapan et al., 2007; Buchanan et al., 2017), while more recent evidence emphasizes the importance of supportive school environments that enable adolescents to express concerns and access counseling services (Podiyya et al., 2025). Whereas teachers provide continuous relational experiences through everyday educational interactions, counselors provide more specialized psychosocial support within the broader school system.

From an integrative perspective, teacher support is conceptualized in the proposed model as a culturally embedded relational context operating alongside parenting style and peer attachment. Through guidance, feedback, recognition and everyday interpersonal interactions, teachers provide relational experiences that adolescents may interpret and integrate into their developing understanding of themselves. School counseling, in contrast, functions as a distinct systemic and facilitative layer of professional support. This distinction positions teacher support as one of the three primary relational contexts contributing to adolescent self-concept development while preserving the complementary but conceptually different role of school counseling within the broader educational environment.

School Counseling Support as A Systemic Influence on Adolescent Self-Concept

In contemporary educational settings, school counseling services function as a professional support system that complements teachers' academic and interpersonal roles by providing structured assistance for students' emotional, behavioral, and psychosocial needs. Together, these complementary forms of support contribute to a broader developmental environment that facilitates adolescents' adjustment and well-being.

School counseling is conceptualized as a professional helping relationship aimed at assisting individuals in understanding themselves, managing personal challenges, and achieving optimal psychological functioning (Stone & Dahir, 2006; Lapan et al., 2007). Its functions encompass individual and group counseling, preventive and developmental interventions, and psychosocial support. Contemporary perspectives further emphasize mental health education, early intervention and resilience-building as important components of school counselors' expanding roles in addressing adolescents' diverse psychosocial needs (Atumba et al., 2025). School counseling therefore extends beyond responding to existing concerns to supporting students' self-awareness, coping capacities and broader psychosocial development.

Empirical evidence indicates that school counseling can contribute positively to adolescents' psychological and developmental adjustment, although outcomes vary according to intervention, implementation and context. School counseling programs have been associated with improvements across academic, behavioral and psychosocial domains (Sink & Stroh, 2003; Buchanan et al., 2017). A randomized controlled trial further demonstrated that adding school-based humanistic counseling to pastoral care produced a small but significant reduction in adolescents' psychological distress, with benefits persisting after counseling ended (Cooper et al., 2021). More recent review evidence indicates mixed overall effectiveness across school- and community-based counseling studies, although such services remain highly valued by young people, teachers and parents (Copeland et al., 2024). These findings highlight the importance of considering both intervention outcomes and how counseling is implemented within the wider school support system.

From a developmental perspective, counseling may facilitate adolescents' meaning-making of social experiences by providing structured opportunities for reflection and emotional exploration. Through these processes, adolescents can examine experiences arising from family, peer and school relationships and consider their significance for their understanding of themselves. This is consistent with social learning and individual psychology perspectives, which recognize individuals as active interpreters of social experiences and the meanings attached to them (Bandura, 1977; Adler, 2014). Counseling may therefore provide a reflective mechanism through which relational experiences are processed and integrated into adolescents' evolving self-understanding.

The facilitative role of school counseling should also be understood within adolescents' sociocultural context. Malaysian evidence indicates that social and emotional experiences are embedded within culturally situated expectations concerning interpersonal relationships, emotional expression and socially appropriate behavior (Abd Hadi et al., 2023). Research involving Malaysian adolescents further highlights the interconnected roles of family relationships, peer pressures, academic demands and culturally shaped patterns of emotional regulation in their psychosocial experiences (Mohd Hasni et al., 2025). Counseling support should therefore remain sensitive to the relational and sociocultural meanings adolescents attach to their experiences, providing opportunities to interpret these experiences within their broader social context.

Within residential school environments such as MRSMS, counselors operate amid sustained academic, interpersonal and institutional experiences. They are positioned to provide accessible psychosocial support, identify emerging concerns and implement preventive, developmental and targeted interventions. Contemporary perspectives similarly emphasize prevention, early intervention and coordinated support as important aspects of school counseling for adolescent mental health and well-being (Atumba et al., 2025). In the Malaysian residential-school context, these functions occur alongside adolescents' continuing family and cultural influences, intensive peer relationships, teacher expectations and institutional demands, requiring counseling support that remains responsive to interconnected relational and contextual experiences.

