

A Correlational Study of Academic Stress and Self-Concept of Pre-Secondary Locomotor Disabled Children with Reference to Gender

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Abstract:

The education of children with disabilities in India has been increasingly acknowledged as a policy priority and a social obligation. Pre-secondary students with locomotor disabilities have distinct problems in combining their physical limitations with the scholastic demands that are placed upon them. The idea of academic stress, which is described as the pressure originating from tests, performance demands, peer comparison, and social expectations, has a strong interaction with self-concept, which relates to the view of one's own talents, value, and identity. It is essential to comprehend this relationship since self-concept has an impact on resilience, motivation, and social adaptability, but stress frequently diminishes self-confidence and academic engagement. The study has adopted a review-based methodology, relying entirely on secondary data sources such as academic articles (2015–2023), government policy documents, international reports, and NGO publications. A thematic approach was used to examine three broad dimensions: the nature of academic stress in locomotor disabled children, the formation of self-concept in educational and social contexts, and the interlinkages between the two factors with reference to gender. The findings of the research indicated that academic stress was a substantial obstacle for these youngsters, frequently lowering their self-confidence and increasing their susceptibility to isolation. Children were better able to deal with stress when they had a positive self-concept, which served as a protective buffer. Female students were more likely to internalise stress and exhibit decreased self-esteem, whereas male students were more likely to externalise stress by exhibiting behavioural issues. Gender served as a mediator in this process. The association between stress and self-concept was further impacted by factors such as inclusive education methods and urban-rural differences. According to the findings of the study, resilience and self-concept may be improved by supportive surroundings

that include inclusive pedagogy, sensitive teaching, encouragement from family, and adaptable technologies. On the other hand, stress can be exacerbated by neglect and bias. Suggestions encompassed digital and inclusive interventions, guidance programs, techniques that are sensitive to gender, training for teachers, reinforcement of policies, and future longitudinal study.

Keywords: *Academic stress, self-concept, locomotor disabled children, gender, inclusive education*

Introduction:

Disability is understood to be a complex social and health problem in India that impacts millions of children and limits their capacity to get education. The 2011 Census of India found that over 2.2 percent of the Indian population had some type of impairment, with locomotor disability being one of the most prevalent categories (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2013). Locomotor impairments provide a number of substantial obstacles for children, especially for those who are in the pre-secondary school age group (ages 6–14). It is during this period that formal education provides the basis for future learning and socialisation. For these youngsters, participation in academics is frequently difficult by a number of factors, including psychological obstacles, physical limitations, and a lack of infrastructure. In the field of special needs education, academic stress is becoming an increasingly prevalent issue. It is defined as the pressure that children feel as a result of things like as exams, assignments, the expectations of their parents, and comparisons with their peers. Because of the presence of further obstacles, children with locomotor impairments are subjected to this stress, including limited mobility, trouble accessing classroom materials, and, in some circumstances, discriminatory attitudes in school environments (Mukhopadhyay & Mani, 2021). In this context, it is essential to understand self-concept, which is defined as the manner in which children see their capabilities, identities, and values. Self-concept is a critical factor in psychosocial and academic development since it has a direct impact on motivation, coping abilities, and resilience. When self-concept is negatively influenced, academic stress may become even more severe, so establishing a cycle in which confidence is diminished and academic accomplishment is impaired.

The importance of investigating academic stress and self-concept among children with locomotor disabilities stems from the twin difficulty that these children face: coping with physical constraints while also attempting to achieve scholastic achievement. A result of the competitive nature of education in India and society's stress on academic achievement is that inclusive and special schools around the nation are seeing a rise in academic pressure (Chauhan, 2021). For locomotor disabled children, these pressures are magnified by accessibility barriers, stigma, and the struggle for equal participation in classroom activities. Gender is an additional significant aspect to take into consideration. Research has demonstrated that children with impairments of both genders frequently have divergent responses to stress and that they acquire opposing self-concepts (UNICEF, 2019). Whereas boys may endure stress that is tied to academic performance requirements, girls are frequently confronted with compounded challenges such as concerns about their body image, cultural stereotypes, and limited autonomy. It is of utmost importance to address these gender-specific experiences in order to have a comprehensive knowledge of stress and self-concept in children with disabilities.

