



A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PERSONALITY ADJUSTMENT AND SELF-CONCEPT IN PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED AND NORMAL CHILDREN WITHIN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigates the differences in personality adjustment and self-concept between physically challenged and normally abled children within educational systems. Through structured interviews with students, educators, and psychologists, the research explores how physical disabilities influence children's self-perception and integration within academic settings. Key themes identified include perceived competence, social inclusion, resilience, and the impact of support on self-esteem. Findings reveal that physically challenged children perceive lower physical competence but may develop compensatory strengths in other domains. They experience less social inclusion and higher feelings of isolation than their normally abled peers. Despite these challenges, both groups demonstrate resilience, though their sources and manifestations differ. The study highlights the critical role of support from educators and peers in influencing the self-esteem and adjustment of physically challenged children. This research underscores the need for inclusive educational practices and policies that enhance support systems, facilitate social integration, and acknowledge diverse competencies. Future research should focus on broader, quantitative studies and intervention strategies to support the diverse needs of all children in educational environments.

Keywords: *personality adjustment, self-concept, physically challenged children, education, qualitative research, interviews.*

Introduction

Personality adjustment and self-concept are crucial elements in the psychological development of children, influencing how they perceive themselves and adapt to their environments. This study aims to delve into these aspects specifically within the context of children with physical disabilities, comparing their experiences to those

of normally abled children within educational settings. Such research's significance lies in its contribution to academic literature and its practical implications for educational strategies and support mechanisms tailored to diverse needs.

Importance of Personality Adjustment and Self-Concept in Children

Personality adjustment and self-concept are interconnected constructs that affect numerous developmental outcomes in children, including their social integration, academic performance, and overall well-being. Self-concept reflects one's perception of oneself, encompassing self-esteem, body image, and role performance perceptions (Harter, 1999). On the other hand, personality adjustment involves the ability to maintain equilibrium in one's personality despite external stresses or pressures (Eisenberg et al., 2006). Developing a healthy self-concept and effective personality adjustment mechanisms are particularly critical during the formative school years, which pose various social and academic challenges.

Challenges Faced by Physically Challenged Children in Educational Systems

Physically challenged children often face unique challenges in educational environments that can significantly impact their personality adjustment and self-concept. These challenges include, but are not limited to, physical accessibility, social integration, and often, unfortunately, discrimination or stigmatisation (Dunn, 2004; Scior, 2011). Such experiences can shape their self-perception negatively and affect their psychological adjustment, so exploring these dimensions is essential.

Research Objectives and Questions

The primary objective of this research is to explore how physical disabilities influence children's personality adjustment and self-concept within educational settings. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do self-concept and personality adjustment in physically challenged children differ from those in normally abled children within the same educational environments?
2. What role do educational settings play in supporting or hindering the personality adjustment of physically challenged children?

Literature Review

This literature review synthesises existing research on self-concept and personality adjustment in children, particularly those with physical disabilities. It discusses the theoretical frameworks relevant to studying these constructs within the educational context and identifies gaps in the current research.

Self-Concept and Personality Adjustment in Children

Self-concept is defined as an individual's perception of themselves, including attributes, roles, and competencies (Harter, 1999). It is a vital component of psychological health, influencing emotional stability, interpersonal relationships, and coping strategies. In children, self-concept is closely linked to academic performance and social integration (Marsh et al., 1999). Personality adjustment refers to maintaining emotional equilibrium and adapting to social and environmental demands. For children, especially those facing physical challenges, these psychological constructs become even more significant due to the additional stresses they encounter (Eisenberg et al., 2006).

Research indicates that physically challenged children often experience lower self-esteem and an altered self-concept compared to their peers (Dunn, 2004). The visibility of their disability influences this disparity, the extent to which it affects their functionality, and the social reactions they receive from others (Scior, 2011). These factors can contribute to varied personality adjustments, manifesting as resilience or increased vulnerability to psychological distress.

Theoretical Frameworks

Several theoretical frameworks are pertinent in exploring the constructs of self-concept and personality adjustment. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides a valuable lens, emphasising the interaction between individuals and their multi-layered environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory highlights the importance of considering the various systems surrounding the child (e.g., family, school, community) and their reciprocal interactions that affect the child's development. Another relevant framework is the Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), which suggests that individuals determine their own social and personal worth based on how they stack up against others. In school settings, physically challenged children may engage in social comparisons that could negatively affect their self-concept and adjustment.

