



EMPATHY VIS-À-VIS SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND INTELLECTUAL SELF-CONCEPT: AN INVESTIGATION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

An academic environment encompasses intellectual activities, social life and emotional growth. It demands caring, compassionate and empathetic connections. Students develop their sense of 'self' along with their social, emotional and intellectual identities. Self-concept is a multi-faceted paradigm understood by self-motives and social situations that gets reflected in behaviour. The present study is a descriptive survey that seeks to connect empathy with university students' social, emotional and intellectual self-concept. The test was carried out on a representative stratified sample and quantitative analysis established the results.

Key Words: Empathy, Self-Concept, Higher Education, Academic Environment, University Students.



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Introduction

Humans progress by creating new knowledge and universities are institutions that oversee the generation of new knowledge. Here, the environment is competitive, divergent, and challenging, creating a unique culture of learning. Students on a university campus come from varied backgrounds. Positive interactions on campus reflecting care, share and help lead to supportive, meaningful and constructive relationships. In contrast, negative interactions lead to bully-victim relationship and enmity (Rubin, 2012). The social environment and interpersonal dealings that occur on campus are very instrumental in healthy academic growth.

University students are distinctively known to be social. They are individuals with a well-developed awareness of 'self.' A self-concept is an individual's perception of their characteristics, abilities, behavior and sense of unique identity. A student's self-concept is also associated with learning, motivation, attitudes, perception, and adjustment. These constructs also determine the academic environment and success. Differences in the self-concept of students affect their academic achievement (Amirkhani et al., 2018).

Empathy vis-à-vis Social, Emotional and Intellectual Constructs

An academic environment includes collaborations, cooperation, creativity and communication. For successful communications, empathy is required. In a social situation, empathy is one individual's reactions to others' practical experiences (Davis, 1983). It enables people to put themselves into others' mental shoes and instinctively understand their emotions and thoughts. Empathy empowers an individual to feel with others. It facilitates compassion that motivates people to improve the well-being of others. Empathy is one of the core issues in education and not merely part of knowledge and skill development (Cain, 2019). Empathy in this light becomes a significant construct as a compassionate interpersonal dealing leads to a pro-social environment.

The social dimension of a student's life gets influenced by empathy and vice versa, at one side, young adults with bigger social circles and ones who lived with their families for a longer time display higher empathy levels (Atan, 2017). On the other hand, young adults experience less conflict in social relationships when empathy is high (Van Lissa, 2016). Self-awareness, regulation of emotions and mental flexibility enhance empathy and relates to emotional intelligence positively (Hajibabae, 2018). Hence, higher emotional intelligence establishes productive relationships and empathetic skills, leading to effective emotional management. Cognitive empathy has a negative relation with depression (Bennik et al., 2019) and, individuals with high empathy display objective and rational points of view and healthy responses (Green et al., 2018). Social and moral cognition is influenced by empathy and aids in developing flexibility and adaption (Bazdok et al., 2015; Melloni et al., 2015).

Self-Concept vis-à-vis Social, Emotional and Intellectual Constructs

The self-concept develops throughout the lifespan in different situations. The verbal and nonverbal responses of meaningful relationships like parents, family members, peer groups and teachers help build self-concept (Harter, 1998). The symbolic interactionism approach attributes the development of self-concept to be a social process. In this light, social interaction and comparison with peers' aids in the formation of self-concept. When teachers work on students' self-belief, they foster lasting academic capabilities (Jaiswal & Choudhari, 2017). Self-concept also affects opinions, attitudes and responses in personal and social life (Mehrad, 2016). A student's overall self-concept is based on both academic and non-academic dimensions. Examples of the non-academic areas are physical appearance, popularity, trustworthiness, relations with parents, emotional stability, etc. The academic areas are verbal,

mathematics, problem-solving, art etc. In academics, both overall academic self-concept and subject-specific self-concept influences students' actions and motivation. Students' self-concept plays a vital role in emotions related to achievement outcomes (Pekrun & Perr, 2014). Self-concepts of ability also are positively associated with enjoyment and negatively to anxiety and boredom (Goetz et al., 2010).

A positive self-concept enhances self-regulation, goal setting, behavior monitoring and cognitive preparation for action (Markus & Wurf, 1987). It is also suggested that students' educational aspirations are driven by general academic self-concept (Brunner et al., 2010). The relation of self-concept varies across domains. A study found a significant correlation between self-assessments in intellectual domains in contrast to insignificant correlation was observed between self-perceptions in the social domains (Hymel et al., 1999). On the other hand, self-concept related to empathy in all aspects and positive self-evaluation of social self-concept was found to predict empathy (Stojiljkovic et al., 2014).

Significance of the Study

University students face challenges when they transit from the active pursuit of knowledge acquisition to the knowledge creation process. Complexities of social relations exist on university campuses. The variation in the cultural background of the students is also of a wide range. Students evolve themselves socially, emotionally, and intellectually by active academic pursuits. A good understanding of themselves in these domains leads to success in their endeavors.

Moreover, healthy social communication requires empathy. A literature review suggested that intellectual, emotional and social constructs associate with self-concept and empathy. Yet there were no such specific studies that explained the association of intellectual, emotional and social self-concept with empathy. These viewpoints created curiosity in investigators' minds to determine how social, emotional, and intellectual self-concept and empathy correlate with each other among university students.