Psychological distress is further exacerbated by societal expectations and shame. The perception of children with locomotor disabilities as being dependent might have a detrimental effect on their self-confidence. Issues regarding accessibility—including inadequate transportation, infrastructure, or assistive devices—also limit their involvement, which exacerbates both academic stress and identity challenges (World Health Organization, 2018). The magnitude of the problem is brought into focus by national and international data. According to the 2021 State of the World's Children report from UNICEF, children with disabilities are twice as likely to be excluded from education compared to children without disabilities. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, which was enacted in India, enforced inclusive education and non-discrimination, therefore reaffirming the constitutional right to education for all individuals. Government initiatives like as Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan and NEP 2020 have placed a strong emphasis on removing obstacles through inclusive pedagogy, assistive technology, and resource centres (Ministry of Education, 2020). Despite the implementation of these programs, students continue to experience an increase in academic stress, whether they have a disability or not. Increased competitiveness, high parental expectations, and a lack of psychological support have been identified as significant factors,

according to reports (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2021). For locomotor disabled children, these systemic pressures intersect with their disability, making the issue more complex. In the field of disability and education, there is a body of literature; however, there is a lack of synthesis about the relationship between academic stress and self-concept in pre-secondary school children with locomotor disabilities in India. This is especially true in terms of gender as a reference point. This discrepancy limits the breadth of both comprehension and policy initiatives that may be implemented.

This research seeks to examine and synthesise secondary sources in order to get an understanding of the link between academic stress and self-concept among children in India who have locomotor disabilities, with a specific focus on gender-based inequalities. The purpose of the research is to draw attention to patterns, obstacles, and areas that require action by analysing literature, reports, and policy frameworks. All of the information that serves as the basis for this study comes from secondary sources. The materials comprised scholarly journals spanning the years 2015–2023, reports from UNESCO, UNICEF, and WHO, publications from the Government of India, and reports from NGOs about disability and education. The theme review technique was implemented, organising the study into three major categories: (a) academic stress, (b) self-concept creation, and (c) gender-based disparities among pre-secondary locomotor impaired children. There was no gathering of original data, and no statistical analysis was performed, which ensured that the conclusions were drawn based on reliable, published, and available information.

Academic Stress in Pre-Secondary Locomotor Disabled Children:

Nature of Academic Stress:

Multiple interconnected stressors contribute to the formation of academic stress among children with locomotor disabilities who attend pre-secondary schools. These children must fulfil the same academic requirements as their peers despite the fact that they frequently deal with extra physical and social challenges, and examinations, assignments, and classroom performance are frequently the major sources of stress for these students. In India, where academic competition is fierce and test results have a significant impact on students' future prospects, the pressure that students experience is intensified (Kumar & Raja, 2020). On top of that, accessibility problems create an additional burden. There are a number of barriers that prevent students from fully participating in educational processes, including but not limited to

a lack of learning aids, limited transportation facilities, and a lack of suitable infrastructure such as ramps and accessible classrooms (Rao, 2019). For many children, simply reaching school can be a stressful experience. Even when present in classrooms, they often encounter difficulties in accessing blackboards, laboratories, or playgrounds, resulting in feelings of exclusion.

In addition, emotional stress is brought on by the obstacles of inclusion and peer comparisons that take place in mainstream classes. Inclusive education strives to incorporate students with disabilities; however, a lack of sufficient teacher preparation and peer insensitivity may result in marginalisation for these kids. Experiences like this exacerbate the emotional stress that impaired children face, resulting in a decline in their motivation to participate in learning activities and contribute to the class (Sharma & Salend, 2016).