From an integrative perspective, school counseling is conceptualized as a systemic support mechanism rather than a fourth primary relational influence equivalent to parenting, peers or teachers. Parents, peers and teachers provide direct relational contexts through which adolescents experience socialization, feedback and interpersonal relationships, whereas counseling offers a structured professional space for reflecting upon and processing these experiences. This positioning is consistent with contemporary evidence that counseling should be understood within the wider complexity of the educational system rather than as an isolated service (Copeland et al., 2024), requiring connection with broader school structures, referral pathways and relevant stakeholders.

Accordingly, within the proposed model, school counseling functions as a systemic, facilitative and culturally responsive support layer that assists adolescents in reflecting upon and integrating experiences arising from their primary relational environments. Parenting, peer attachment and teacher support constitute key sources of relational experience, while counseling provides structured opportunities for psychosocial support and adaptive meaning-making. Through this complementary role, school counseling may facilitate the processes through which adolescents develop a more coherent understanding and evaluation of themselves.

Theoretical Propositions

Drawing on the theoretical synthesis and empirical insights presented above, the following theoretical propositions are advanced to articulate the key relationships represented in the proposed conceptual model:

1. Parenting styles characterized by supportive and responsive interactions contribute to more adaptive adolescent self-perceptions by providing relational experiences through which adolescents develop and evaluate their understanding of themselves.
2. Secure and supportive peer attachment contributes to adolescent self-concept development through experiences of acceptance, belonging, interpersonal feedback and social evaluation.
3. Supportive teacher–student relationships contribute to adolescent self-concept development by providing interpersonal feedback, encouragement and experiences of competence and school belonging.
4. School counseling functions as a systemic and facilitative support mechanism that supports adolescents in reflecting upon, interpreting and integrating experiences arising from family, peer and school environments, thereby facilitating the processes associated with self-concept development.

Development of The Conceptual Model From Mixed-Method Findings

The proposed conceptual model was developed through an integrative synthesis of quantitative and qualitative findings generated from the sequential explanatory mixed-method study. In this design, quantitative and qualitative strands are intentionally connected so that subsequent qualitative inquiry can provide deeper explanation and contextual understanding of patterns identified in the quantitative phase, while integration enables both strands to contribute to a more comprehensive interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Accordingly, model development involved a sequential process of empirical identification, qualitative elaboration, cross-strand integration, theoretical synthesis and sociocultural contextualization.

In the quantitative phase, parenting style, peer attachment and teacher support were examined as key social influences associated with adolescent developmental outcomes. The findings provided an empirical basis for identifying family, peers and teachers as relevant social contexts within adolescents' developmental environment. Variations in their relative contributions provided the initial empirical foundation for considering how these influences could be represented within an integrated developmental framework.

The subsequent qualitative phase provided contextual understanding of how these social influences were experienced and interpreted by adolescents. Recurring experiences associated with parenting, peer relationships and teacher support elaborated the relational contexts identified quantitatively by providing experiential insight into how adolescents perceived and made sense of interactions within family, peer and school environments. Thus, the qualitative strand served not merely to confirm the quantitative findings but to elaborate the meanings and processes underlying the identified social influences.

The qualitative findings from school counselors extended the interpretation beyond these three primary relational contexts. Counsellors' experiences highlighted structured psychosocial support encompassing intervention, emotional support, monitoring and follow-up, alongside collaborative, preventive and developmental practices within the school environment. These findings informed the conceptual positioning of school counselling as a systemic and facilitative support mechanism rather than as an additional primary social influence equivalent to family, peers or teachers.

Integration occurred through a cross-strand synthesis of these findings. Mixed-method integration brings together quantitative and qualitative evidence to generate insights extending beyond those obtainable from either strand independently (Fetters et al., 2013; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Through this process, parenting style, peer attachment and teacher support were conceptualised as primary sources of relational experiences within family, peer and educational contexts, respectively. School counselling, in contrast, was positioned as an

embedded professional support layer that may facilitate reflection, psychosocial adjustment and adaptive meaning-making across these interconnected environments.

