

Academic Performance, Self Efficacy and Perceived Social Support of Visually Impaired Students

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Abstract

Objective: The present study investigated the relationship between academic performance, self efficacy and perceived social support of visually impaired students.

Sample: A purposive sample consisting of 60 visually impaired students was selected from three institutions in Lahore, comprising boys and girls in equal number.

Instruments: Translated versions of Multidimensional Perceived Social Support Scale by Zimet, Dehnam and Farley and Generalized Self Efficacy Scale by Jerusalem were used for the purpose of data collection.

Results: Significant correlation was found between academic performance, self – efficacy, and perceived social support. Gender differences were found in academic achievement. Girls secured a higher percentage of marks than boys.

Conclusion: Visually impaired students can make

significant educational attainments if they are provided support. This in turn will add to their self-efficacy which may lead to even greater achievement. Educational institutions need to design and set up support networks by involving faculty and students for promoting higher achievement and self-reliance in visually impaired students.

Keywords: Visual impairment, academic performance, self – efficacy, social support.

Introduction

Visual impairment can be due to multiple causes including albinism, cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, hemianopsia, macular degeneration, retinal detachment, strabismus and other conditions.

The prevalence of visual impairment varies. According to a nationwide survey carried out in 2002–2004 by the Pakistan National Eye Survey Study Groups,¹ visual impairment prevalence in Pakistan among age range 30 years and higher is 2.7%. This translates to 1.7% million visually impaired adults. Approximately 85.5% of these adults suffer from preventable causes of visual impairment while 14.5% are completely blind. Out of those who are completely blind, 55% suffer from cataracts. Older people suffer significantly more from visual impairment as compared to younger adults. Visual impairment between the age range of 30 – 39 year old is less among females compared to males, while in the age range of 40 – 59 years the prevalence of visual impairment is less among males than females. It is estimated that there are approximately 624,000 visually impaired people in Pakistan between the ages of 30 – 59 years.

Academic achievement is the ability to attain proficiency in school responsibilities as measured by test

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results and reported in scores or grades based on a students' performance.²

Self – efficacy is a specific trait defined as the self – assessment of one's own ability to accomplish a task or attain mastery over a particular condition or set of circumstances. Self – efficacy has been found to be a predictor for academic performance and also predicts students' motivation and education as evidenced by research over the last two decades.³

Social support is thought to be especially important during adolescence. Adolescents who are blind or visually impaired may experience problems in relating with the outside world, and this may influence their feelings of happiness and adjustments in life.

Social support can be categorized into social connectedness, perceived social support and actual or enacted social support.^{4,5}

Perceived social support is a person's cognitive assessment of the support available to him or her which enables them to cope with trauma, stress and anxiety. It has been found to reduce anxiety and psychological distress and improve well-being.⁶⁻¹¹

Research has revealed that there is no main effect of visual impairment on academic achievement; moreover visually impaired students have capacity to manage their difficulties in approaching or accessing their education criterion as well as written information regarding exams. More or less 20% of all students who have low vision or are visually impaired have few friends to achieve access to colleges and universities¹². According to research the visually impaired students have same mental health as normally sighted students; however it is also reported that visually impaired students showed less sense of security and self – confidence than normally sighted students. It has been found that visually impaired students showed less academic achievement than sighted student.¹³

Visually impaired adolescents showed better success in psychological adjustment, academic performance as well as in accomplishment of mental tasks; in these variables main predictor is high self – efficacy beliefs that create a positive change in these developmental tasks. It has been seen in case of students with visual impairment self efficacy contributes to self – management activities and skills as well as to achievement of life goals. It is also associated with positive feelings.¹⁴

Self – efficacy is considered to be highly associated with students' fundamental interest in exploring and learning tasks and also plays an important role in

their writing revision tasks.¹⁵⁻¹⁷ Self – efficacy has been seen as a predictor that is significantly associated used as measure associated significantly with student sad options of major sin college, achievement in course work, and determination. There are two predictors of self efficacy that are related to students' attitude: their rate of learning performance and expenses of energy.^{18,19}

Regarding the impact of perceived self-efficacy on determination an academic investigation, has revealed that it plays a vital role in student's skill attainment both directly and ultimately by increasing their determination.²⁰ It has been indicated that self-efficacy contributes to the perceived career opportunity in scientific field, grades and determination. Self-efficacy is seen to be moderately interrelated with academic performance; it was also significantly correlated to social support.²¹