Associated Psychological Factors:

There is a strong correlation between academic stress and psychological problems, including low self-esteem, social stigma, and feelings of isolation. As a result of the negative cultural attitudes that they have absorbed, numerous children with locomotor impairments are left with little faith in their own capabilities (UNICEF, 2019). Such internalized stigma compounds stress when they are unable to match peers academically or physically. Expectations of the family are also quite important. Parents of children with disabilities might sometimes have expectations that are too high or, on the other hand, they can underestimate the capabilities of their child. Both methods have the potential to cause stress: When expectations are very high, it is inevitable that there will be fear of failure, and when expectations are decreased, there will be feelings of inadequacy (Gupta, 2018). In addition, stress levels are further impacted by the attitudes of teachers. Instructors who are both kind and empathetic can assist students in dealing with difficulties, but instructors who are negligent or prejudiced can lead to frustration and academic anxiety (Mehrotra, 2020).

Gender-based Variations:

When it comes to academic stress, gender variations are a crucial factor in how it presents. In India, societal norms commonly equate male identity with accomplishment and independence, which often results in male students experiencing stress related to performance expectations. Their frequent failure to achieve these expectations, which is caused by their physical limits, frequently leads to increased feelings of irritation and worry (Rao, 2019). Students who are

female, however, are presented with obstacles that are exacerbated. They must contend with cultural preconceptions connected to gender and disability in addition to the demands of academics. In particular, mobility limitations may impede their ability to attend school, particularly in rural regions, and cultural opinions about girls with disabilities may affect the amount of support for education that they receive from their families and communities. Girls must deal with stigma associated with disability in addition to gender prejudice, which contributes to an increase in stress levels (UNICEF, 2019).

Supporting Literature:

Research on academic stress among disabled children in India highlights recurring patterns. Sharma and Salend (2016) emphasized the role of inclusive classroom environments in either mitigating or intensifying stress, depending on teacher preparedness and peer attitudes. Gupta (2018) identified family and parental expectations as significant stressors that influence children's academic motivation. Rao (2019) It has been proven that infrastructural constraints are closely correlated with elevated levels of stress among children who have locomotor disabilities. Educational exclusion and stigma are two factors that have been shown to be frequent drivers of academic anxiety in students, according to a number of international publications, including UNICEF's (2019) research on children with disabilities. These data taken together highlight the fact that academic stress in children with locomotor disabilities prior to secondary school is a multifaceted construct that is influenced by academic, psychological, gender, and environmental variables.

Self-Concept of Pre-Secondary Locomotor Disabled Children:

Understanding Self-Concept:

The term "self-concept" describes the way that an individual perceives their own capabilities, their intrinsic value, and their identity as a whole. It includes the way in which an individual assesses his or her own abilities, limitations, and responsibilities within society. For children, especially those in the pre-secondary stage, self-concept is of great importance since it influences their motivation, resilience, and ability to adjust to social situations (Marsh & Martin, 2011). There are several dimensions to the components of the self-concept. How students assess their achievement in learning and in tasks linked to school is reflected in their academic self-concept. Their perception of their social self-concept includes their notion of social integration, peer acceptability, and interpersonal interactions. The sense of one's

emotional well-being, self-worth, and capacity to cope with stress are all components of the emotional self-concept. A child's total sense of self is moulded by these three elements working in tandem, which in turn impacts their preparedness to confront both academic and social obstacles (Yeung et al., 2019).

Formation of Self-Concept in Disabled Children:

The development of self-concept among children with locomotor disabilities is frequently affected by their relationships with their classmates, the assistance they receive from their families, and their level of inclusion in school. Experiences of bullying or exclusion, which are negative, do harm to self-esteem, whereas positive interactions with friends and companions improve confidence and a sense of belonging (Sharma, 2018). As parental encouragement and acceptance directly contribute to children's conviction in their capabilities, family support plays a vital function. On the other hand, overprotection or decreased expectations might have a detrimental impact on their confidence (Gupta, 2017). Another important consideration is the extent to which schools are inclusive. Inclusive classrooms that encourage participation and equality cultivate a good self-concept. On the other hand, discriminating behaviours or inadequate support networks can perpetuate feelings of inferiority. Children have the opportunity to participate in school activities with a greater degree of independence when adaptive aids are available to them. These aids include accessible infrastructure, mobility devices, and wheelchairs. This increased independence improves their self-confidence (Rao, 2019). Rehabilitation programs and counseling also play a significant role in building resilience, helping children cope with academic challenges, and strengthening their self-image (Mehrotra, 2020).

