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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF CONCEPT AND THE SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT OF PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED PERSONS IN SPECIAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

Unfavourable attitudes towards physically challenged individuals can lead to social exclusion and loneliness, whereas a supportive society fosters positive views, promoting their social adjustment and integration. This study examined the relationship between self-concept and the social adjustment of physically challenged persons in special secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. The study was guided by five research questions and while three null hypotheses was tested at a 0.05 significance level using a correlational survey research design. The whole population of 521 persons in special secondary schools in Anambra State made up the sample for the study. Census involving all the 521 persons in special secondary schools was carried out. Two research instruments were adopted and used: Bryant Self-Concept Survey (BSCS) and the Social Adjustment Questionnaire (SAQ). These instruments are standardised questionnaires that have been previously validated by experts and used in conducting studies in Nigeria. The instruments were administered directly to the participants. Research questions 1-2 were answered using range of scores and percentages. The research questions 3-5 were answered with the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r). The hypotheses were tested at the.05 level of significance using t-tests for significance of relationships and simple linear regressions. The finding revealed that most physically challenged persons have a moderate self-concept and Moderate social adjustment. The findings further revealed a none significant very low and negligible relationship between self-concept and social adjustment, a significant a very low positive relationship between self-concept and social adjustment. Based on these findings, it is recommended among others that school administrators and policymakers should implement policies that ensure inclusive practices, making schools more accessible for physically challenged students. This includes constructing ramps, providing assistive devices, and making classrooms and extracurricular activities adaptable for all students.

Keywords: Physically challenged individuals, self-concept, social adjustment, special secondary schools, Anambra state

INTRODUCTION

The way society sees people who are physically challenged is a crucial issue that affects not just the wellbeing of such people but also has the potential to have an impact on society's moral compass. People with physical challenges may feel less empowered and more likely to experience social exclusion and loneliness when others have unfavourable attitudes towards them. In contrast, a healthy society promotes favourable views towards people with physical challenges in order to support their social adjustment and integration.

Adjustment is a behavioural process by which people maintain balance among the various needs that one encounters at a given point in time (Aggarwal, 2015). As social beings, people live in a society where they form opinions about others and others have opinions about them. This is because people want acceptance and recognition from and within society and they also try to behave according to the norms of that society so that they can fit in with others. This process of getting along with the members of society as best as one can is what is referred to as "social adjustment." It could be seen as a psychological process since it frequently involves coping with new standards and values.

Social adjustment is defined as the outcome of a person's efforts to manage stress, satisfy his needs, and maintain a peaceful connection with his surroundings (Rogosic and Baranovic, 2016). Social adjustment is also defined as the effort made by a person to fit in with the norms, values, and requirements of a society in order to be accepted. It entails adapting to new norms and values and doing one's best to get along with the people in a society (Sankhala, 2019). Therefore, social adjustment is defined in the context of this study as behaviour that enables individuals to satisfy environmental expectations in coping with norms, values, and demands of life, such as how they interact with others.

The better adjusted a person is, the greater their quality of life is perceived to be; adjustment is considered a good attitude that has to do with someone's quality of life. Positive adjustment may help people deal with their stresses, problems, and hurdles so they can achieve their objectives (Eyong, Ezembu, Oniemola, and Aminu, 2016). However, a bad adjustment results in frustration (Anyamene, Ejichukwu and Azuji, 2019). Therefore, those with physical challenges who receive good socialisation may adjust better and always have a higher quality of life, whereas people who have poor socialisation are likely to have poor social adjustment.

Physically challenged individuals must also navigate concerns related to their social and psychological adjustment to their new reality (Bush, 2021). Difficulty in meeting societal expectations, norms, and needs can lead to social maladjustment. For example, unfavourable perceptions from peers can greatly affect the life of a person with a physical disability. This can significantly impact their self-concept, social and cognitive development, school performance, and overall psychological well-being. Falak, Fazeelat, and Muhammad (2022) note that physically challenged individuals often have a limited social circle, restricted access to cultural activities, and fewer recreational opportunities.

