

EFFECT OF SOCIAL COMPARISON ON SELF-ESTEEM AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN COLLEGE STUDENTS: INTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

The study investigates the influence of social comparison on students' self-esteem and academic accomplishments within educational institutions. Festinger social comparison theory (1954) posits that individuals have the ability to evaluate their abilities, attributes, and achievements by comparing themselves to their peers. The role of intrapersonal communication the internal dialogue and thoughts individuals have with themselves is significant in shaping their self-esteem and behaviour. This research shows an extended understanding on "how university students engage in intrapersonal communication by analysing the interplay between social comparison, self-esteem, and academic performance" Employing a quantitative methodological approach, data are collected from a cohort of college students through the help of questionnaires. Participants are asked to respond to queries pertaining to their participation in social comparisons related to their academic performance. Statistical analyses using SPSS is employed to uncover associations among the variables. The primary goal of this study is to enrich insights into how social comparison influences college students' self-esteem and academic performance. Intensive social comparison has the potential to elevate self-esteem to levels that can influence academic achievement. The findings from this study have implications for educational institutions. Educators can promote students' overall welfare and academic accomplishments by recognizing the impact of social comparison on self-esteem and academic performance, they can implement strategies that nurture constructive intrapersonal communication.

Keywords:

Intrapersonal Communication, Social Comparison, Self-Esteem, Academic Performance, College Students, Classroom Settings

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' self-perception and interactions with others within the realm of intrapersonal dynamics. The period spent in educational institutions holds immense significance for the personal growth of students. During this time, students encounter various challenges and numerous peers, fostering an environment of self-competition against their fellow students. Often, this competition is specifically directed towards those who excel academically [10]. social comparisons can manifest in various ways, including unintentionally, consciously, or artificially. When people compare themselves to someone and consider themselves to be superior, that can be called an upward comparison, and the downward comparison can be described as making a comparison with someone believed to be inferior [24] [25]. When making an upward comparison, students may come to the conclusion that they fall short of their targets or, on the other hand, they may identify with the target and think that they might be able to improve and reach the target level of competence. Students who compare themselves negatively may arrive to the conclusion that they are not as awful as their target or, on the other hand, they may

identify with the target and believe that they could perhaps get inferior and end up being as bad as the target [4]. The phenomenon of student choice of a comparison level and the individuals they choose to compare themselves which has received limited attention in discussions. Nonetheless, a subsequent investigation conducted by [9], and Kuyper in 1999 demonstrated a pattern that aligns with Festinger predictions from 1954. Specifically, the study found that students tended to compare their exam scores with those of their fellow classmates of the same sex, who had achieved slightly superior results. This suggests that the tendency to engage in social comparison, as outlined by Festinger, influences students to select peers performing slightly better as their reference points when evaluating their own exam performance. Observing the achievements of others has the potential to inspire individuals to elevate their own standards of success, consequently motivating them to pursue newfound and challenging objectives [21]. There are studies focused on the elements like social comparison, self-esteem, academic performance [8] [12] but the present study focuses on associations between social comparison, self-esteem and their impact on academic performance of college students. The outcomes of these comparisons can significantly impact their self-esteem and academic performance, either positively or negatively. In essence, the overarching objective of this research is to amplify our comprehension of the dynamics of intrapersonal communication and lay a robust foundation for interventions and methodologies aimed at augmenting college students' academic achievements and cultivating positive self-esteem. By exploring the intricate interplay between self-esteem, academic accomplishments, and social comparison, one can foster a nurturing and supportive educational environment for students.

2. OBJECTIVE

The study focuses on intrapersonal dynamics. Mainly social comparisons with self-esteem levels and the academic performance of college students. The researchers aim to find out whether self-esteem levels caused by social comparison, whether it is upward or downward, end up being an influencing factor for the academic performance of college students.

2.1 SOCIAL COMPARISON THEORY

Leon Festinger [7] first introduced his theory of social comparison, which claims that people aspire to have stable, correct valuations of themselves and have a fundamental need to evaluate their thoughts and capacities. Social comparison is a behaviour in which we compare specific characteristics of ourselves for example, our behaviour, opinions, and success to other people in order to gain a better understanding of oneself [9]. This was originally limited to comparing viewpoints and skills [7]

but it has since grown to incorporate additional factors including feelings [9].