Gender Dimensions:

Children with locomotor disabilities are substantially affected in their self-concept by their gender. Body image problems, societal stigma, and cultural norms regarding femininity and physical aptitude are additional obstacles that girls with locomotor impairments frequently encounter. These influences may serve to restrict the goals and self-confidence of girls, especially in social contexts where they already face obstacles to receiving an education (UNICEF, 2019). On the other hand, boys frequently gain a sense of self-worth from their independence, strength, and athletic capabilities. Frustration or a reduced sense of self-worth may occur as a result of these expectations being directly affected by limitations on mobility.

Their challenges are further exacerbated by social standards that equate masculinity with physical aptitude, resulting in the development of unique gendered tendencies in the construction of self-concept (Kumar & Raja, 2020).

Supporting Literature:

Studies from India and abroad provide insights into how children with disabilities form self-concept. Sharma (2018) found that inclusive educational practices significantly improved the self-concept of disabled children in Indian classrooms. Gupta (2017) emphasized the role of family attitudes, noting that supportive environments helped children develop positive self-perceptions. Rao (2019) highlighted that the use of adaptive aids and accessible infrastructure reduced dependency and improved confidence among locomotor disabled students. Mehrotra (2020) reinforced the importance of counseling programs in strengthening emotional self-concept. These conclusions are also supported by research conducted in other countries. According to Marsh and Martin (2011), multidimensional self-concept models applicable to a wide range of populations, including children with impairments. Yeung et al. (2019) It was verified that resilience and accomplishment in children with impairments are substantially predicted by academic and social self-concepts. The existing body of literature emphasises the fact that the self-concept of children with locomotor disabilities is influenced by both structural elements and social interactions. Moreover, gender is considered to be a significant driver of the experiences of these children.

Correlation Between Academic Stress and Self-Concept:

Interlinkages:

Pre-secondary children with locomotor disabilities have a profound and complex link between academic stress and self-concept. When educational expectations surpass the coping abilities of a kid, academic stress occurs; on the other hand, self-concept is a reflection of the child's opinion of their own ability, worth, and social value. Self-concept and confidence are often diminished as a result of the regular experience of significant academic stress. Children who are unable to satisfy academic expectations owing to restricted access to resources or mobility constraints frequently internalise failure, which leads to a decrease in self-belief and academic desire (Rao, 2019). This load is exacerbated by the stress of tests, comparisons with one's peers, and pressure from parents. This results in a loop in which academic stress directly lowers self-confidence. A positive self-concept, on the other hand, serves as a protective buffer. Students

who have a positive self-image as capable learners, useful peers, and resilient persons are better equipped to cope with the stress brought on by academic obligations. Self-concept facilitates adaptive coping techniques, allowing youngsters to perceive academic problems as opportunities for growth rather than as dangers. In inclusive classroom environments, where participation and accomplishments are acknowledged, positive self-concept minimises the negative consequences of stress, hence promoting resilience and perseverance (Sharma, 2018). This dichotomy illustrates that although stress has the potential to destroy self-confidence, the cultivation of a positive self-concept may reduce its influence and encourage adaptive development.