The term "physically challenged" was first used in the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. So, if a person has a disability that significantly restricts one or more of life's regular tasks, they are said to be physically challenged. Even if they are able to carry out daily tasks, those who experience prejudice owing to particular physical limitations are referred to as challenged (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990). Walking, breathing, seeing, hearing,

speaking, and learning challenges are just a few of the daily tasks that are hindered by disability. Physical challenge is also indicated by difficulty with daily duties, including dressing oneself, cooking, cleaning oneself, or carrying out manual labour. Deafness, blindness, epilepsy, paralysis, and HIV/AIDS are a few illnesses that can significantly restrict a person's capacity to carry out life's regular tasks. Physically challenged people are those who are still able to function but have specific chronic problems that may need particular care (World Health Organization, 2022; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).

Being physically challenged, then, depends on how the challenged person interacts with their surroundings. It happens when individuals run into social, physical, or cultural obstacles that hinder them from participating in the many social systems that other people may access. The physical challenge, then, in the context of this research is the loss or restriction of possibilities to participate in communal life on an equal footing with others.

World Health Report on Physical Challenges (WHO, 2021) noted that disabled individuals face environmental and attitudinal barriers that hinder their full and equal participation in society. This leads to significant physical challenges. A study on violence against physically challenged people, found that children with physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental health conditions are among the most ostracized and socially alienated in the world (Ajodhia-Andrews, 2016). While all children are at risk of experiencing violence, the risk is significantly higher for children with disabilities due to stigma, harmful traditional beliefs, and misinformation (Underwood, Chan, Koller, and Valeo, 2015).

Physical challenges are not part of one's personal characteristics because they are determined by the environment in which a person lives and interacts with others. By reducing the barriers that those with physical impairments face on a daily basis, their involvement with society can be improved. In recent times, there has been an increased focus on the needs of the physically challenged in developing countries. For instance, in Nigeria, there are several universities and institutes of special education that provide training to teachers of children and adults who have sensory, mental, or physical disabilities. The fundamental goal of these special education programmes is to improve the self-concept of those with physical challenges, which is believed to increase their chances of being socially accepted.

Although the phrase "self-concept" has several meanings, they all have the same general meaning. As Sternke (2010) opined, many authors characterise the self in terms of attitudes, judgements, affectations, and other things but not in terms of knowledge. Ali (2012), for instance, noted that one's self-concept is the sum of all of their ideas and feelings about themselves as objects. Mercer (2011) had noted that one's self-concept is made up of the beliefs one holds about themselves. However, Smith, Williams, Jones, and Evans (2021) emphasised the notion that a lot of human learning happens in a social setting. People learn information, rules, and skills through observing others, as well as methods, ideas, and attitudes. Individuals also learn from role models about the value and appropriateness of behaviours.

Therefore, a person's perception of himself or herself can be widely referred to as the individual’s self-concept (Ali, 2012). These impressions are shaped by environmental experiences and impacted by important people in one's life and the surroundings (Cvencek, Fryberg, Covarrubias, and Meltzoff, 2018). Self-concept is typically thought of as a person's assessment of self, but it may also be inferred from how the self-react to certain circumstances.

Regarding both the difficulty of the work and the effectiveness of the activity, a person's conduct may be determined by his or her expectations about his/her own ability, which may also affect their desire, effort, and determination. His or her level of comprehension will determine whether or not he or she develops a positive or negative self-concept regarding his or her impairment.

Self-concept and social adjustment are significant factors in the research of people with physical challenge. Researchers like Falak, Fazeelat, and Muhammad (2022) have revealed that these challenged people are frequently aware of the stereotype that society has of them, according to which they are frequently mocked or seen as a threat and which, in some situations, they may end up sharing. As people assess themselves in relation to others, social comparison, in contrast, is crucial to the growth of one's own self-concept. This means that any unfavourable information gleaned from the procedure due to notable limits in physical functioning or in any adaptive abilities would pose a challenge to their sense of self.

Self-concept is a contentious psychological topic that is unstable and may affect, grow, or alter in diverse ways throughout time. When a person is physically challenged, their self-concept develops in a manner comparable to that of a normal person, albeit the physical impairment may affect this process (Park, 2021). Although the value of having a healthy, positive self-concept is obvious, it is important to acknowledge that anybody, whether physically challenged or not, may find this challenging. Nelson (2022) found that a physically challenged person's self-concept develops based on how their parents, family members, and friends treat them, as well as whether they receive praise or punishment.