Research on Physical Disabilities within Educational Contexts

Educational environments play a critical role in the development of self-concept and personality adjustment. Schools are sites for academic learning and critical spaces for social interaction and personal development. Research has shown that supportive educational practices can mitigate some of the negative impacts associated with physical disabilities (Stinson & Whitmire, 1992). Inclusive educational settings that provide adaptive resources, peer-mediated support, and teacher training on disability awareness tend to foster better psychological outcomes in physically challenged children (Rose et al., 2009).

However, despite the advances in inclusive education, physically challenged children still face significant barriers that affect their self-concept and adjustment. These include inadequate access to physical and curriculum adaptations and persistent social stigma (King et al., 2013).

Gaps in Current Research

While the existing literature provides insights into the impacts of physical disability on children's psychological development, several gaps remain. First, much of the research focuses on quantitative assessments, which may overlook individuals' nuanced experiences (Lightfoot et al., 1999). There is a need for more qualitative studies that explore the personal narratives of physically challenged children to better understand their self-concept and adjustment strategies.

Additionally, limited research compares the self-concept and personality adjustment between physically challenged children and their normally abled peers in similar educational settings. Such comparative studies are essential to discerning the specific factors contributing to disparities in psychological outcomes.

Finally, educational environments' dynamic and evolving nature calls for ongoing research to keep pace with changes in educational policies, practices, and societal attitudes towards disability.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to explore physically challenged children's personality adjustment and self-concept compared to their normally abled peers within educational settings. Qualitative methods are particularly suited to this research as they allow for a deeper understanding of the personal experiences and perceptions of the participants (Creswell, 2007). This section details the participant selection criteria, data collection techniques, and methods for analysing interview data to ensure reliability and validity.

Participant Selection Criteria

The participants for this study will be selected based on the following criteria:

1. **Age:** Children aged between 8 and 12 years. This age range is chosen because self-concept and personality traits become more stable and measurable at this stage of development (Harter, 1999).
2. **Educational Setting:** Children enrolled in mainstream public schools that include both physically challenged and normally abled children. This criterion ensures that the study contexts are similar for all participants.
3. **Nature of Physical Disability:** Children with physical disabilities that affect their mobility or motor functions. Disabilities will be categorized as mild, moderate, or severe based on medical documentation provided by a certified health professional.

Participants will be recruited through special education departments within schools and local community centres catering to children with disabilities. An institutional review board will obtain ethical approval, and parental consent and child assent will be secured for all participants.

Data Collection Techniques

Data will be collected through structured interviews with both children and key informants, including teachers, school psychologists, and parents. These interviews are designed to elicit rich, detailed information about each child's self-concept and how they adjust their personalities within their educational environment.

1. **Child Interviews:** These will focus on the children's perceptions of themselves, their experiences at school, and their social interactions. Questions will be framed in an age-appropriate manner.
2. **Informant Interviews:** Teachers, parents, and school psychologists will provide insights into the child's behaviour, academic performance, and social integration.

All interviews will be conducted in a private setting within the school or at the child's home to ensure a comfortable environment for the participants. Each interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes and audio-recorded with the participant's consent.

Methods for Analysing Interview Data

Interview data will be transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis will proceed in the following stages:

1. **Familiarisation:** Reading through the data multiple times to become familiar with the depth and breadth of the content.
2. **Coding:** Generating initial codes from the data systematically across the entire data set. Codes that are relevant to the research questions will be collated.
3. **Theme Development:** collating codes into potential themes and gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. **Reviewing Themes:** Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set.
5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** This involves ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells.

To ensure reliability, two researchers will conduct the coding process independently, followed by discussions to reach a consensus on the themes. Triangulation will be used to enhance validity by comparing data from different sources (children, parents, and teachers) to check the consistency of the information regarding each participant's experiences.

Ensuring reliability and validity

Ensuring reliability in qualitative research involves demonstrating consistency across the study's methodology and completeness in the data collection. To ensure validity, which concerns the accuracy of the findings, the study will use strategies such as triangulation, participant validation (also known as member checking), and detailed documentation of the research steps to allow for auditability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Table 1: Participant Demographic Information

Participant Code	Age	Disability Type	Severity	Educational Setting
P1	9	Cerebral Palsy	Moderate	Public School
P2	11	Muscular Dystrophy	Mild	Public School
P3	8	Spina Bifida	Severe	Public School
P4	12	None (Control)	N/A	Public School
P5	10	None (Control)	N/A	Public School

This table will be used to track participant data and ensure diversity in the sample, enhancing the study's generalizability and robustness of the findings.