Gender as a Mediator:

Gender serves as a mediating factor in the relationship that exists between stress and self-concept. The likelihood that female pupils with locomotor difficulties will internalise stress is higher. They are frequently susceptible to experiencing self-doubt as a result of cultural standards, societal stigma, and concerns about their physical image, which ultimately results in decreased confidence and limited goals (UNICEF, 2019). Stereotypes of reliance are reinforced by the junction of gender and disability, which in turn increases stress and diminishes self-concept. Instead of expressing their tension, girls may bottle it up, which can result in low self-esteem and worry. Frustration, violence, and disruptive behaviour are some of the ways in which male students frequently externalise stress. Social conventions associate male identity with independence and strength, which means that boys find it especially challenging to reconcile their identities with physical limits. When they are unable to achieve these expectations, males may display stress via their behaviour, which can result in problems with their peers and a decrease in social acceptance (Kumar & Raja, 2020). These gender-based differences demonstrate how stress manifests differently in shaping self-concept, requiring nuanced interventions.

Educational and Social Contexts:

Furthermore, the relationship between academic stress and self-concept is influenced by social and educational environments. Students may benefit from adaptable technology, counselling services, and a higher understanding of their peers in metropolitan regions, where schools are more likely to embrace inclusive education techniques. Support such as this decreases academic stress and promotes a positive self-concept by enabling involvement and

independence (Mehrotra, 2020). Conversely, rural students often face infrastructural limitations, inadequate teacher training, and social stigma, which elevate stress levels and restrict opportunities for developing self-concept. This connection may be transformed in a significant way by the implementation of inclusive education approaches. Students with disabilities can succeed intellectually and socially in schools that provide accessible infrastructure, skilled teachers, and peer sensitisation. Research indicates that inclusive behaviours have the dual effect of alleviating academic stress and validating the self-worth of children. As a result, these activities have the additional benefit of enhancing self-concept (Sharma & Salend, 2016). Without such models, disabled children remain vulnerable to exclusion, reinforcing negative cycles of stress and poor self-concept.

Synthesis of Literature:

Studies in India and globally provide insight into the link between academic stress and self-concept. In the Indian context, Sharma (2018) emphasized that inclusive classrooms improve both stress coping and self-concept, while Rao (2019) documented how infrastructural limitations amplify stress and weaken confidence. Gupta (2017) found that family support enhances self-concept and reduces stress, whereas overprotection fosters dependency. Mehrotra (2020) further highlighted the role of teacher attitudes in shaping children's resilience against stress. Globally, Marsh and Martin (2011) established that self-concept and academic achievement are reciprocally linked, with stress serving as a negative mediator. Yeung, Craven, and Kaur (2019) confirmed that positive academic and social self-concepts predict resilience in the face of educational pressures. UNICEF (2019) and WHO (2018) underscored that disabled children worldwide experience higher stress due to exclusion, and enhancing self-concept is a protective strategy against marginalization.

Even yet, there are still certain things that aren't known about this subject. In India, a small number of research focus exclusively on children with locomotor disabilities who are of pre-secondary school age. Furthermore, the interaction of gender, disability, and academic stress has not been sufficiently investigated. Longitudinal studies that follow how stress and self-concept change during the school years are notably missing. The existence of these gaps underscores the importance of conducting research that is more nuanced and sensitive to context.

Table 1: Correlation between Academic Stress and Self-Concept in Pre-Secondary Locomotor Disabled Children

Dimension	Observations	Explanation
Stress Impact on Self-Concept	High academic stress lowers self-confidence and motivation	Exam pressure, peer comparison, and resource limitations undermine self-worth.
Self-Concept as Buffer	Positive self-concept improves resilience and coping ability	Confident children perceive academic challenges as opportunities rather than threats.
Gender as Mediator	Females internalize stress, reducing self-esteem; Males externalize stress through aggression or frustration	Gender norms influence how stress translates into self-concept outcomes.

Source: created by author

Educational Contexts Urban: better inclusion, adaptive aids, counseling; Rural: poor infrastructure, stigma, limited opportunities Contextual differences shape stress levels and self-concept formation. Inclusive Education Models Supportive classrooms reduce stress and validate abilities Teacher training, accessibility, and peer sensitization promote positive self-concept.

