Self-Concept and Self-Esteem Relationship among College Students During COVID-19: A Cross-Sectional Study in Rural Areas of Jammu Division

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ABSTRACT

Background: The disruption of the education system during COVID-19 impacted students' self-perception, as they faced increased isolation, academic challenges, and heightened stress. **Aim:** To investigate the relationship between self-concept and self-esteem in college students engaged in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Methodology:** A cross-sectional, observational study design was adopted. A balanced sample of 200 undergraduate students (100 male, 100 female) from rural areas of Jammu colleges was randomly selected to represent the population. The study employed two standardized questionnaires: the Self-Esteem Scale by Dr Santhosh Dhar and Dr Upinder Dhar, and the Self-Concept Cum Rating Scale by R.K. Saraswat, which assesses self-concept. **Result:** A Pearson correlation value of 0.655 indicates a significant positive association between self-concept (SC) and self-esteem (SE), according to the correlation study. This association, which is significant at the 0.01 level (p =.000), suggests that SC tends to rise along with an increase in SE. With 200 participants in the study, the results have a strong foundation. The dependability of the observed connection is reinforced by the significance of the correlation (p < 0.01), which suggests that there is very little probability of this link happening by coincidence. This robust positive correlation points to a significant relationship between the two variables and implies that the same things affecting SC may also affect SE. **Conclusion:** The study's findings reveal a significant positive correlation (r = 0.655, p < 0.01) between SE and SC, suggesting that factors influencing SE also impact SC.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic, Online learning**,** Self-concept, College Students, Self-esteem,

Introduction

One's self-concept is a complete view and comprehension of oneself, including beliefs, emotions, and ideas in relation to physical, social, emotional, and spiritual aspects of existence. It combines self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-image, and self-awareness to influence behaviour and how one reacts to challenges. According to Rosenberg (1979), Bandura (1997), Shavelson. (1976) and others, it represents how people see themselves and incorporate their experiences into a cohesive sense of who they are. On the other hand, self-esteem is a person's whole evaluation of their own value, which includes both positive and negative self-perceptions. Emotional stability and decision-making depend on positive self-perception. Low self-esteem may have a detrimental impact on relationships, personal development, confidence, and goal attainment (Rosenberg et al., 1979), (Leary et al., 1999).

Self-concept and self-esteem are connected yet distinct concepts. In other words, we can say that self-concept is about understanding yourself. While self-esteem is about liking yourself, both play a crucial role in

students' lives, as they significantly impact academic performance, social interactions, and overall well-being (Rosenberg et al., 1979), (Marsh and Shavelson et al., 1985). A positive self-concept across various domains usually enhances self-esteem, whereas a negative one can decrease it. This dynamic relationship implies that changes in self-concept can have an impact on self-esteem over time (Dorn et al., 2020)

Furthermore, both the academic and emotional health of students throughout the globe have been severely damaged by the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the abrupt switch to online learning, students experienced extreme learning loss as well as higher levels of stress and anxiety (Dorn et al., 2020), (Lischeret al., 2021). These obstacles included restricted access to technology and difficulty adjusting to new formats. Students from marginalized communities were most affected by social isolation and increased screen usage, which exacerbated these problems (Viner et al., 2021), (Tandon et al., 2020). The disruption of academic routines and feedback mechanisms during the pandemic has likely impacted students' self-perception, contributing to self-doubt and lower academic self-esteem (Gonzalez et al., 2020) (Xie et al.,2020)

Against this backdrop, the objective of this research is to investigate the correlation between self-concept and self-esteem among college students who were participated in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically on students from rural regions. This correlation analysis guide future efforts to improve remote learning experiences and promote students' psychological well-being and academic performance.

Literature Review

A student's self-concept and self-esteem are vital components of their existence. Both are separate but related concepts that are vital to students' academic achievement and psychological health. Consider your self-concept as a multi-piece puzzle. The definition given by Rosenberg & Owens et al., 2001 is "the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings about the self." According to a generally recognized definition provided by Rosenberg, self- esteem is an individual's assessment of themselves that they usually retain, indicating whether they are in acceptance or disapproval of themselves (Savin-Williams & Jaquish et al.,1981). A person's cognitive knowledge of oneself, including their views of their skills and attributes, values, and beliefs, is referred to as their self-concept. The construct in question is complex and has several subcategories, including intellectual, social, and physical self-concepts (Shavelson et al., 1976).

