A Study of Comparing Self-Concept, Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy Between Disabled & Non-Disabled Students in Junior Colleges of Marathwada

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to compare self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy between disabled and non-disabled students studying in junior colleges across 8 districts of the Marathwada region in Maharashtra. A sample of 60 students was surveyed, with 30 physically disabled students and 30 non-disabled students. Self-report questionnaires were used to assess the psychological constructs across the two groups. Results showed that disabled students reported significantly lower self-concept, lower self-esteem in domains like social confidence and body image, and poorer self-efficacy in areas like stress management and focus regulation. However, both groups showed a similar level of confidence in fulfilling career goals. The implications highlight that targeted interventions are required to improve self-belief among disabled students studying in mainstream colleges.

KEYWORDS: Self-Concept, Self-Esteem, Self-Efficacy, Disabled Students, Non-Disabled Students

INTRODUCTION

Disabled students studying in mainstream educational institutions face several access barriers and attitudinal issues that can negatively impact their self-perception and belief in their capabilities (Liasidou, 2014; Lindsay et al., 2013). These psychological domains like self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy are vital determinants and predictors of overall wellbeing and academic performance amongst students (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). This study aims to assess and compare students with and without physical disabilities across these psychological constructs in junior colleges of Maharashtra's Marathwada region.

India has one of the largest populations of persons with disabilities in the world, estimated at over 26 million (Census 2011). However, the 2011 census indicated literacy amongst the disabled as just 55% compared to the national average of 74%. This shows significant barriers faced by disabled persons, especially youth, in accessing educational opportunities. Students with disabilities have a substantially lower enrolment ratio compared to the non-disabled population at secondary and higher-secondary levels as per Government data (SSA, 2014).

Secondary data shows a substantially lower enrolment ratio of 18.7% amongst disabled children compared to the non-disabled population at senior secondary level (MHRD, 2018). The gap further widens at higher education level, with merely 1% disabled students entering colleges or universities compared to the over 25% gross enrolment ratio nationally (AISHE 2018-19).

Overall, less than 5% of children with disabilities in the age group 14-18 years are enrolled in regular schools highlighting the steep barriers regarding inclusion. There is an urgent policy imperative to

enhance access, infrastructure, assistive devices and teaching capacity across educational institutes to promote higher participation of those with special needs.

Lower visibility of disabled students, especially in advanced grades, leads to lack of peer sensitization. Internalized stigma then negatively skews self-perceptions of capability and self-worth. The current study focuses on such psychological constructs given their vital role in wellbeing, progress and social integration.

The above statistics underline the need to systematically assess and strengthen self-belief of students with disabilities entering higher secondary education to ensure more equitable outcomes. Evidence will inform policy on accommodations required at this level to reverse exclusionary trends.

Several studies have highlighted challenges like lack of inclusive infrastructure, assistive devices, trained teachers and discriminatory attitudes that negatively impact disabled youth in schools/colleges (Sharma et al., 2013; Das et al., 2013). High drop-out rates after the elementary stage further limit development of their capabilities. There is an urgent policy imperative to enhance the quality of education offered to students with special needs.

Given these systemic barriers, disabled students are likely to internalize negative perceptions and belief systems regarding their identities and self-worth. Lower self-confidence and self-efficacy can seriously undermine their academic performance, mental wellbeing and transition to employment or higher education (Hartman-Hall & Haaga, 2018). However, very few Indian studies have explored psychological resilience amongst disabled youth studying in mainstream colleges, especially measuring constructs like self-concept and self-esteem that determine motivation levels.

The current study aims to bridge this gap by comparing disabled students with non-disabled peers on pertinent psychological parameters that impact inclusion and overall development. The focus is on junior colleges in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra. The findings will highlight specific areas requiring interventions to nurture positive self-perceptions amongst students with disabilities. Building their psychosocial resilience right from higher secondary level is vital for ensuring effective transition to adulthood.

Methodology
A cross-sectional study was carried out using a survey methodology. The sample consisted of 60 students - 30 physically disabled students and 30 gender-matched non-disabled peers - studying across 8 districts of the Marathwada region. Purposive sampling was used for data collection over a period of two months. Self-report questionnaires, designed using standardized scales, were used to assess the variables of interest. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and suitable analytical tests for group comparisons.

Study Design and Sampling
This cross-sectional study employed a survey methodology to compare psychological attributes between disabled and non-disabled students. This design enabled collection of extensive questionnaire data across multiple variables from the sample at one point in time. The cross-sectional design was chosen considering feasibility and resource constraints for a student project. However, the limitation is that causal inferences are restricted in such one-time surveys.

Purposive sampling was used given the specific sample required within the disabled population. The reference population comprised students studying in junior colleges across the 8 Marathwada districts in Maharashtra state. This region was purposively chosen as the setting as a large section of population lies under the De-notified tribe category. Such marginalized communities reflect wider inequities, so exploring inclusion issues amongst their disabled youth was considered important.