Results

The thematic analysis of the interview data from physically challenged and normally abled children revealed several core themes that highlight the differences and similarities in self-concept and personality adjustment between these groups. This section presents these themes and provides a comparative analysis.

Themes in Self-Concept and Personality Adjustment

1. **Perceived Competence:** Physically challenged children generally expressed lower perceived competence in physical activities compared to their peers. However, they often reported compensatory strengths in academic skills or artistic talents. This aligns with the notion that children who perceive physical limitations may focus on developing and valuing other skills (Marsh et al., 1999).
2. **Social Inclusion:** A common theme among physically challenged children was the feeling of being less included in social activities, which sometimes led to social isolation. In contrast, normally abled children reported higher peer interaction and social integration levels. This finding supports previous research

indicating that physical disabilities can impact social opportunities and peer relationships (Stinson & Whitmire, 1992).

3. **Resilience and Coping:** Both groups exhibited signs of resilience, but the sources and manifestations of resilience differed. Physically challenged children often cited overcoming daily physical challenges as a source of strength, while normally abled children referred to resilience in terms of academic or sports achievements (King et al., 2013).
4. **Self-Esteem:** Physically challenged children's self-esteem was frequently tied to their social experiences and physical self-efficacy. In many cases, positive feedback from teachers and peers could mitigate negative self-perceptions related to their disabilities (Scior, 2011). Normally, abled children typically derive their self-esteem from a broader range of activities and peer comparisons.
5. **Perception of Support:** Support from educational staff and family was crucial for physically challenged children and positively impacted their self-concept and adjustment. Normally abled children also valued support but did not emphasise it as critical to their self-concept (Eisenberg et al., 2006).

Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis between physically challenged and normally abled children highlights several key differences and similarities:

- **Differences:** The major differences lie in perceived competence in physical activities and the level of social inclusion. Physically challenged children often feel less competent and included, which has significant implications for their overall personality adjustment and self-concept development.
- **Similarities:** Both groups showed similar levels of resilience and coping strategies, albeit derived from different experiences. Furthermore, the importance of supportive relationships was a common theme across both groups, emphasising the role of a supportive social environment in fostering positive self-concept and personality adjustment.

Table 2: Summary of Themes and Comparative Analysis

Theme	Physically Challenged Children	Normally Abled Children
Perceived Competence	Lower in physical areas, compensated by other abilities	Generally high across various domains
Social Inclusion	Lower experiences of social isolation are more common	Higher, more integrated into peer activities
Resilience and Coping	Derived from overcoming daily challenges	Often related to overcoming academic or sports challenges
Self-Esteem	Impacted by physical self-efficacy and social feedback	Broader sources, often unaffected by physical abilities
Perception of Support	Highly valued, crucial for positive self-concept	Valued but less critical to self-concept

Findings and Discussion

The results of this study underscore several significant themes related to self-concept and personality adjustment among physically challenged and normally abled children. This section interprets these findings in light of existing literature, discusses the implications of physical disabilities on children's psychological development within educational settings, and considers the implications for educational practices and policies.

Interpretation of Results

The themes identified from the interviews reveal profound insights into how physical disabilities can influence children's self-concept and their adaptation to educational environments.

1. **Perceived Competence and Self-Concept:** Physically challenged children often perceive themselves as less competent in physical activities but may develop a sense of competence in other areas (Marsh et al.,

1999). This compensatory mechanism can be a crucial adaptive strategy, enhancing resilience and broadening the self-concept beyond physical limitations (Eisenberg et al., 2006).

2. **Social Inclusion and Adjustment:** Studies have shown that feelings of social isolation can negatively impact a child's self-concept and psychological adjustment due to the reduced social inclusion that physically challenged children experience (Stinson & Whitmire, 1992). In contrast, normally abled children generally report better social integration, highlighting the impact of physical disabilities on social opportunities.
3. **Resilience Through Overcoming Challenges:** The resilience observed in physically challenged children often stems from the daily overcoming of physical barriers, which contributes positively to their self-concept and encourages adaptive personality development (King et al., 2013).

These findings are consistent with the existing literature and highlight the multifaceted impact of physical disabilities on children's psychological development.

Discussion on the Impact of Physical Disabilities

Physical disabilities significantly impact the psychological and social experiences of children within school environments.