Higher education had been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, causing until now uncommon disruptions for college students throughout the globe. As a result of the pandemic, educational institutions all throughout the globe were forced to close, affecting nearly 60% of students and significantly disrupting the educational system (Alqahtani & Rajkhan et al., 2020). Moreover, the psychological burden that college students were bearing had increased due to a lack of social support and difficulties adjusting to distant learning (Lamidi et al., 2024). Students' feelings of loneliness and elevated stress levels had been exacerbated by the pandemic's effects on social isolation and routine disruptions (Haikalis et al., 2021). The epidemic had also had an impact on students' exercise regimens and physical well-being; breaks in regular exercise routines have been linked to higher levels of stress and anxiety (Yuan et al., 2022). For college students, the COVID-19 epidemic increased already-existing anxieties and introduced further difficulties. This had a direct impact on their self- perception and sense of confidence. The pandemic brought to light the significance of students' self-concept and self-esteem. Due to the significant effects of the pandemic on college students' wellbeing, self-concept and self- esteem becoming more important.

A student's self-concept is an essential component of their learning process and overall development, and the typical classroom setting may have a big impact on it. College students' perceptions of themselves are flexible and shaped by a variety of elements, such as their social and academic experiences. According to Nelson et al., (2011), college students with ADHD often have a weaker sense of who they are than their classmates, which emphasizes the need for specialized help to address their unique issues and enhance their sense of who they are. Fostering a healthy self-concept and academic achievement for these individuals requires an understanding of their unique requirements and a solution for them. Furthermore, Zhao et al., (2024) suggested that the association between college students' sense of purpose in life and physical exercise is mediated by their self-concept, demonstrating the connection between psychological self-perceptions and physical well-being.

Due to the sudden switch to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, many students had

difficulties with their academic self-concept. For many students, the disruption of their regular lives brought on by COVID-19 resulted in a crisis of self-identity. It was challenging for them to develop and preserve a strong sense of self because of the uncertainty and worry surrounding the pandemic. Students' general well-being and ability to participate fully in their education were negatively impacted by the substantial emotional load that resulted from this identity discomfort in addition to the scholastic difficulties (Browning et al., 2021).

The pandemic's uncertainty and tension influenced students' emotional self-concept as well. High levels of stress, anxiety, and desperation were experienced by many students, which had an adverse impact on their perception of themselves. Students' emotional self-concept declined during the pandemic, and Xie et al. (2020) found a strong correlation between both. According to Zhu et al. (2016), who studied the association between Chinese college students' self-concept, mental health, and social adjustment, having a good self-concept greatly enhances psychological well-being. According to their study, students who had a more positive self-perception were more resilient and better able to deal with emotional and social difficulties when things became tough.

However, in conventional learning contexts, students' self-esteem also plays a crucial role in determining both their academic success and general well-being According to research, having a strong and positive self- esteem is associated with increased motivation, enhanced interpersonal connections, and greater academic performance (Baumeister et al., 2003).

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted students mental health and self-esteem. Numerous research has emphasized the role that resilience, social support, physical exercise, and psychological capital play in regulating the relationship between students' well-being and this pandemic. A study conducted in Spain by Villodres et al. found that social lockdown negatively impacted the self-esteem of secondary school students, though this effect could be reduced by exercising and eating a balanced diet.

Research also examined the mediating roles that psychological capital and self-esteem play in the relationship between anxiety and sleeplessness in COVID-19 patients. These findings highlight the need of preserving positive psychological resources during challenging situations (Du et al., 2024).

Research indicates that the pandemic has led to a notable decline in self-esteem among students. For instance, found a negative association between stringent social distancing measures and self-reported emotional well-being and self-esteem in children and adolescents, suggesting that the stressors associated with the pandemic have exacerbated feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth (Goto et al., 2022). Similarly, a significant decrease reported in self-esteem levels among students during the pandemic, emphasizing the detrimental effects of social isolation and altered learning environments on students' self-perceptions (Catling, 2022). This decline in self- esteem is further corroborated by who noted that psychological distress, including anxiety and depression, has been prevalent among students, largely due to the pandemic's impact on academic pressures and future uncertainties (Azmi et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the influence of social support on self-esteem has been highlighted by examining the association between internet usage preference, loneliness, online social support, and self-esteem among college students during COVID-19 (Luo et al., 2022). Japanese junior high school students' implicit self-esteem was unchanged despite the difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating that they were able to maintain a resilient self-perception even in the face of adversity (Uchida & More et al., 2022).

Research Gap

Prior to COVID-19, research on self-concept and self-esteem focused on traditional classroom interactions, peer relationships, and academic achievements (Harter, 1998; Marsh & Craven, 2006). The sudden shift to online learning during the pandemic drastically altered these dynamics. With fewer in-person interactions, students lacked social reinforcement and feedback, affecting their self-esteem and self-concept. Increased self-reliance in online settings posed new challenges, particularly for rural students facing limited resources and isolation. This study examines how online learning during COVID-19 impacted rural college students' self-concept and self- esteem, offering insights to improve mental health and academic support in future online education.