A significant association has been reported between self – efficacy grade and academic performance was found to be significantly related with self – efficacy. Similar findings are available with reference to accomplishment of performance related tasks.²²

Social support plays a significant role in the adjustment and achievement of visually impaired persons. However it may not always be available to all. Visually impaired adolescents have often had fewer friends and usually have fewer dates with adolescents than those who have appropriate and normal vision. These blind adolescents frequently have feelings of isolation and problems in making peers to best friends.²³

At the same time several visually impaired adults have reported getting social support from their close friends.²⁴ The majority of young people with visual impairment believed that they are contented with their support which they are receiving from families. On the other hand, some studies revealed that adolescents with impairment may receive insufficient social support; sometimes their families show overprotection to them, do not realize their condition and consciously or unconsciously ignore the existing problem.²⁵⁻²⁷

By conducting this study the researcher has been able to identify variables that contribute to the status of visually impaired students as self – reliant or dependent members of their families, organization and the society. Findings of previous research indicate that it can be possible to avoid visual impairment from becoming a constant handicap with sufficient and appropriate care. This research aims to add to the existing

body of scientific knowledge that may be used for better planning for an improved quality of life of visually impaired persons.

- 1) To investigate the relationship between perceived social support and self – efficacy and academic performance of visually impaired students.
- 2) To look into gender differences in terms of perceived social support, self – efficacy and academic performance of visually impaired students.

We hypothesized that there is a correlation between academic performance, self-efficacy and social support of visually impaired students and that academic performance, self – efficacy and social support among visually impaired students differs across gender.

Method

We adopted a correlational research design. Our study sample consisted of 60 respondents with visual impairment. The sample consisted of an equal number of males ($n = 30$) and females ($n = 30$). The purposive sample of visually impaired learners in intermediate and bachelors program was taken from three public sector institutions in Lahore: a university for women, a co-educational university, and a college for Special Education. All of the participants gave informed consent to participate in the study. Age of the participants ranged from 18 to 24 years (the upper limit of the participants' age was higher than the average students in their class because visually impaired students generally do not get admission in school at an early age). Participants of all socioeconomic classes were included. Students of less than 18 years or above 24 years of age were excluded.

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) is a brief research tool designed to measure perceptions of support from 3 sources: Family, Friends and significant others. The scale comprises a total of 12 items, with 4 items for each subscale.²⁸ It is brief and simple to use and exhibits adequate internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha: 0.8) and test-retest reliability. Urdu version of this scale was used in this study.

The Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) is a 10 – item 4 point Likert type scale developed to assess optimistic self – beliefs in helping individuals deal with a variety of life challenges e.g. how an individual learned to compete with various impediments which generate stumbling blocks in his or her life as well as

how these individuals learn to handle stress and burn-out.²⁹ We used the Urdu version of this scale developed by one of the authors.³⁰ Which also exhibited good internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha: 0.70) and test-retest reliability.

After taking informed consent from the respondents and assuring them of confidentiality, the questionnaires were individually administered to each participant. Demographic information was collected from each participant and they were all requested to cooperate in completing the scales. The researcher read out the items and recorded responses in the answer sheets. Results were analyzed using SPSS version 17. Statistical analyses included correlation and t-test.

Results

Our sample consisted of sixty visually impaired students. Participants' mean age was 21.33 and $SD = 1.76$. Five percentage of the visually impaired students were of 18 years of age, 11.7% were aged 19, 20% were aged 20 years, and 15% were of 24 years of age. 30% of students were 18 years of age studying in intermediate, 35% were 21 years of age studying in B.A and the same number were studying in B.S.

The results indicate that academic performance is significantly correlated with generalized self – efficacy and perceived social support and subscales of perceived social support (Table 1). Our results also showed that significant others' support was more strongly correlated with academic performance than family and friends social support.

Independent sample t-test was used to assess the group differences in academic performance among male and female visually impaired students. Our results showed that visually impaired female students were better achievers academically ($M = 68.27, SD = 12.50$) than visually impaired male students ($M = 59.50, SD = 11.92$). The differences were significant ($t(58) = -2.77, p < 0.01$ (Table 2).