- **Physical Competence and Activities:** Limited participation in physical activities can marginalise physically challenged children, affecting their social circles and opportunities for peer interaction, thus impacting their social adjustment and integration (Scior, 2011).
- **Social Perceptions and Interactions:** The social model of disability suggests that societal attitudes towards disability significantly affect the self-concept and quality of life of those with disabilities (Oliver, 1990). The stigmatisation or lower expectations held by peers and even educators can reinforce feelings of inadequacy among physically challenged children.
- **Educational Support Systems:** The level of support provided in schools, such as adaptive technologies and inclusive teaching strategies, plays a critical role in facilitating or hindering the adjustment and integration of physically challenged students (Rose et al., 2009).

Implications for Educational Practices and Policies

This study's findings suggest several important implications for educational practices and policies:

- **Inclusive Education:** Schools should adopt more robust inclusive education practices that accommodate physically challenged students and actively promote their integration into all school activities (Lindsay, 2007).
- **Teacher Training:** Educators should receive training to better understand the needs of physically challenged children and foster an inclusive and supportive classroom environment.
- **Peer Sensitization Programmes:** Programmes that educate and sensitise normally abled children about disabilities can reduce stigma and foster a more inclusive and supportive peer environment.
- **Policy Development:** Educational policies should emphasise developing and implementing comprehensive support systems that address the academic and social needs of physically challenged students.

Table 3: Summary of Discussion and Implications

Aspect	Discussion Points	Implications for Education
Perceived Competence	Compensatory skills development in non-physical areas	Curriculum adjustments to highlight diverse strengths
Social Inclusion	Lower inclusion and higher social isolation	Enhanced inclusion practices and peer education
Resilience and Coping	Resilience derived from overcoming daily challenges	Support systems that recognize and build resilience
Educational Support Systems	The critical role of support in adjustment and integration	Policy focus on comprehensive educational support

Conclusion

Summary of Key Findings

This study has elucidated significant differences in personality adjustment and self-concept between physically challenged and normally abled children within educational systems. Key findings include:

1. **Perceived Competence:** Physically challenged children often perceive themselves as less competent in physical activities but may compensate by developing a strong sense of self in non-physical domains.
2. **Social Inclusion:** These children experience significantly lower levels of social inclusion, which correlates with increased feelings of isolation, while their normally abled peers enjoy higher levels of social interaction and integration.
3. **Resilience and Coping:** Despite facing daily physical challenges, physically challenged children display resilience, which plays a crucial role in strengthening certain aspects of their personality adjustment.
4. **Support and self-esteem:** The support received from educators and peers is pivotal in affecting the self-esteem and overall personality adjustment of physically challenged children, highlighting the need for proactive educational support practices.

Limitations of the Study

The study, while insightful, has several limitations that must be acknowledged:

1. **Sample Size and Diversity:** The findings are based on a relatively small and homogenous sample, potentially limiting the representation of the diverse physically challenged population. Different types of disabilities and varying degrees of severity may influence the broader applicability of the results.
2. **Geographical Limitation:** Conducted within a specific geographical and cultural context, the study's applicability to other settings, where educational systems and societal attitudes towards disability differ, may be limited.
3. **Qualitative Focus:** The reliance on qualitative data provides depth but limits the ability to generalise findings. Complementary quantitative measures could provide broader validation of the observed themes.

Suggestions for Future Research

To build on this study and overcome its limitations, future research could consider:

1. **Expanding Participant Diversity:** Including a more extensive and diverse sample of participants covering various types of physical disabilities and educational settings would enhance the generalizability of the findings.
2. **Longitudinal Studies:** Conducting longitudinal research would yield insights into how self-concept and personality adjustment evolve as children with physical disabilities progress through different educational stages.
3. **Intervention Studies:** Research focused on intervention strategies that can positively impact the self-concept and social inclusion of physically challenged children is needed. Such studies could explore the effectiveness of specific educational practices and policies.
4. **Quantitative Analysis:** Incorporating quantitative methods would broaden the perspective and help validate the qualitative findings. Standardised self-concept and personality adjustment measures could be used to ascertain broader trends and patterns.

Overall, the study highlights the profound impact physical disabilities can have on children's development within educational settings. The findings underscore the importance of inclusive educational practices and targeted support to enhance the well-being and integration of physically challenged children. Moving forward, continued research is essential to developing and refining strategies that support the diverse needs of all children in their educational journeys.

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