

Relationship between academic self-esteem and educational achievement of visually impaired- Suggestion for Inclusion

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The social attitude with regard to the education and rehabilitation of visually impaired people has undergone considerable changes particularly in the last two centuries. With separation, ostracization from the society in ancient times to protection with pity and compassion during the Judiac or early Christian periods, the emphasis shifted to the establishment of special schools for imparting training to the blind during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and now to Inclusive education.

Educational Achievement:

Educational achievement refers to educational or academic performance as a specified level of attainment or proficiency in academic work as evaluated by teachers by standardized tests or teacher-made tests or by combination of both.

Academic Self-Esteem

Academic self-esteem refers to an individual's understanding about his or her own academic abilities and the perception of others about this understanding. Whatever an individual thinks about himself if matches with what other people think about him then it is known as positive academic self-esteem. If this thinking does not match between an individual and others then it is known as negative academic self-esteem.

The above two variables are directly interrelated to each other. It is hypothesized that if one increases then it leads to the increase in the other variable. It is a general belief that academic self-esteem contributes to the efforts of a child to take more initiative which in turn promotes his/her achievement in different areas particularly in educational pursuit.

During the 20th century those concerned with the education and rehabilitation of blind children focused their attention on educating the blind children along with the sighted persons in ordinary schools. During the 1950s the principle of normalization evolved

with emphasis on equalizing of opportunities and options. This was followed by the concept of integration in the field of special education of blind as an viable option for equalizing opportunities, effective use of resources, reduction in isolation, and stigma and providing a wider range of experiences.

This was based on the belief that ordinary schooling would enhance the social and emotional well being of the blind, that it would bring them into educational and economic mainstream, be helpful in total citizenship and involvement in all activities, would sensitize them to their role in this endeavour, would provide favorable learning experiences and ultimately would result in the total integration and rehabilitation which is the ultimate goal of all educational efforts. It is also thought that it will provide them a continuity of services from early detection and early intervention through schooling, vocational education, independent living in the community, and meet their specific needs. It would also ensure that blind person:

1. Experiences a sense of participation and achievement with the group with whom they receive their education.
2. Achieve increasing independence within the context in which they receive their education.
3. Participate in decision making about choices of educational programmers and thereby learn skills of self-advocacy, and
4. Receive their education in context, which reflects on ecological perspective, that is in context, which involves family and community resources.

Thus it is evident from the examination of above observations that emphasis in integration is an all-round development of blind persons. This encompasses the promotion of positive academic self-esteem and self-concept.

Relationship Between Educational Achievement and Self-Esteem

Educational Achievement and self-esteem seem to be highly interrelated and one influences the other, nonetheless, the foundation for academic achievement seems to be positive self-esteem, which has to be cultivated early in life. Low self-esteem is often cited as the ultimate source of poor academic achievement and self-destructive behavior (Haggerty et al 1996). This, in one way or another affects the personal growth of the person as well as his/her role and status in the society at large. The type of self-esteem the child withholds is by and large dependent on his /her surrounding (Apter, 1997), Particularly, the type of early childhood upbringing, early school experiences and peer relationship play a vital role in molding the child's self-esteem (Bernard van Leer Foundation; Klein etal, 1996). Indeed, the opinions of significant adults (parents, teachers, etc) have an impact on a blind child's level of self- esteem. For example, parents or teachers who view a child as competent or

attractive communicate their opinion to the child, who eventually internalizes these opinions and begins to view himself /herself accordingly.

On the other hand, adults who view a child as unattractive or incompetent also communicate these opinions to the visually impaired child, who eventually internalizes them and forms unfavorable opinion of himself/herself as well as his surrounding. A child who develops positive self-esteem will become confident about his abilities and is likely to become an adult who respects others and will work well and help others with a strong sense of social interest. Those who consider themselves as effective are usually willing to attempt some solution to whatever problem they face, and they will not give up easily in their efforts to overcome some obstacles.

When sight is lost, the person feels particularly helpless and dependent until he can acquire an appropriate adaptive behavioral and coping skills. At the same time, the minimal expectations and negative attitudes experienced by the blind person contribute to lowered self-esteem. Thus, the dynamic forces that operate upon a newly blind person make his sense of worth and competence especially vulnerable.

The development of self-esteem among those born blind is also precarious. All growing children, especially through their teen years, wrestle with the fundamental questions: "Who am I?", "Am I loveable?", "What is the meaning of life?", "Where do I belong?", "Can I handle it?". The blind child who experiences devaluating and derogatory reactions or reflections within his social environment find it more difficult to obtain satisfactory answers to these basic issues of life. When any child is made to feel strange, different, unwanted, incapable, or inadequate, his self-esteem is jeopardized.