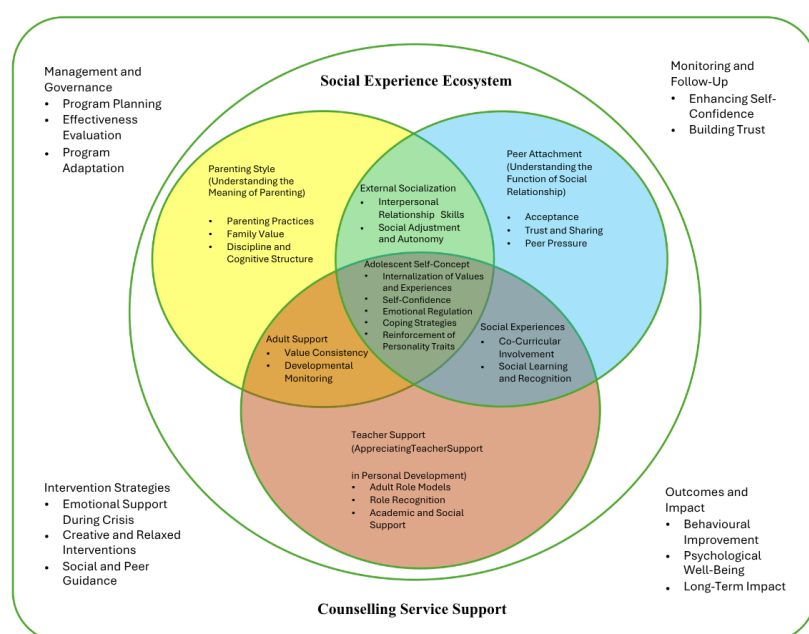
The integrated findings were subsequently interpreted through the theoretical perspectives underpinning the study. Social learning theory explains how adolescents learn through observation, interaction and responses to significant social agents (Bandura, 1977), while ecological perspectives situate development within interconnected social systems and relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Individual psychology further emphasizes individuals' active interpretation of experiences and the meanings assigned to their social worlds (Adler, 2014). Together, these perspectives provided the theoretical basis for conceptualizing adolescents as active participants who interpret and integrate relational experiences into their evolving understanding and evaluation of themselves.

The integrated findings were also situated within the Malaysian sociocultural context. Family, peer and educational relationships are embedded within culturally situated values and expectations concerning interdependence, family relationships, interpersonal connectedness and socially appropriate behavior (Zulkefly et al., 2021; Abd Hadi et al., 2023). Contemporary Malaysian evidence further demonstrates that adolescents' psychosocial experiences are interconnected with family relationships, peer interactions, academic demands and culturally shaped emotional expectations (Mohd Hasni et al., 2025). Accordingly, the Malaysian sociocultural context was incorporated as an interpretive lens rather than a separate causal variable, recognizing that the meanings adolescents attach to relational experiences may be culturally situated.

Through this sequential process, the quantitative findings established the empirical relevance of the three social influences; the qualitative adolescent findings elaborated how these influences were experienced; and the qualitative counselor findings extended the framework by identifying the role of structured psychosocial support. Cross-strand integration, theoretical interpretation and sociocultural contextualization then informed the final organization of the model into three primary relational contexts—parenting style, peer attachment and teacher support—with school counseling positioned as a systemic and facilitative support mechanism. This process provided the empirical, theoretical and contextual foundation for the theoretical propositions and the proposed conceptual model.

Proposed Conceptual Model of Adolescent Self-Concept Development

Figure 1 Proposed Adolescent Self-Concept Development Model



Based on the synthesis of existing literature and empirical insights, this article proposes an integrative conceptual model of adolescent self-concept development within the context of Malaysian boarding schools (MRSM). The model conceptualizes self-concept development as a dynamic process through which adolescents interpret and

integrate experiences derived from multiple interacting social environments. This perspective is grounded in social learning and ecological frameworks, which emphasize the role of ongoing interactions between individuals and their social environments in development (Bandura, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Contemporary research similarly demonstrates that self-concept develops dynamically during adolescence and is responsive to social and environmental experiences across developmental contexts (Van der Crujisen et al., 2023; Paskova & Ďuricová, 2024).

At the core of the model is adolescent self-concept, defined as individuals' perceptions and evaluations of themselves across multiple domains, including their abilities, characteristics, and social roles (Rogers, 1959; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). Longitudinal evidence demonstrates developmental changes in self-evaluations across adolescence and indicates that more positive self-evaluations may contribute to greater self-concept clarity over time (Van der Crujisen et al., 2023). Accordingly, the model positions self-concept as an evolving understanding and evaluation of the self informed by adolescents' relational and social experiences.

The model identifies three primary relational contexts—family, peers and teachers—as key sources of developmental experiences. Within the family context, parenting style provides an early foundation through which values, behavioral expectations and emotional patterns are established (Baumrind, 1991; Steinberg, 2001). Parenting characteristics such as warmth, involvement and supportive practices remain important for adolescents' psychosocial adjustment (Bačíková-Šlěšková & Janovská, 2024). These relational experiences may contribute to adolescents' self-evaluations and provide a foundation through which subsequent social experiences are interpreted.