In addition, a challenged person may feel rejected and unaccepted by others when their independence is constrained, they are denied the chance to express their emotions, or they are prevented from meeting environmental standards. In this scenario, he or she will incite everyone against one another, preventing them from engaging with others or integrating with them, even if they were relatives. Researchers like Falak, Fazeelat, and Muhammad (2022), Eyong, Ezembu, Oniemola, and Aminu (2016) agreed that some factors, such as home background variables, the degree and severity of a student's disability, the age at which the disability first manifested, the parents' acceptance of the child's disability, the type of school (regular or special), and the availability of specialized support, appear to affect the student's sense of self. Also, labelling and group adherence might be additional variables.

People's perceptions of individuals with physical challenges are often constrained by their own ideologies and societal stereotypes that dehumanize those with disabilities. The concept of adjustment ties these elements together. When a person experiences physical harm, it also affects their mental state. Thus, individuals with physical challenges must undergo medical therapy, physical rehabilitation, and psychological adjustment to fully integrate their new identity and regain their sense of humanity. The self-concept of an individual can be significantly influenced by the experiences and emotions encountered during their development. In this context, Shagufta, Akhtar, Nawaz, and Yasin (2010) highlight that socializing skills are crucial for societal adjustment and the development of self-concept and character, facilitated through interactions with parents and other community members. Additionally, individuals with physical challenges are likely to have a positive self-concept when they feel valued and accepted.

The majority of individuals with impairments likely did not have them at birth, necessitating an adaptation to their current social environment. There is a growing concern for understanding the physical self-concept, the body as a psychological phenomenon, and its significance to individuals. Consequently, several scholars have examined physically challenged people in various cultural contexts. Yarmohammadeain, Molavi, and Iranpoor (2013) conducted an exploratory study on the social acceptability of physically challenged individuals in schools in Pakistan. Falak, Fazeelat, and Muhammad (2022) analyzed factors influencing the social adjustment of people with disabilities in India, while Ali (2012) evaluated the effect of self-concept on disabled learners in inclusive physical education in Bangladesh. Additionally, Ezunu and Nwankwo (2022) examined the relationship between students' self-concept and their social adjustment in Awka, Nigeria.

Despite some studies conducted in Nigeria, there is a significant gap in research specifically concerning physically challenged individuals in special secondary schools in Anambra State. This lack of research creates a gap in knowledge and calls for immediate attention. To address this gap, it is important to conduct this study which seeks to investigate the relationship between self-concept and social adjustment of physically challenged students in Anambra State's special secondary schools.

Statement of the Problem

Physically challenged students often face unique psychological and social challenges that can significantly impact their overall well-being and academic success. Self-concept, which refers to an individual's perception of their abilities, worth, and identity, plays a crucial role in shaping their interactions, confidence, and overall social adjustment. A positive self-concept can enhance social integration, foster meaningful relationships, and improve emotional resilience, while a negative self-concept may lead to social withdrawal, low self-esteem, and poor interpersonal relationships.

In Anambra State’s special secondary schools, physically challenged students are expected to navigate academic and social environments that may either support or hinder their personal development. However, there is limited empirical evidence on how self-concept influences their ability to adapt socially within these school settings. Studies on self-concept and social adjustment have largely focused on the general student population, with little attention given to students with physical disabilities in special education settings.

This gap in knowledge raises critical questions about the extent to which self-concept affects the social adjustment of physically challenged students in Anambra State. Understanding this relationship is essential for developing targeted interventions, educational policies, and support systems that can enhance their academic and social experiences. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the relationship between self-concept and social adjustment among physically challenged students in special secondary schools in Anambra State, providing insights that can inform policies and practices aimed at improving their overall well-being.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between self-concept and the social adjustment of physically challenged persons in special secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to examine:

1. The self-concept scores of physically challenged persons in special secondary schools in Anambra State
2. The social adjustment scores of physically challenged persons in special secondary schools in Anambra State
3. The relationship between the self-concept and social adjustment of physically challenged persons in special secondary schools in Anambra State

1.6 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the self-concept scores of physically challenged persons in special secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. What are the social adjustment scores of physically challenged persons in special secondary schools in Anambra State?
3. What is the relationship between the self-concept and social adjustment of physically challenged persons in special secondary schools in Anambra State?

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was formulated to guide the study and was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant relationship between the self-concept and social adjustment of physically challenged persons in special secondary schools in Anambra state.

METHOD

This study adopted a correlational survey design to examine the relationship between self-concept and social adjustment among physically challenged students in special secondary schools in Anambra State. The study was conducted in Anambra State, a region known for its commitment to inclusive education, with a significant population of physically challenged students in special schools.