When conveyed these directly or indirectly, affect his/her educational achievement. A blind person's self-esteem is also affected when he/she is conveyed that he/she is not self-sufficient and hence depends for various things on others. The dependency needs of those blind who does not get adequate educational provisions are more visible or more obvious than the dependency needs of the sighted, and as a result, most members of society tend to share the opinion that the visually impaired are more dependent and thus less worthy. The sighted find it easy to forget that interdependence is healthy and normal. There is abundant evidence to support the conviction that visually impaired children and adults can be capable and contributing members of their society. With the adequate support in terms of facilities, encouragement and ample opportunities, blind child can develop into an independent, responsible individual. Blindness in and of itself does not impede mental growth is amply proven by the successes of many prominent blind persons throughout history.

It can therefore be argued that early positive familial and school experience of children with visual disabilities sets a stage for success in learning and life in general. As this is very true for children in general, it is particularly essential for children with visual disabilities for cognitive, sensory, communicative stimulation as well as social competences and skills, which are the corner stones for subsequent learning.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the relationship between the academic self-esteem and educational achievement in the two educational settings where blind children in India are placed so as to find out the effectiveness of the inclusive setting in promoting the academic self-esteem.

Method of Study

In the present study the descriptive research method was followed. Sixty visually impaired adolescents studying in special and integrated settings have constituted the sample of the present study. These subjects were divided in to two groups of thirty each enrolled in special school settings and integrated school settings. One to one matching is done on the basis of age, sex, educational achievement, socio-economic status, and IQ. The visually impaired adolescents studying in integrated and special school setting were selected on the basis of purpose cum convenience sampling procedure.

Hypothesis of the Study

1. Positive academic self-esteem of visually impaired adolescents helps them to attain higher level of educational achievement.
2. There was no significant difference in the relationship between academic self-esteem and educational achievement of visually impaired adolescents studying in the two settings.
3. There was no significant difference between the academic self-esteem and educational achievement of male visually impaired adolescents studying in the two settings.
4. There was no significant difference between the academic self-esteem and educational achievement of female visually impaired adolescents studying in the two settings.
5. There was no significant difference in the relationship between academic self-esteem and educational achievement of male and female visually impaired adolescents studying in the two settings.

Tools Used in the Study

1. Personal Information Blank (Self developed). To obtain information on certain demographic variables was developed by the investigator.

2. BASE-Behavioral Academic Self Esteem (A Rating Scale) By Stanley Coopersmith and Ragnar Gilberts was used for the present study.

Results and Discussion

Since the purpose of the present study was to explore the relationship between academic self-esteem and educational achievement of the visually impaired adolescents studying in different educational settings, the product movement coefficient of correlation (r) was calculated between academic self-esteem and educational achievement. The following table depicts the r values:

GROUP	VARIABLE	R) Co-relation)
Visually impaired girls in residential setting	Academic self-esteem and educational achievement	0.15
Visually impaired boys in residential setting	-do-	0.60
Visually impaired girls in integrated setting	-do-	0.29
Visually impaired boys in integrated setting	-do-	0.03
Visually impaired in residential setting	-do-	0.33
Visually impaired in integrated setting	-do-	0.14

It can be noticed from the above table that the two variables are positively co-related to each other. Though in some case the value is quite low. These value show that the two are directly positively related i.e. if the value of one variable is higher then, the value of the other would also be higher. Thus, it can be inferred that high academic self-esteem helps in increasing educational achievement or vice-versa.

Conclusion:

1. It is difficult to arrive at a precise view on the status of any group of subjects with regard to social traits after studying a small sample.
2. The hypothesis formulated to study the impact of educational setting on the relationship between the two variables academic self esteem and educational achievement could not be accepted as no significance in the relationship between academic self esteem and educational achievement was found.

Suggestions for Promoting Inclusion:

- 1.) Maximize the positive and minimize the negative. Focus on your abilities more than your limitations. Everyone has both abilities and limitations. This is not to say that you don't acknowledge that you have a disability, but rather, by focusing on and developing your abilities you can feel good about all the things you can do.
- 2.) Avoid unrealistic comparisons. Don't get caught up in comparing apples to oranges. Everyone has both strengths and limitations.
- 3.) Set realistic goals for yourself. Since everyone has limitations, it is not fair to expect yourself to be able to do something unrealistic. This may mean allowing yourself to take the extra time needed to read material and rewarding yourself for persevering. It may not be realistic to expect yourself to read something in the same amount of time as someone without a reading disability.
- 4.) Do not over-generalize. If there is something that you cannot do as a result of your disability, it is not fair to conclude that you are an overall failure. There are many things that you can do. Do not tie all of your self-worth to any one attribute or event. Just because you might be a lousy cook does not mean that you are a lousy person in general.
- 5.) Appreciate yourself - all of yourself. This means appreciating your disability too. There may be times when you believe that it is more annoying than appreciable, but focus on the positive aspects of your disability.

The Two Major Recommendations are:

Firstly such studies on a larger sample in different geographical areas need to be conducted to confirm this finding. Moreover, The provisions and facilities available to the visually impaired children should also be studied in relation to these variables.

Secondly the factors that contribute to the development of positive academic self esteem also need to be studied so as to ensure that visually impaired children in inclusive setting are provided with adequate care and attention in their educational development

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