2.2 DIRECTIONS OF SOCIAL COMPARISON

Social comparison can be either upward or downward. When people compare themselves to someone, and they consider themselves to be superior, they are engaging in upward comparison. A downward comparison, on the other hand, is described as making a comparison with someone believed to be inferior [25]. According to Natacha Boissicat study on social comparisons in the classroom with comparison targets, the variability is differently correlated with their bias in self-evaluating academic competence [16]. Students must also identify with their aim in order for upward comparison to have a positive effect. This highlights the significance of taking this interaction effect into consideration when examining the connection between social comparison in the classroom and academic self-evaluation [16]. Contrary to prior studies conducted in an experimental setting, when students engaged in downward comparison, their self-evaluation bias of competence did not depend on identification with their comparison target context [6].

2.3 INTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Communication can be considered an everyday activity. Everything that is alive communicates if it is understood as the transmission of stimuli and a reaction or action on those stimuli, including all type of living organisms [23]. Intrapersonal communication is the study of the internal conversations, we have that shape our attitudes, feelings, and actions. Social comparison, a cognitive process by which people assess their skills, characteristics, and successes by comparing themselves to others, is a key component of intrapersonal communication [7]. The definition of communication at the intrapersonal level refers to a situation when the communicator is both sender and receiver, but it fails to distinguish between human communication in this situation and a single tree biological response to an insect invasion, "All of the physiological and psychological message processing that occurs within individuals at conscious and unconscious levels as they try to understand themselves and their surroundings" [23].

2.4 SELF-ESTEEM

William James invented the phrase "self-esteem" in 1890, making it one of psychology oldest notions. Self-esteem is a general assessment of one own value. It displays a variety of values in people with "low" to "high" self-esteem. People with low self-esteem actively despise themselves and believe they are worthless in extreme cases. Individuals with strong self-esteem believe in themselves and their inherent worth [14]. Numerous scholars have expressed a variety of opinions on self-esteem, most notably a Turkish author by the name of Tony Humphrey who wrote about it in his book "the key to Child education." He has stated in his writing that better self-confidence is associated with stronger self-esteem. Higher self-confidence, independence, candour, optimism, adaptability, using direct and clear channels of communication, embracing one problems and emotions, accepting oneself and others, accepting weaknesses as opportunities to get stronger, and acting as a problem solver are some of the traits [13] self and others, accepting weaknesses as

opportunities to get stronger and function as a problem solver. The significance of self-esteem is frequently seen in relation to critical areas such as human motivation, growth, achievement, adapting ability, building relationships and psychological wellness and overall well-being. Given such an extensive and significant history, it is not surprising that numerous definitions of self-esteem can be found in the field [15]. When a person self-esteem grows, so does one sense of loneliness [11]. The study done by Hasan Yilmaz discovered that self-esteem is a strong predictor of loneliness [11] People with higher self-esteem are more self-confident, embrace their own difficulties and emotions, accept themselves and others, view weaknesses as opportunities to grow, and function as problem solvers [2].

2.5 SOCIAL COMPARISON AND ACADAMIC PERFORMANCE

Student achievement in college is significantly influenced by their sense of academic competence in a particular field [1], comparison on students' self-evaluation of their academic competence, is a major factor in success in the academic performance and in their college life [16]. Similar studies have been focused on the outcome of the positive or negative self-evaluation regarding academic performance and self-behaviour [3]. upward comparisons not only encourage students to work efficiently but also trigger unfavourable emotions and reduce academic self-esteem [17].

3. HYPOTHESIS

- **H₀:** Social comparison levels are negatively associated with self-esteem and does not have an impact on academic performance.
- **H_a:** Social comparison levels are positively associated with self-esteem and have an impact on academic performance.

Since social comparison levels are positively associated with self-esteem and have a significant impact on academic performance, the null hypothesis H₀ has been rejected, and the alternative hypothesis H_a has been accepted and proven. While low self-esteem could result in poor affective states and decreased academic progress, high self-esteem could lead to higher academic performance as well as positive psychological health as a result.