The results showed that visually impaired females showed the same level of self efficacy as indicated in ($M = 29.23, SD = 4.40$) as compare to visually impaired male students ($M = 29.23, SD = 4.40$). There was no significant difference, $t(58) = -2.82, p \leq .01$. Similarly outcomes of perceived social support showed no significant difference as indicated in ($M = 64.06, SD = 9.48$) as compare to visually impaired students males ($M = 60.86, SD = 11.44$). The differences were not significant, $t(58) = -1.17, p \leq .01$.

Table 1: Correlation among Generalized Self Efficacy, Academic Performance and Perceived Social Support; Family, Friend and Significant Others (N = 60).

	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Generalized Self Efficacy	-	.53**	.55**	*.29*	.32*	.59**
2	Academic Performance			.56**	.35*	.31*	.50**
3	Perceived Social Support				.83**	.66**	.63**
4	Family Social Support					.32*	.30*
5	Friends Social Support						.22*
6	Significant Others						

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Table 2: Independent Sample t-Test Comparing Academic Performance of Male and Female Visually Impaired Students (N = 60).

Variable	Male (n = 30)		Female (n = 30)				95% CI	
	M	SD	M	SD	t(58)	p	LL	UL
Academic Performance	59.50	11.92	68.27	12.50	-2.77	.007	-15.10	-2.45

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, CI = Confidence Intervals, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit.

Discussion

This study aimed to identify the correlation between academic performance, self efficacy and perceived social support. We also wanted to look into the role (if any) of other variables such as gender, education, and academic scores on self efficacy and perceived social support.

There is a positive correlation between academic performance, self efficacy and social support of visually impaired students. Enhanced public awareness and education about visual impairment is an important helping factor for visually impaired students to adjust in their existing environment.³¹ Self efficacy and academic performance are interrelated and both are vitally important to increase determination of one's behavior. Social support and self-esteem also play an important role in enhancing confidence and academic performance. In our study, there was a strong, positive correlation between academic performance of visually impaired students and self – efficacy. Increases in self-efficacy were correlated with increases in academic performance. This association between academic scores and tasks related to performance is significantly related to self – efficacy has been reported in literature. Higher generalized self – efficacy and self –

esteem have been seen to be the chief predictors of good academic adjustment.³²

Our study also showed that there is a positive relationship between perceived social support and academic performance. There was a strong, positive correlation between academic performance of visually impaired students and support received from friends. Increases in level of social support were correlated with increases in academic performance.

Moreover significantly positive correlation was found between academic performance and family support, especially from parents. Parents and family members have been previously reported to be significant sources of social support on a daily basis and in support related to homework. Another researcher reported in his study that social support from significant others as well as from family was more significant compared to support from friends.³³ This is consistent with previously reported findings of research with regard to the source of support with visually impaired persons reporting more social support from parents than from peers.

According to another research findings social support received from family as well as significant others serves as a supportive pillar enabling an individual to

explore the world and perceive the obstacles of life as controllable and manageable.³⁴ Appropriate enhancement of the variables in this study i.e. self – efficacy, social support especially in visually impaired students is very important for good adjustment in society. A supportive environment enables them to achieve their goals including good academic grades. Self – efficacy moderately interrelates with academic performance and is significantly correlated to social support.

Our findings on academic performance, self – efficacy and social support are significant and consistent with past studies.

Why are visually impaired female students more academically successful than males? Reasons may vary; may be because the female respondents were studying in institutions with stronger academic credentials, or maybe they were getting more attention from the teachers and greater support from the peers than the males in our study. Facilities provided by institutions and teaching methods may vary from institution to institution. Previous research has revealed that visually impaired female students have more capacity to manage their difficulties related to academic achievements. Other research supporting these findings has shown that significant gender differences were found in broad – spectrum learning and academic performance. Females showed improved work aptitude and were better in verbal communication. These differences in academic achievements can be explained by factors such as students’ class behavior, choice of subjects, facilities provided by institutions and their cognitive abilities.^{35,36}

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the academic performance and related variables of visually impaired students. It also indicates direction where by factors such as self-efficacy and perceived social support can help minimize the effects of visual impairment in achieving academic goals. Health related, as well as therapeutic, counseling services can be used for enhancing well-being and other positive beliefs among visually impaired students. Perceived social support especially support from parents can help visually impaired students improve their academic performance and cope better with stressful life situations and adversity. Colleges and universities, both public and private, need to improve and enhance facilities for supporting the visually impaired students for attaining what they have the

potential for. Academic institutions can play a pivotal role in promoting independent living, self-reliance, and a meaningful life in visually impaired students by developing strong support networks involving faculty as well as students.

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