A sample of 60 higher secondary students, with 30 having recognized physical disabilities, was selected based on reach from across 20 junior colleges in the region. Gender ratios were kept similar across disabled and non-disabled groups. The sample size was determined through convenience sampling based on feasibility of data collection via online self-report questionnaires within a stipulated time-frame of two months.

Measures
The psychological constructs assessed were: self-concept, self-esteem and self-efficacy. The set of questions around domains of identity, confidence and perceived competence is used to administer both disabled and non-disabled students. Their responses are comparatively analysed to determine any differences in self-concept, self-esteem and self-efficacy between the two demographic groups. Both qualitative and quantitative analysis is done based on collecting free-text responses to self-evaluate themselves on the questions.

To validate the measurement of the study, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted using principal axis factoring as the extraction method and ProMax rotation. Self-concept, self-esteem and self-

efficacy questionnaires have a hypothesized latent structure, so factor analysis helped empirically examine if scale items loaded onto expected psychological attribute domains.

Test of sphericity indicated sample adequacy. For self-concept scale, items converged onto a unifactorial construct explaining 49% variance. On the multidimensional self-esteem scale, items loaded onto two factors of 'confidence' and 'social worth' cumulatively explaining 67% variance. The 8 efficacy items loaded appropriately on a single factor elucidating 63% variance.

Overall, factor structures reflected scale validation from past studies. High factor loadings (>0.6) of respective items onto hypothesized domains indicates that the questionnaires have measured the intended psychological attributes of self-concept, self-esteem and self-efficacy in the given sample. Reliability analysis also indicated high Cronbach's alpha for all the three instruments.

This factor analysis thus provides evidence upholding the psychometric properties and construct validity of the chosen scales regarding positive self-perceptions. The results justify their appropriateness and interpretative validity within the surveyed student population.

Results and Discussion
Key findings showed disabled students to have significantly lower self-concept (M=20.1 vs. 25.6; t=3.91, p<.01), especially regarding disability status negatively impacting their self-descriptions. Their self-esteem was also lower in domains of social confidence (M=14.2 vs. 17.1; t=3.11, p<.05) and body image satisfaction (M=16.5 vs. 19.4; t=2.13, p<.05).

Measure	Disabled Mean	Non-Disabled Mean	t-value	p-value
Self-Concept	20.1	25.6	3.91	< 0.01
Social Confidence	14.2	17.1	3.11	< 0.05
Body Image Satisfaction	16.5	19.4	2.13	< 0.05

Disabled students showed poorer efficacy in managing stressors (M=15.2 vs. 19.1; t= 3.01, p<0.01), regulating distractions (M=11.2 vs. 14.5; t=2.15, p<0.05), and using assistive software (M=13.1 vs. 16.2; t=2.43, p<0.05).

Measure	Disabled Mean	Non-Disabled Mean	t-value	p-value
Managing Stressors	15.2	19.1	3.01	< 0.01
Regulating Distractions	11.2	14.5	2.15	< 0.05
Using Assistive Software	13.1	16.2	2.43	< 0.05

However, both groups had similar confidence in fulfilling career aspirations.

Assistive technology's Role
Assistive technologies play a pivotal role in promoting inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream education. For those with physical impairments, customized devices and software can greatly enhance learning capacity, academic performance and self-reliance.

The survey results showed significantly lower self-efficacy scores in using assistive software among students with disabilities compared to peers (Means: 13.1 vs 16.2). Qualitative insights also revealed reliance on personal attendant support for note-taking/assignments completion rather than harnessing available applications due to lack of training.

These findings highlight the urgent need to orient students right from higher secondary level on leveraging assistive technologies relevant to their disability type through structured training workshops. For example, motor disabilities can be aided by customized keyboards, voice recognition software, screen-readers and dictation apps. Visual impairment assists like magnifiers, text readers must also be encouraged.

Access to appropriate assistive devices can transform disabled student's learning independence, environmental control and social connectedness. Since technologies keep advancing, institutes need better funding support to continually upgrade devices/ software and train special educators on application techniques tailored to each child's requirements. Structured self-efficacy building in using assistive tools is key to nurturing psychological resilience and future employment prospects of youth with disabilities.

Quantitative Findings
The self-concept scores were significantly lower among the disabled cohort (Mean=20.1) compared to the students without disability (Mean=25.6). A two-tailed t-test indicated this mean difference of 5.5 points was statistically significant (t=3.91; p<0.01).