4. RESEARCH METHOD

This non-interventional research examines associations between variables without causing any external influence on the subjects or the environment being studied. This study is used to explore real-world situations, behaviours, or outcomes in natural settings [22]. It follows a systematic and ethical methodology, ensuring the rights, safety, and confidentiality of participants throughout the data collection process following the declaration of Helsinki [5]. This is quantitative research, that uses the survey method for collecting data. 266 participants were studied for this research, of whom 100 were male and 166 were female. This study is focused on college students, and the age group is limited to 18 to 31 years. Two different scales were used in the questionnaire to measure the variables. The self-esteem levels of the students are measured using Rosenberg self-esteem scale [19]

to collect the data, and for the rest of the variables like social comparison and academic performance, the Likert scale [18] was used.

4.1 THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Social comparison theory [7] is used as the foundation for this research. The process of directions from this theory, like upward and downward comparison, has been used as the variables for this study as represented as the figure below. The fig 1 is a graphical representation of how the variables are tested in this research, initially the social comparison levels of the participants are measured and tested in two different directions essentially upward and downward comparison then other variables like the self-esteem and academic performance is measured using Rosenberg scale and Likert scale. All the variables are tested with each other for association and their results are created and represented as a process flow diagram.

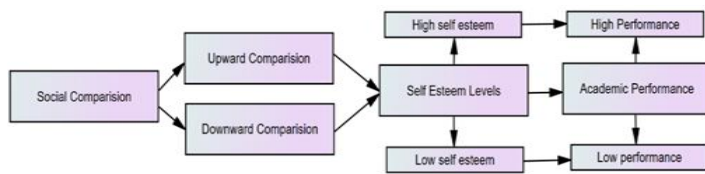


Fig.1. Flow Diagram

5. DATA ANALYSIS

Table.1. Upward Comparison* Self Esteem Levels Cross tabulation

| | | Count | | | |
|-------------------|-------|--------------------|----------------------|------------------|-------|
| | | Self Esteem Levels | | | Total |
| Upward Comparison | Low | Less Self-esteem | Moderate Self-esteem | High Self-esteem | |
| | | Moderate | 47 | 31 | 24 |
| | High | 30 | 28 | 41 | 99 |
| | Total | 19 | 21 | 25 | 65 |
| Total | | 96 | 80 | 90 | 266 |

The Table.1 shows that people with low upward comparison have less self-esteem levels people who does High upward comparison have High self-esteem levels.

Table.2. Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
|--------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 10.096 ^a | 4 | .039 |

The Table.2 reveals that there is a significant relationship at 5% significance level between Upward Comparison and Self Esteem Levels ($\chi^2 = 10.096^a$; $df=4$, $p < .039$).

Table.3. Downward Comparison * Self Esteem Levels Crosstabulation

| | | Count | | | |
|----------|-----|--------------------|----------|------|-------|
| | | Self Esteem Levels | | | Total |
| Downward | Low | Less | Moderate | High | |
| | | High | 43 | 28 | 25 |

| Comparison | Moderate | 31 | 30 | 22 | 83 |
|------------|----------|----|----|----|-----|
| | High | 22 | 22 | 43 | 87 |
| Total | | 96 | 80 | 90 | 266 |

The Table.3 reveals that people who does higher Downward comparison have high self-esteem levels and with less downward comparison have less self-esteem levels.

Table.4. Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
|--------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 15.861 ^a | 4 | .003 |

The Table.4 reveals that there is a significant relationship at 5% significance level between Downward Comparison and Self Esteem Levels ($\chi^2 = 15.861^a$; $df=4$, $p < .003$).

Table.5. Self Esteem Levels * Academic Performance Crosstabulation

| | | Count | | | |
|--------------------|----------|----------------------|------|----|-------|
| | | Academic Performance | | | Total |
| Self Esteem Levels | Less | Moderate | High | | |
| | | Less | 49 | 31 | 16 |
| | Moderate | 21 | 36 | 23 | 80 |
| | High | 20 | 29 | 41 | 90 |
| Total | | 90 | 96 | 80 | 266 |

The Table.5 reveals that people with higher self-esteem levels have higher academic performance and people with less self-esteem levels have and less academic performance levels.

Table.6. Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
|--------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 28.821 ^a | 4 | .000 |

The Table.6 reveals that there is a significant relationship at 5% significance level between Self Esteem Levels and Academic Performance Crosstabulation ($\chi^2 = 28.821^a$; $df=4$, $p < .000$).