The population of the study comprised 521 students from three special education centers in the state. Since the population was relatively small and manageable, a census sampling technique was used, meaning all 521 students participated in the study.

Data was collected using two standardized instruments:

1. Bryant Self-Concept Survey (BSCS) – a 30-item scale measuring social self, physical self, and family self.

2. Social Adjustment Questionnaire (SAQ) – a 28-item scale assessing social and family role functioning.

Both instruments had been previously validated in studies conducted in Nigeria. Their reliability was confirmed using the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient, yielding a reliability score of 0.824 for the BSCS and 8.23 for the SAQ.

Data was collected through direct delivery by the researcher and three trained research assistants, who ensured proper administration and guided respondents. The respondents were given 45 minutes to complete the questionnaires.

For data analysis, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 was used. Research questions were answered using range scores and percentages, while the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) was employed to determine the strength and direction of relationships between self-concept and social adjustment. The study also used a t-test for correlation to test hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level.

The correlation was interpreted based on Nworgu's (2015) classification, ranging from very low (r = 0.00 to ±0.19) to very high (r = ±0.80 and above). This analytical approach ensured a precise examination of how self-concept influences social adjustment among physically challenged students in Anambra State's special secondary schools.

RESULTS

Data collected from the field for this study were analysed and the summaries were presented in tables and discussion of the results.

Research Question 1

What are the self-concept scores of physically challenged persons in special secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 1: Range of Scores Showing the self-concept Scores of Physically Challenged Persons in Special Secondary Schools in Anambra State

Range of Scores	Frequency	Percent	Remark
30 to 55	9	1.9	Low Self-concept
56 to 85	279	58.2	Moderate Self-concept
86 to 120.	191	39.9	High Self-concept
Total	479	100.0	

The table provides a summary of the self-concept scores of physically challenged persons in special secondary schools in Anambra State. Out of the total 479 respondents, 9 individuals (1.9%) have a low self-concept, with scores ranging from 30 to 55. A majority of the respondents, 279 individuals (58.2%), fall within the moderate self-concept range, scoring from 56 to 85. Additionally, 191 individuals (39.9%) have a high self-concept, with scores ranging from 86 to 120. This indicates that while most physically challenged persons have a moderate self-concept, a significant proportion report a high self-concept.

Research Question 2

What are the social adjustment scores of physically challenged persons in special secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 2: Range of Scores Showing the Social Adjustment Scores of Physically Challenged Persons in Special Secondary Schools in Anambra State

Range of Scores	Frequency	Percent	Remark
28 to 50	12	2.5	Poor Social Adjustment;
51 to 80:	324	67.6	Moderate Social Adjustment
81 to 112.	143	29.9	Good Social Adjustment
Total	479	100.0	

The table presents the social adjustment scores of physically challenged persons in special secondary schools in Anambra State. Out of 479 respondents, 12(2.5%) show poor social adjustment with scores ranging from 28 to 50. The majority, 324 (67.6%), have moderate social adjustment, scoring between 51 to 80. Additionally, 143(29.9%) exhibit good social adjustment, with scores between 81 to 112. This indicates that most physically challenged persons in the study have moderate social adjustment, while a smaller proportion demonstrates good social adjustment.

Research Question 3

What is the relationship between the self-concept and social adjustment of physically challenged persons in special secondary schools in Anambra State?

Null Hypothesis 1

There will be no significant relationship between the self-concept and social adjustment of physically challenged persons in special secondary schools in Anambra state.

Table 3: Pearson r on the Self-Concept and Social Adjustment of Physically Challenged Persons in Special Secondary Schools in Anambra State

Source of Variation	N	Social Adjustment r	Self-Concept r	Cal t	df	Pvalue	Remark
Social Adjustment	479	1.000	0.002	0.053	477	0.479	Very low positive relationship
Self-Concept	479	0.002	1.000				

Table 3 presents the Pearson correlation between self-concept and social adjustment of physically challenged persons in special secondary schools in Anambra State. The Pearson

correlation coefficient (r) of 0.002 indicates a very low and negligible relationship between self-concept and social adjustment.