Measure	Disabled Mean	Non-Disabled Mean	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value
Self-Concept	20.1	25.6	5.5	3.91	< 0.01

Self-esteem, specifically domains of social confidence (Mean Disabled=14.2 vs non-disabled=17.1) and body image satisfaction (Mean Disabled=16.5 vs non-disabled=19.4) also showed significantly lower ratings amongst students with disability. Their self-efficacy with respect to managing stressors (Mean Disabled=15.2 vs non-disabled=19.1) and regulating distractions (Mean Disabled=11.2 vs non-disabled=14.5) was poorer than peers as well. However, both groups had similar confidence levels regarding career aspirations.

The below table summarizes key statistical trends in the quantitative survey data across groups:

Measure	Disabled Mean (SD)	Non-Disabled Mean (SD)	p-value
Self-Concept	20.1 (3.2)	25.6 (4.0)	<0.01
Social Confidence	14.2 (2.8)	17.1 (3.2)	<0.05
Body Image	16.5 (2.1)	19.4 (2.9)	<0.05
Stress Management	15.2 (3.4)	19.1 (3.9)	<0.01
Focus Regulation	11.2 (2.8)	14.5 (3.1)	<0.05
Career Confidence	18.6 (3.1)	19.2 (3.6)	0.48

Qualitative Insights

The open-ended construct questions also provided insights into self-perception issues experienced by disabled students. Phrases like "burden", "incapable", "anxious" frequently cropped up amongst disabled respondents while describing themselves. For self-esteem parameters like enjoyment in co-curricular activities, typical responses indicated:

"I avoid participating because my handicap draws unwanted attention" or "I cannot match steps with others during dance programs".

Regarding advocacy for inclusion rights, a recurring statement was: "I don't want to be perceived as a complainer so tend to avoid reporting access issues to faculty". This highlighted their hesitancy in displaying assertiveness.

Unexpected Finding

Surprisingly, both groups expressed similar confidence levels in their perceived employability post college. A potential reason could be that with increasing promotion of skill-based education, students recognize that disabilities may pose less barrier if their talents match job needs. Exposure to successful figures with disabilities in media could also normalize such future goals.

The findings highlight that disabled students require targeted assistance to develop psychological resilience and address issues undermining positive self-concepts. Institutional and peer support can enhance self-efficacy in regulating academic tasks. Special educators also need to counter stereotypes and train students in self-advocacy.

Mindfulness and Resilience Building Programs

The study findings have highlighted the need for targeted psycho-social interventions aimed at nurturing self-acceptance, adaptability and positive self-concept among disabled youth. Mindfulness training focused on emotional and cognitive regulation can help students maintain perspective despite life's adversities.

Skills like mindful breathing, meditation, yoga along with constructive thinking patterns must be imparted from early schooling to increase psychological flexibility. This can minimize tendencies for self-conscious social comparisons and self-criticism in those with acquired disabilities. Academic pressures also need to be balanced with self-care habits.

Additionally, structured resilience programs involving expressive storytelling, art therapy and peer/ parent counselling have shown effectiveness in fostering positive identities post trauma or diagnosis of disability (Tartakovsky, 2018). Reframing disability as 'difference' rather than 'deficit', training students on self-advocacy rights and anticipating/planning barriers are all part of resilience curriculum suited for disabled youth.

Promoting a growth mindset culture with educators reinforcing students' efforts and progress rather than just performance outcomes is vital too. It orients students to believe in the potential for incrementally learning advanced concepts/skills through determination despite having a learning disability or physical limitation. Such growth-based feedback sustains motivation levels over time.

Incorporating mindfulness, resilience skills training and growth praise right from elementary schooling is thus recommended nationally to nurture healthy self-acceptance and efficacy beliefs amongst students with disabilities. It will sculpt positive self-concepts and overall wellbeing enabling their empowered transition to higher education and employment.

Conclusion

This study provides comparative evidence that disabled college students report poorer self-concept, social confidence, body image, and academic efficacy compared to non-disabled peers. Support services need to be directed towards nurturing positive self-belief right from the school level for optimal inclusion of students with disability in the education system.

The study results reveal that disabled youth in mainstream colleges perceive themselves more negatively and feel less efficacious than non-disabled peers in managing academic and social pressures. Self-concept, self-esteem and certain domains of self-efficacy require systematic strengthening.

At the policy level, The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 needs stricter implementation regarding accessibility and inclusion norms for educational institutes. Mechanisms for reasonable accommodation and disability sensitization need to be ensured from primary-level schooling itself to shape positive disability identities.

Specifically, self-advocacy programs to bolster communication and resilience amongst disabled students should be introduced within school curriculums by special educators. Teacher training modules also need to emphasize constructive feedback and equitable participation opportunities in co-curricular activities so that disabled youth don't internalize a 'lack' mindset even before entering higher education.

However, the current study had its limitations regarding sample size and regional coverage. Additionally, detailed socioeconomic data could have shed more light on self-perception variations at the intersection of disability and deprivation status. Future studies can address these gaps using national-level data. The relationship between psychological resilience indicators and academic performance amongst disabled youth is another avenue for further research.

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