Research Objective

To investigate the relationship between self-concept and self-esteem in college students engaged in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Materials and

Methods Research

Design

Quantitative Correlational Study: The study employed a quantitative correlational design to explore the relationship between two key psychological constructs: self-concept and self-esteem. This design is well-suited for examining the strength and direction of relationships between variables, allowing for the identification of significant associations.

Study Group

A cross-sectional study was conducted across various colleges in the Jammu division (Jammu & Kashmir UT, India), focusing particularly on rural areas. The study group comprised 200 undergraduate students from rural colleges in the Jammu division of Jammu & Kashmir UT, evenly split between 100 males and 100 females. Participants, aged 18 to 22, were randomly selected from five colleges, with each college providing 40 students (20 males and 20 females).

Procedure

Data was collected in a classroom setting using standardized questionnaires designed to assess self-concept and self-esteem, promoting positive interaction between participants and the researcher. Participants were given a brief summary of the research objectives before to the study and given detailed instructions on how to complete the Self-Concept and Self-Esteem Questionnaire. They were promised that their answers would only be utilized for study and that there was no right or wrong response. Before starting, participants were told to ask questions if they required clarification. Following completion, the answers were rated according to a predetermined key, and the data were examined to obtain conclusions that matched the goals of the study.

Semi-structured Proforma
A semi-structured pro forma was used to collect sociodemographic details, including age, gender, and family type.

Tools Used
Self-Esteem Scale: Developed by Dr. Santhosh Dhar and Dr. Upinder Dhar, this scale measures self-esteem using a 5-point scale to evaluate various aspects of self-worth. The scale, adapted into Hindi by R.N. Singh and Ankita Srivastava from Robinson & Shaver's 1973 model, has a split-half reliability index of 0.86, indicating high consistency.
Self-Concept Cum Rating Scale: Created by R.K. Saraswat, this tool assesses self-concept through 58 personality traits categorized into five dimensions: power, social, ability, physical, and psychological. Each trait is evaluated across three categories—real self, ideal self, and social self. The scale has a test-retest reliability index of 0.83, demonstrating its reliability over time.

Area of Study

This study investigates the relationship between self-concept and self-esteem in rural college students during COVID-19 online learning. Students in rural areas have fewer resources, less internet access, and more social isolation, which has an impact on how they see themselves. Despite these obstacles, their adaptability and tenacity may influence their self-concept and self-esteem in both positive and negative ways.

Result and Observation
This section presents the findings from the analysis of the relationship between self-concept and self-esteem among college students engaged in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1: Correlation between Self-Concept and Self-Esteem

			SE	SCS
SE	Pearson Correlation		1	.655[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)			0
	N		200	200
SCS	Pearson Correlation		.655[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0	
	N		200	200

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A Pearson correlation value of 0.655 indicates a significant positive association between SE and SCS, according to the correlation study. This association, which is significant at the 0.01 level (p =.000), implies that SC tends to rise along with an increase in SE. With 200 participants in the study, the results have a strong foundation. The dependability of the observed connection is reinforced by the significance of the correlation (p < 0.01), which suggests that there is very little probability of this link happening by coincidence. This robust positive correlation points to a significant relationship between the two variables and imply that the same things affecting SE may also affect SC.

The strong positive correlation (r=0.655, p<0.01) between SC and SE points to possible shared external causes, reciprocal impacts, or underlying structures. Similar developmental, environmental, or psychological factors impact both variables, requiring more investigation into their causal linkages and underlying processes. **Limitations** While the study provides valuable insights into the correlation between self-concept and self-esteem among college students during the COVID-19 pandemic, several limitations must be acknowledged. Our study's limitation is that it uses a cross-sectional design, capturing data at a single point in time. Longitudinal studies would be required to investigate how these variables may fluctuate with ongoing online learning experiences. The present study is primarily quantitative, focusing on statistical correlations without delving into qualitative aspects that could provide deeper insights into students' experiences. Understanding the reasons behind the correlations between self-concept and self-esteem would benefit from qualitative data, such as interviews or open-ended survey questions.

Conclusion

With a Pearson correlation of 0.655, the study's findings demonstrate a strong positive relationship between self-concept (SC) and self-esteem (SE) among college students who engaged in online learning opportunities during the COVID-19 epidemic. This result emphasizes these two psychological categories are interdependent, implying that raising self-esteem probably improve one's self-concept and vice versa. Despite the difficulties of online learning, students' positive self-perception is indicated by their higher mean scores for SC (133.065) and SE (69.71). However, the variability observed in self-concept suggests that external factors, such as limited social interaction, isolation, and inadequate technological resources, have influenced its development, particularly for rural students.

Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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