

A CORRELATIONAL STUDY OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND OTHER POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTS AMONG STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

Learning disability is one of the most commonly occurring neuro-developmental disorders affecting around 5-15% of the school going population. It is characterized by severe academic difficulties in processing information related to reading, writing and math. A small section of this population also exhibits deficits in processing non-verbal information such as understanding facial expressions or tone of voice which greatly affects their interpersonal relationships. More recent researches are increasingly beginning to go beyond the academic difficulties associated with LDs and recognizing the social-emotional difficulties experienced by them. The present study attempts to fill the existing knowledge gaps in understanding the relationships among Emotional Intelligence, Subjective Happiness, Well-being, Hope, Self-esteem and Self-concept specifically in relation to students with learning disability.

Keyword: - Learning disability, emotional intelligence, happiness, well-being, self-concept, social emotional learning

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning disability is one of the most common neuro-developmental disorder affecting school age children. The prevalence rate of learning disability across its various sub-types of reading, writing and math ranges from around 5 to 15% among the student population, with the proportion of males being two to three times higher as compared to females (DSM-V, 2013). In several Indian studies, the prevalence rates show a similar pattern where 6 to 19 % of school-going children have been identified as having some kind of learning disability (Sridevi et al., 2015; Bandla et al., 2017; Chacko & Vidhukumar 2020).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) came up with a definition of Learning Disability in 1977 and defined it as “Specific Learning Disabilities means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, speak, read, spell or to do mathematical calculations...” Although it has been several decades since then and the IDEA keeps updating about every five years, it still defines Specific Learning Disability in terms of “Oral expression, Listening comprehension, Written expression, Basic reading skill, Reading fluency skills, Reading comprehension, Mathematics calculation, Mathematics problem solving” (2017).

Although severe difficulties observed in the areas of reading, writing and math are defining characteristic of learning disabilities, some researches have also tried to understand the social-emotional side of people living with this disorder. Several studies have found that students with LD also show considerable social skills deficits (Kavale & Forness, 1996; Parhiala et al., 2015; Zach et al., 2016) that affects their interpersonal relationships (Schmidt et al., 2014) and communication skills (Balboni et al, 2017). They are also more rejected by peers as compared to their

non-LD counterparts (Kuhne & Wiener, 2000; Lorger et al., 2015) and are at greater risk of developing anxiety (Nelson & Harwood, 2011a) and depression (Nelson & Harwood, 2011b). Other recent studies done to study in the area of suicidal thoughts and attempts have shown the magnitude of social-emotional issues experienced by individuals with LD. The Fuller-Thomson report of 2018 done on a large nationally representative population of Canada has found that adults with learning disability were 46% more likely than those without an LD to have ever attempted suicide. In the same report the prevalence rate of suicide attempts was compared between individuals with and without LD and found that the rate was significantly higher in case of those with LD (11.1% vs. 2.7%, $p < .001$).

According to some previous studies, individuals with learning disabilities were found to have lower emotional intelligence than those without LDs. (Narimani et al., 2009, Hen & Goroshit, 2014; Zysberg & Kasler, 2017). All models of emotional intelligence highlights the importance of emotional skills and abilities related to our interpersonal and intrapersonal domains. Having higher emotional intelligence is positively related to well-being (Marvoli et al., 2007; Edara, 2021), happiness (Furnham & Petrides, 2003; Ghahramani et al., 2019), self-esteem (Mehmood & Gulzar, 2014; Bibi et al., 2016; Tajpreet, 2015), self-concept (Landa et al., 2009; Nimbalkar, 2019), hope (Batool et al., 2014; Saricam et al., 2015) etc.

However, research on the relationships between these variables among students with learning disabilities is scarce and inconclusive. Thus, the present study attempts to understand the interrelationships among these variables among students with learning disability in the Indian context where the identification of the disorder itself is complicated by the incongruence of the first or second languages associated with the students and the languages in which tests are available and the different medium of instructions adopted by schools in.

2. METHOD

2.1 Sample

The sample comprised of 65 participants in the age group of 9 to 15 years. Participants were selected through purposive sampling which is a type of non-probability sampling in which participants who are fulfil certain criteria for being included in the sample are selected by the researcher who judges. For the present study, school students in the proposed age group who have already been diagnosed with specific learning disorder (also referred to as learning disability) and have been undergoing special education while still being part of their respective school's inclusive education were chosen as participants of the study.

2.2 Measure

For the present study the following measures/tools have been used: The Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale, Subjective happiness scale, Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory (School form), Children's Hope Scale, Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (2nd edition), BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory (Youth Version (BarOn EQi:YV)) in order to assess participants' levels of well-being, subjective happiness, self-esteem, hope, self-concept and emotional intelligence. These scales are briefly described below.

The Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale (Liddle & Carter, 2015)

The Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale is holistic scale developed by the Stirling Council Educational Psychology Service (UK) to measure well-being and emotional development in children in the age range of eight to fifteen years. There are a total of 15 items in the scale. This scale has two components: wellbeing and social-desirability. The social desirability sub-scale has three items and the well-being sub-scale has twelve items to measure positive outlook and positive emotional state. The Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale demonstrates good reliability and validity (Liddle & Carter, 2015; Haque & Imran, 2016).

Subjective happiness scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999)

The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) is a 4-item self-report scale which provides brief index of one's overall happiness. The SHS demonstrates good reliability and validity (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). The original scale was developed for adults over 14 years of age, although it is suitable to be used across all age groups, even in children as young as 8 years old (Holder et al., 2010)

Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory (School form) (Coopersmith, 1975)

The Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory was developed by Stanley Coopersmith in 1975 to measure self-evaluations of individuals in four domains of life: General Self, Home-Parents, School-Academic and Social Self-Peers. It has a total of 58 items out of which eight items comprise of the Lie Scale. It can be used in children across grades 2 to 11. This scale has good internal consistency (Spatz & Johnston, 1973; Kimball, 1972), test-retest reliability (Bedeian et al., 1977) and validity (Coopersmith 1967).

Children's Hope Scale (Snyder et al. in 1997)

The Children's Hope (Snyder et al. in 1997) is a six-item measure of children's beliefs about attainment of their personal goals and the presence of personal agency towards goal attainment. It can be used in children within the age range of 8-16 years of age. The Children's hope scale has shown good reliability- Internal consistency of 0.72 to 0.86; test-retest reliability of 0.71 to 0.73 and validity (Snyder et al., 1997).

Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (2nd edition) (Piers and Herzberg, 2007)

The-Piers Harris Children's Self-concept scale-2 (2007) is a 60-item measure of self-concept which was originally developed by the authors Ellen V. Piers and David S. Herzberg in the 1960s. This scale assesses five domains of self-concept namely Behavioural Adjustment (BEH), Intellectual and School Status (INT), Physical Appearance and Attributes (PHY), Freedom From Anxiety (FRE) and Happiness and Popularity. This scale has two validity scales: Inconsistent Responding (INC) index and Response Bias (RES) index for assessing inconsistent or irresponsible responding. The-Piers Harris Children's Self-concept scale shows excellent reliabilities and validities.

BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory (Youth Version (BarOn EQi:YV) (BarOn & Parker, 2000)

The BarOn EQi:YV is a 60-item inventory which is used to measure emotional intelligence in children in the age-group of 7-18 years old. There are seven sub-scales in this measure: Interpersonal Scale, Intrapersonal Scale, Adaptability, Stress management, General Mood Scale, Positive Impression Scale and Inconsistency Index. The BarOn EQi:YV shows satisfactory reliabilities and validities (BarOn & Parker, 2000).

3. PROCEDURE

For the purpose of the current study, 65 participants in the age group of 9-15 years, who have already been diagnosed with a specific learning disorder and have been undergoing special education for at least a year while still being part of inclusive education were selected as participants of the study. After taking necessary permission and consent from school authorities, parents and the participants, all the measures used for the study were administered. The measures were given to groups of 2-4 participants at a time considering the difficulties they had in reading and comprehending the items. Utmost care was taken that participants understand and assess themselves well before responding to each item of the measures. After the administration, all the scales were scored according to the scoring protocols suggested in the manuals. The data was then analysed using SPSS. Pearson correlation coefficient was used to analyse the intercorrelations among all the variables of the study. The results, discussion and implications of the study are further discussed.

4. RESULTS

Table -1: Table showing the intercorrelations among the variables of the study

Correlations							
		Well-being	Subjective Happiness	Self-esteem	Hope	Self-concept	Emotional Intelligence
Well-being	Pearson r	1	.420**	.498**	.422**	.332**	.356**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	.000	.000	.007	.004

Subjective Happiness	Pearson r	.420**	1	.506**	.522**	.211	.072
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001		.000	.000	.092	.570
Self-esteem	Pearson r	.498**	.506**	1	.383**	.399**	.508**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.002	.001	.000
Hope	Pearson r	.422**	.522**	.383**	1	.272*	.317**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.002		.028	.010
Self-concept	Pearson r	.332**	.211	.399**	.272*	1	.148
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	.092	.001	.028		.238
Emotional Intelligence	Pearson r	.356**	.072	.508**	.317*	.148	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.570	.000	.010	.238	

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01. N=65

5. DISCUSSION

The objective of the current study was to study the relationship among well-being, general happiness, self-esteem, hope, self-concept and emotional intelligence among school students with specific learning disorder (SLD) or learning disability. The rationale of this study was the relative dearth of studies concerning positive psychology variables concerning those with a diagnosed case of learning disability, especially in the Indian context.

For this study a number of schools and special education centres were approached for participants with learning disabilities belonging to Delhi-NCR. The students with LD who have been undergoing special education for at least a year have been selected as participants of the study.

From the results of the study, in Table 1, we can see that there exists positive relationships among all the variables of the study.