6. RESULTS

Students with low upward comparison has less self-esteem levels and high upward comparison have high self-esteem level (Table.1). There is a significant relationship at 5% significance level between Upward Comparison and Self Esteem Levels ($\chi^2 = 10.096^a$; $df=4$, $p < .039$) (Table.2). people who do higher Downward comparison have Higher self-esteem levels and who have lower downward comparison levels have low self-esteem levels (Table.3). There is a significant relationship at 5% significance level between Downward Comparison and Self Esteem Levels ($\chi^2 = 15.861^a$; $df=4$, $p < .003$) (Table.4). Students with higher self-esteem levels have higher academic performance, people with less self-esteem levels have and less academic performance levels (Table.5). There is a significant relationship at 5% significance level between Self Esteem Levels and Academic Performance ($\chi^2 = 28.821^a$; $df=4$, $p < .000$) (Table.6).

7. DISCUSSIONS

In this study, the researchers identified positive correlations between social comparison, self-esteem, and academic performance. The researchers divided social comparison into two distinct variables: upward comparison and downward comparison. Upward comparison involves individuals assessing themselves against those who outperform them and achieve higher scores. Conversely, downward comparison entails individuals evaluating themselves against those who attain lower scores and generally exhibit inferior performance [7]. Individuals with elevated self-esteem tend to hold favourable perceptions of themselves. Conversely, those with low self-esteem levels tend to harbour unfavourable self-esteem levels [19]. From the findings, it is found that engaging in comparisons with individuals who exhibit superior performance can induce a motivation to bridge the gap and strive for improved academic performance. This inclination towards upward comparison has the potential to elevate self-esteem levels and subsequently enhance academic performance. Students predominantly gravitate toward downward comparison rather than upward comparison [8] [16]. This preference is attributed to the role of social comparison with peers of similar competency levels in preserving self-perception. This dynamic is hindered when comparisons are made with more accomplished classmates [16]. Florence Dumas has found that when upward comparison was higher, it did not lower the student comparison evaluations; students thought more about their own skills and performance than the performance of comparison targets [8]. When individuals engage in comparisons with those who demonstrate lower performance, a sense of comfort often emerges, as they perceive themselves as superior in comparison. This phenomenon can create a psychological comfort zone. Although this might contribute to a boost in their self-esteem levels, there appears to be a lack of concurrent enhancement in academic performance. Furthermore, the investigation revealed a notable trend: upward comparison proves to be more advantageous in fostering elevated self-esteem levels and promoting advancements in academic performance [12]. The results of several more studies conducted by [12] [20], and [16] are consistent with this pattern of findings.

8. LIMITATIONS

Despite the findings produced by this study, several limitations are present within its framework. Notably, the distribution of data within the sample of 266 individuals studied is unequal, comprising 100 male participants and 166 female participants. This uneven distribution of gender representation hindered the consideration of gender-based analyses in the conducted tests. Furthermore, the study scope is confined solely to college students ranging in age from 18 to 31 years. The limitation of this age range restricts the generalizability of the study conclusions to a wider demographic. The data collection process itself is also subject to limitations. The data primarily stems from a closed-circle context, predominantly consisting of college students. To enhance the study validity and applicability, future research should endeavour to amass data from a more diverse array of sources. Additionally, the study geographic scope is confined exclusively to the city of Coimbatore. Given the educational nature of the research, a more expansive population

and larger sample size would be imperative for the validation of results through broader representation. An additional limitation arises from the structure of the questionnaire employed. With two distinct scales utilized, each variable within the study was probed by a limited set of only six questions, culminating in a total of 25 questions. This constrained approach to data collection may have implications for the comprehensive understanding of the underlying phenomena.

9. CONCLUSION

The complex interplay among social comparison, self-esteem, and academic performance within college students' emphasis the significant role of intrapersonal communication in shaping their educational journey. These individuals assess their own competencies and achievements through the lens of their peers, culminating in the formation of upward or downward comparisons. These comparative processes wield considerable influence over their self-esteem, potentially generating feelings of superiority or inferiority that subsequently reverberate into their academic performance.

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