Operational Definitions

Self-Concept

The concept, feelings, attitude, aspirations and values of the individuals concerning themselves is self-concept. The dimensions of undertaken for this study are social, emotional and intellectual.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to imagine oneself in another's place and resonate with someone's feelings, ideas and motives. It is a psychological construct.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the relationship between empathy and self-concept of university students
2. To examine the relationship between empathy and social self-concept of university students
3. To investigate the relationship between empathy and emotional self-concept of university students
4. To find the relationship between empathy and intellectual self-concept of university students

Hypotheses

- Ho1 No significant relationship exists between empathy and self-concept of university students
- Ho2 There is no significant relationship between empathy and social self-concept of university students
- Ho3 Empathy and Emotional self-concept of university students are not significantly related.
- Ho4 Significant relationship for intellectual self-concept and empathy of university students does not exist.

Delimitations

The study delimited itself to the postgraduate university students of the Bathinda district in Punjab.

Methodology

The research investigated the relationship of empathy with social, emotional and intellectual self-concept among postgraduate university students. It involved detailed information about the status of the dependent variables, i.e., empathy and social, emotional and intellectual self-concept. Quantitative data was collected from the population's representative sample to investigate the descriptions of empathy and social, emotional and intellectual self-concept of postgraduate students through standardized questionnaires. These questionnaires were in form of paper pencil test. After the data collection assumptions of metric data scale, linear relationship and existence of no outliers was ensured. Appropriate statistical techniques

were applied. Results were analyzed and the information was organized into a summary. The study intended to find out what exists in the present, and hence, the descriptive survey method was the most appropriate.

Sampling

The population for the research is the frame that encompasses within itself the sample for the study. That is the reason the population of the study is also known as a sample frame. The population for the present study was the postgraduate university students. The university identified for this research was selected for its high research output as the study required students well inducted within a good academic culture. Details of the students enrolled in various postgraduate courses for the session 2018-19 is as follows.

Table 1: Population of the study

Arts students			Science students		
Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
504	451	955	189	163	352
Population 1307					

As depicted in table 1, the total students enrolled for various postgraduate courses within the university were 1307, a sample of 298 with a five percent margin for error, and a ninety-five percent confidence level was determined. Further, a proportional stratified random sampling technique was applied for data collection. Students enrolled for session 2018-19 were 1307, with 955 students in the arts stream and 352 in the science stream. Arts students sample was determined as 218 out of this 115 were male, and 103 were female students. A proportional selection was finalized for the science stream, with 80 students where 43 were male and 37 females. The proportionate stratified data is shown in table 2 below.

Table 2: Sample of the study

Arts students			Science students		
Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
115	103	218	43	37	80
Sample 298					

Tools for Data Collection

The investigators applied Murthy empathy scale (Murthy, 2015), a standardized tool to establish empathy among university students. It has 35 test items with five dimensions: third person's perspective, sympathy, identification with others, emotionality, and interpersonal perspectives. A standardized self-concept scale (Deon, 1971) was used to determine self-

concept. The scale has 212 test items. The items divide into six dimensions: intellectual, emotional, social, character, aesthetic and neutral.

Statistical Techniques for Analysis

The study's hypotheses were tested analyzed using statistical techniques of mean, standard deviation, and Pearson's coefficient of the correlation using SPSS version 25 for quantitative analysis.

Result and Analysis

Table 3: Mean and SD of Empathy, Self-concept, Social Self-concept, Emotional Self-concept and Intellectual Self-concept among university students

	Empathy	Self-concept	Social Self-concept	Emotional Self-concept	Intellectual Self-concept
Mean	88.85	522.02	108.16	57.28	87.96
SD	10.66	39.42	11.83	7.72	13.87

Table 4: Relationship between Empathy, Self-concept, Social Self-concept, Emotional Self-concept and Intellectual Self-concept among university students

	N	df	Pearson's r	Result
Empathy and Self-concept	298	296	0.0935	not significant
Empathy and Social Self-concept	298	296	0.0814	not significant
Empathy and Emotional Self-concept	298	296	0.007	not significant
Empathy and Intellectual Self-concept	298	296	0.0874	not significant

1. No significant relationship was found between empathy and self-concept among university students.
2. A significant relationship was not found between empathy and social self-concept among university students.
3. University students did not reflect a significant relationship between empathy and emotional self-concept among university students.

4. Empathy and intellectual self-concept are not having a significant relationship among university students.

Discussion and Conclusion

The group's mean performance for empathy (M=88.85, SD=10.66) depicts the group to be Ambempath. This result implies that university students can exhibit empathy when encountered with the situation and get detached afterward. The group performed average for overall self-concept (M=522.02, SD=39.42) along with social self-concept (M=108.16, SD=11.83), emotional self-concept (M= 57.28, SD=7.72) and intellectual self-concept (M= 87.96, SD=13.87).

Educational intervention can enhance empathy (Haque et al., 2018). Special effort to improve empathy through classroom practices is significant and improves empathic ability (Meek,1957). Self-concept is a self-reflection process, and self-reflection significantly correlates with insight (Moreira et al., 2018). Hence, for making students reflective and insightful learners, they must have a well-developed sense of 'self.' A healthy academic environment can be achieved by incorporating empathy. As suggested in previous studies, the academic environment contributes to the formation of both empathy and self-concept. Also, higher empathy and a well-developed self-concept make the educational environment better. Higher education institutions are recommended to incorporate activities to develop empathy and intellectual, emotional, and social constructs of self-concept. Such pursuits are recommended to be part of the curriculum and student support services.

Limitations of the Study

The researchers made efforts to make the study as precise and objective as possible. Still, certain limitations were there.

- The tool for the Self-concept was published in 1971 and could not be revised.
- The present study was conducted in a premier university of the region and did not include other universities in the area.
- The dimension wise analysis of empathy was not undertaken in the study.

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