Well-being has been found to have a significant positive correlation with subjective happiness ($r = .420^{**}$, $p < .01$), self-esteem ($r = .498^{**}$, $p < .01$), hope ($r = .422^{**}$, $p < .01$) self-concept ($r = .332^{**}$, $p < .01$) and emotional intelligence ($r = .356^{**}$, $p < .01$).

Subjective happiness has been found to have a significant positive correlation with well-being ($r = .420^{**}$, $p < .01$), self-esteem ($r = .506^{**}$, $p < .01$) and hope ($r = .522^{**}$, $p < .01$). However, subjective happiness was not found to have a significant correlation with self-concept ($r = .211$, $p = .092$) and emotional intelligence ($r = .072^{**}$, $p = .570$).

Self-esteem has been found to have a significant positive correlation with well-being ($r = .498^{**}$, $p < .01$), subjective happiness ($r = .506^{**}$, $p < .01$), hope ($r = .383^{**}$, $p < .01$) self-concept ($r = .399^{*}$, $p < .01$) and emotional intelligence ($r = .508^{**}$, $p < .01$).

Hope has been found to have a significant positive correlation with all the variables of the study, i.e., well-being ($r = .422^{**}$, $p < .01$), subjective happiness ($r = .522^{**}$, $p < .01$), self-esteem ($r = .383^{**}$, $p < .01$), and emotional intelligence ($r = .317^{*}$, $p < .05$). It also had a significant positive correlation with self-concept, but the correlation was relatively lower self-concept ($r = .272^{*}$, $p < .05$).

Self-concept was found to have a positive correlation with all the variables of the study. However, a significant correlation was found only with well-being ($r = .332^{**}$, $p < .01$) self-esteem ($r = .399^{**}$, $p < .01$) and hope ($r = .272^{*}$, $p < .01$). The correlations with other variables were positive but not found to be statistically significant.

In case of emotional intelligence, significant positive correlations were seen with well-being ($r = .356^{**}$, $p < .01$), self-esteem ($r = .508^{**}$, $p < .01$) and hope ($r = .317^{**}$, $p < .05$). The correlations with other variables- subjective happiness and self-esteem were positive but not found to be statistically significant.

As seen from the above results, there are moderate positive relationships between all the variables of the study. Here, well-being is defined as emotional and psychological well-being which means that an individual experiences more positive emotions and positively evaluate their lives. The results are congruent with previous researches where well-being is positively related to happiness (Sundriyal and Kumar, 2014; Heizomi et al., 2015), self-esteem (Karatzias et al., 2006), hope (Lee and Gallagher, 2018), self-concept (Zhang, 2016) and emotional intelligence (Edara, 2021).

In a study done by Dogan et al., (2013), the relationship between self-esteem, psychological well-being, affect balance and self-efficacy was examined among 340 university students, The results of the study indicated that psychological well-being, affect balance and self-efficacy contributes to around 46% of the total variance in self-esteem.

The significant positive correlation of emotional intelligence with self-esteem and hope has been found in a number of studies as well. Emotional intelligence has been found to play a crucial role in the experiences of hope (Batoool et al., 2014; Sethi et al., 2019). Saricam et al. (2015) found that emotional intelligence and hope contributes to 40% of variance in our experience of satisfaction with life.

A positive but very low and statistically insignificant relationship has been found between emotional intelligence and self-concept. Although studies done in non-LD populations have found significant positive correlations between EI and self-concept (Ferrer, 2012; Nimbalkar, 2019), the present study done among students with LD did not find a similar correlation. A few studies have highlighted that contrary to the popular belief that students with learning disability have lower self-concept, it is important to be domain specific when examining their self-concepts. It has been found in some studies that students with LD have low scores on self-concept mostly on behavioural, intellectual and school status domains of self-concept and not on global self-concepts (Gans et al., 2003; Al Zyoudi, 2010). Thus, the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-concept is not very clear among students with learning disabilities, as Bear et al. (2002) did not find clear differences in self-concepts of children with and without LD other than the academic domain.

Similarly, although previous researches found positive relationships between emotional intelligence and happiness (Ruiz-Aranda et al., 2014; Ghahramani et al., 2019), the present study failed to find a similar relationship. The present study defines subjective happiness in global terms- whether a person evaluates himself/herself as a generally happy or unhappy person (Lyubomirsky, 1999). There is a dearth of research examining the relationship between global subjective happiness and emotional intelligence among individuals with learning disability. Thus, future research could explore this area more.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study was an attempt to study the relationship among Emotional Intelligence, Subjective Happiness, Well-being, Hope, Self-esteem and Self-concept specifically in relation to students with learning disability. The findings of our study show that the relationship between some of the variables are in congruence with previous studies done among typically learning individuals, whereas some of the relationships between the variables are not very similar to previous findings of studies done among typically learning individuals. This suggests that researches and interventions meant for typically learning students may not be enough to explain and cater to the needs of students with learning disability. Thus, future research could be more specific to special populations such the learning disability so that they benefit the most from it.

7. REFERENCES

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