Peer relationships become increasingly salient during adolescence, providing experiences of trust, communication and emotional connection alongside opportunities for social comparison and self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Peer acceptance may strengthen belonging and self-worth, whereas rejection and negative peer experiences may contribute to loneliness and lower self-esteem (Montecillo et al., 2024). Stronger peer attachment has also been associated with more adaptive emotional regulation (Muntamah & Pratama, 2025). These experiences provide interpersonal feedback that may contribute to adolescents' developing self-perceptions.

Teachers represent significant adult figures within the educational environment, providing academic, interpersonal and emotional support associated with adolescents' sense of competence and belonging (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Wentzel, 2012). Supportive student–teacher relationships have been associated with more favorable self-esteem, emotional health and academic outcomes (Podiya et al., 2025), while greater perceived teacher support is associated with a stronger sense of school belonging (Elizondo-González et al., 2025). Within residential environments such as MRSMS, sustained school-based interactions position teacher support as an important relational context through which adolescents receive feedback and experience competence and belonging.

Beyond these three primary relational contexts, school counseling is positioned as a systemic and facilitative support mechanism embedded within the educational environment. Counseling provides structured professional support through which adolescents may reflect upon and process experiences arising from family, peer, and school relationships (Stone & Dahir, 2006; Lapan et al., 2007). This positioning is consistent with individual psychology, which emphasizes the meanings individuals assign to their experiences in understanding themselves and navigating their social worlds (Adler, 2014). Contemporary evidence further supports viewing counseling as part of the wider educational system rather than as a discrete or isolated service (Copeland et al., 2024). Thus, counselling functions as an embedded professional support layer rather than as a fourth primary relational influence.

Central to the model is the process through which adolescents interpret and integrate relational experiences into their evolving self-perceptions. Adolescents are not passive recipients of environmental influences but actively engage with and learn from their social environments (Bandura, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Parenting, peer attachment and teacher support provide relational experiences and feedback that contribute to this developmental process, while school counseling may facilitate reflection, emotional processing and adaptive meaning-making. Importantly, counseling is conceptualized as a facilitative support mechanism rather than an

independently tested causal or mediating pathway.

Overall, the proposed model integrates parenting style, peer attachment and teacher support as interconnected relational contexts contributing to adolescent self-concept development, with school counseling providing a systemic and facilitative layer of support. Within Malaysian residential schooling, these components operate within a broader sociocultural context that shapes how relational experiences are encountered and interpreted. The model therefore provides an integrated framework for understanding self-concept as a socially embedded and continuously evolving developmental process.

Implications For Education And Counselling Practice

The proposed conceptual model offers important implications for educational and counseling practice, particularly within Malaysian residential schools such as MRSM. By emphasizing the interconnected roles of family, peers, teachers and school counseling, the model highlights the need for a coordinated approach to adolescent self-concept development. This aligns with ecological perspectives that situate development within interconnected social environments rather than isolated influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Supporting self-concept development should therefore be recognized as a shared developmental responsibility involving multiple stakeholders within and beyond the school environment.

For educators, the model underscores the importance of supportive teacher–student relationships extending beyond academic instruction. Teachers contribute to students’ developmental experiences through daily interactions, feedback, encouragement and interpersonal support (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Wentzel, 2012). Contemporary evidence further associates supportive student–teacher relationships with favorable self-esteem, emotional health, academic outcomes and school belonging (Elizondo-González et al., 2025; Podiya et al., 2025). In practice, schools can strengthen these relationships through structured teacher mentoring, regular student check-ins, constructive feedback and recognition of students’ efforts, alongside clear mechanisms for referring emerging psychosocial concerns to school counselors. These practices can create relational environments in which adolescents feel valued, competent and connected while enabling earlier access to appropriate support.

The model also highlights peer relationships as an important developmental context for experiences of acceptance, belonging and social feedback. Supportive peer environments may foster social connection and acceptance, whereas negative peer experiences may undermine belonging and self-worth (Wang et al., 2018; Laursen & Hartl, 2021; Montecillo et al., 2024). Schools can operationalize supportive peer environments through structured peer-support or peer-mentoring programs, collaborative activities, student leadership opportunities and initiatives that promote inclusion and supportive communication. Within residential settings, trained peer-support structures may be particularly useful in providing accessible sources of social connection while maintaining appropriate referral pathways when students require professional support.