Literature Insights: Indian and global studies confirm dual role of stress and self-concept; research gaps remain Lack of longitudinal, gender-sensitive studies on locomotor disabled children.

A summary of the association between academic stress and self-concept among children with locomotor disabilities who have not yet entered secondary school is presented in the table above. It draws attention to stress as a factor that diminishes self-confidence and as a consequence that is influenced by one's self-perception. Inclusive education serves to diminish stress and cultivate resilience, while gender and educational environments function as mediators. In addition to confirming these connections, existing research highlights knowledge gaps, particularly with regard to the Indian setting.

Conclusion:

Children with locomotor disabilities who are pre-secondary school age are the subjects of a study that came to the conclusion that scholastic stress and self-concept are two elements that are tightly intertwined in these children's life. Continuously high levels of academic stress diminished self-confidence and drive, but a positive self-concept offered resilience and enhanced coping strategies. Stress was not simply the outcome of academic demands such as tests and assignments; it was also the result of accessibility concerns, peer comparisons, and social expectations. These patterns were discovered to be highly impacted by elements related to gender and socio-cultural environments. Young women typically internalised stress, which resulted in reduced self-esteem and constricted ambitions, whereas young men usually externalised stress through behavioural challenges. The impact of stress on self-concept is influenced by gender norms, as demonstrated by these discrepancies. In the same way, the discrepancies between educational environments in urban and rural areas, as well as the disparities in social acceptability, were significant factors in deciding whether children with disabilities were able to build self-confidence or gave in to problems associated to stress. The results of the investigation demonstrated that favourable educational settings served as protective elements. Inclusive classrooms, peer sensitisation, and supportive teachers encouraged resilience and boosted self-concept, whereas situations that were characterised by neglect or bias increased vulnerability. The results indicated that the link between academic stress and self-concept was dynamic and was affected by a number of structural, social, and psychological factors. Children gained self-esteem and self-confidence when there were suitable support mechanisms in place. On the other hand, the lack of such mechanisms increased stress levels and caused harm to self-perceptions.

Overall, the findings revealed that academic stress and self-concept were inextricably linked in the formation of the educational journeys of children with locomotor disabilities who were pre-secondary. It was imperative to deal with these concerns in an integrated manner in order to guarantee that students would make progress academically and would also maintain psychological well-being.

Recommendations:

1. Digital and Inclusive Interventions: Schools should integrate inclusive pedagogy and provide assistive technologies that allow locomotor disabled children to access learning on equal terms.

Adaptive devices, accessible infrastructure, and digital tools can reduce stress and foster independence.

2. Counseling and Mentorship Programs: Regular counseling sessions and structured mentorship programs should be established to help children manage academic pressures and strengthen self-concept. Mentorship by role models with disabilities can further inspire confidence and resilience.

3. Gender-sensitive Approaches: Special initiatives for disabled girls must be designed to reduce stigma, encourage participation, and promote empowerment. These can include targeted scholarships, safe mobility support, and awareness campaigns challenging gender stereotypes.

4. Teacher Training Programs: Teachers should undergo systematic training to better understand the unique challenges faced by locomotor disabled students. Training should focus on sensitivity, classroom adaptations, peer sensitization, and strategies for reducing stress while building confidence.

5. Policy Enhancements: The implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act must be strengthened to ensure equity in education. Monitoring mechanisms should ensure that inclusive provisions are practiced consistently across schools in both urban and rural areas.

6. Future Research: More longitudinal studies are required to trace the psychological impact of academic stress and self-concept development over time. Special attention should be given to how these issues evolve across gender, socio-cultural settings, and academic transitions. Such research will offer deeper insights for designing targeted interventions.

To summarise, in order to address the interconnected difficulties of academic stress and self-concept in children who have locomotor disabilities, a comprehensive approach is needed. This strategy should consist of a combination of inclusive educational methods, psychological support, gender sensitivity, and strong policy enforcement. These approaches can enable India to promote both academic achievement and social empowerment for this disadvantaged population of children if they are implemented.

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