From a counseling perspective, school counseling is positioned as a systemic and facilitative support mechanism that complements relational influences from families, peers and teachers. Counselors provide individual and group counseling, preventive and developmental programs, and psychosocial interventions (Stone & Dahir, 2006; Lapan et al., 2007). School-based counseling research indicates potential benefits for adolescents’ psychological adjustment, although outcomes vary according to intervention, implementation and context (Buchanan et al., 2017; Cooper et al., 2021; Copeland et al., 2024). Contemporary perspectives further emphasize mental health education, early intervention and resilience-building as components of broader adolescent support (Atumba et al., 2025). In practice, counselors can translate these functions into structured preventive and developmental activities focusing on self-awareness, emotional regulation, adaptive coping and interpersonal reflection, delivered through individual counseling, group interventions and psychoeducational programs. This approach extends counseling beyond remedial responses by providing opportunities for adolescents to reflect on experiences arising from family, peer, and school relationships and develop greater self-awareness. Such practices are consistent with social learning and individual psychology perspectives that recognize individuals as active interpreters of their social experiences (Bandura, 1977; Adler, 2014).

At the systemic level, counseling should be integrated within the wider educational ecosystem rather than operating as an isolated support unit. Contemporary review evidence emphasizes the importance of understanding counseling within the relationships, structures and implementation conditions surrounding service delivery (Copeland et al., 2024). Schools can operationalize this integration through clear referral pathways, regular multidisciplinary coordination among counselors and relevant school personnel, appropriate family engagement, and systematic monitoring and follow-up for students requiring continued support, while preserving professional boundaries and confidentiality. Within residential schools such as MRSM, such coordination may enable emerging concerns identified through everyday teacher or peer interactions to be connected more systematically with appropriate professional support.

Overall, the model suggests that supporting adolescent self-concept development requires coordinated efforts across relational and institutional contexts. Rather than relying on isolated interventions, residential schools can translate this integrated approach into four complementary areas of practice: supportive teacher–student engagement, structured positive peer support, preventive and developmental counseling, and coordinated school–family support mechanisms. Together, these practices may provide adolescents with more consistent relational and professional support as they progressively develop their understanding and evaluation of themselves.

Limitations And Future Directions

The proposed conceptual model should be interpreted within the contextual boundaries of the study. As the model was developed from findings involving adolescents and school counselors within Malaysian residential schools, particularly MRSM, its applicability to other educational settings should not be assumed without further empirical examination. The distinctive academic, residential and social environment of MRSM may shape adolescents' experiences of parenting, peer attachment, teacher support and school counseling differently from those in day schools or other educational contexts. Future research should therefore examine the model across diverse educational settings, adolescent populations and sociocultural contexts to assess its broader applicability and potential contextual variations.

CONCLUSION

Adolescent self-concept development can be understood as a dynamic process shaped through interconnected experiences across multiple social environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Van der Cruysen et al., 2023; Paskova & Ďuricová, 2024). This article advances this perspective through an integrative conceptual model that situates self-concept development within a broader system of relational and institutional influences in the context of Malaysian residential schools (MRSM).

The proposed model identifies family, peers and teachers as three primary relational contexts through which adolescents encounter feedback, expectations, acceptance, guidance and other interpersonal experiences. Represented through parenting style, peer attachment and teacher support, these interconnected contexts contribute to adolescents' developing perceptions and evaluations of themselves. Consistent with social learning and ecological perspectives, adolescents are conceptualized as active participants who interpret their experiences rather than as passive recipients of social influences (Bandura, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

A key contribution of the model is the positioning of school counseling as a systemic and facilitative support mechanism within this broader developmental ecology. Rather than representing a fourth primary relational influence or an independently tested causal pathway, counseling provides structured opportunities for reflection, psychosocial support and adaptive meaning-making within the wider educational support system (Copeland et al., 2024). This positioning distinguishes the role of counseling from the primary relational contexts while recognizing its potential contribution to adolescents' processing of experiences across family, peer and school environments.

Overall, the proposed model moves beyond fragmented consideration of individual social factors by integrating parenting style, peer attachment and teacher support within a unified, contextually grounded framework, supported by school counseling as a systemic layer of professional support. Within Malaysian residential

schooling, this perspective highlights the value of coordinated support among families, educators and counseling professionals in creating relational and institutional environments conducive to adolescents' psychosocial adjustment and self-concept development.

Future research should empirically test the relationships proposed within the model, including the pathways through which parenting style, peer attachment, teacher support and school counseling are associated with adolescent self-concept development. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable in examining how these relationships and adolescents' self-concept evolve over time. Such research would strengthen the empirical foundation of the model and inform educational and counseling practices supporting adolescent development.

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