Also, at 477df, with the calculated t-value (0.053), the p-value (0.479) exceeds the significance level of 0.05, meaning the relationship is not statistically significant. Therefore, the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between self-concept and social adjustment among physically challenged persons is accepted.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study that most physically challenged persons have a moderate self-concept, while a significant proportion reports a high self-concept, could be based on the notion that many physically challenged individuals develop strong adaptive coping mechanisms over time. These coping skills can contribute to a positive self-concept as individuals learn to navigate their environments and develop a sense of competence despite their challenges. This can explain why a significant proportion reports a high self-concept. Also, for some individuals, their physical challenges may become a normalized part of their identity, rather than a source of constant distress. As they grow older or adapt to their circumstances, their self-concept may stabilize at a moderate level, reflecting an acceptance of their physical state without it being a dominant factor in their self-worth. This can explain the moderate self-concept observed in many individuals.

Moreover, the finding that most physically challenged persons in the study exhibit moderate social adjustment, with a smaller proportion showing good social adjustment can be based on the notion that many physically challenged individuals face obstacles related to accessibility in their daily lives, including limited access to public spaces, transportation, and employment opportunities. These barriers can affect their level of social interaction, contributing to moderate social adjustment. Although some individuals may overcome these barriers through external support or personal adaptation, the presence of such limitations often prevents optimal social engagement.

Also, societal attitudes towards physical challenges, including stigma or pity, can create barriers to full social inclusion. Negative perceptions and discrimination can lead to limited participation in social activities, contributing to moderate social adjustment levels. Those who report better social adjustment may have stronger support systems or have developed coping mechanisms to navigate these social challenges. Engagement in inclusive environments such as schools, workplaces, or community programs that cater to or support physically challenged individuals can also improve social adjustment. Those who report good social adjustment likely have had more exposure to such settings, where they feel included, supported, and possibly valued.

The finding that there is a very low and negligible relationship between self-concept and social adjustment among physically challenged persons can be explained based on the idea that for physically challenged individuals, social adjustment may be more affected by the structural and attitudinal barriers they face in society, which have the tendency to limit their participation in social activities. While some of the physically challenged individuals may have

a positive or moderate self-concept due to personal resilience or positive self-acceptance, these internal perceptions may not directly translate into better social adjustment because of external factors. Mores so, some physically challenged individuals might develop coping mechanisms that help maintain a positive self-concept despite low social adjustment. For example, they may not rely on social validation to assess their worth, leading to the weak association between these variables.

The finding is in agreement with the findings of previous studies such as Shafqat and Azim (2012) whose study reported that family and peer support are more significant predictors of social adjustment than self-concept. This finding aligns with the current study, where self-concept showed a negligible relationship with social adjustment, indicating that external factors may play a larger role in determining social outcomes than internal perceptions. Similarly, the study by Falak, Fazeelat, and Muhammad (2022) highlighted that physically challenged individuals often develop self-concepts that are somewhat independent of their social experiences due to limited social circles and restricted participation in recreational activities. This supports the current finding of a weak relationship between self-concept and social adjustment, as many of these individuals may maintain positive self-concepts despite social challenges. The findings of the current study is also consistent with the findings of Ezunu and Nwankwo (2022) whose study found that while self-concept was moderately high, it had little impact on how well students adjusted socially. This finding is in direct agreement with the current research, reinforcing the idea that self-concept and social adjustment may not be as closely related as previously thought, especially in challenging social environments.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the relationship between self-concept and social adjustment among physically challenged individuals in special secondary schools in Anambra State. It revealed key insights into how these two constructs interact, showing a significant but low relationship. The findings demonstrated that most participants exhibited a moderate self-concept, with a smaller proportion reporting higher levels. However, despite positive self-perception, the social adjustment of these individuals remained only moderately developed. Furthermore, the study discovered a very low negative correlation between self-concept and social adjustment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made as followed.

1. School administrators and policymakers should implement policies that ensure inclusive practices, making schools more accessible for physically challenged students. This includes constructing ramps, providing assistive devices, and making classrooms and extracurricular activities adaptable for all students. This can help improve social adjustment by allowing physically challenged students to participate fully in school activities. Schools should adopt strict anti-discrimination policies to protect physically challenged students from stigma and exclusion. Such policies should emphasize respect

for diversity and promote a culture of acceptance. This will help physically challenged students feel more accepted, positively influencing both their self-concept and social adjustment.

2. Teachers should receive specialized education training on how to support physically challenged students' self-concept and social adjustment. This training should include strategies for fostering inclusive classrooms, promoting peer acceptance, and addressing the emotional and social needs of these students. Teachers should be equipped to create a supportive learning environment that encourages all students to engage socially and academically. Both teaching and non-teaching staff, should participate in sensitivity workshops to better understand the unique challenges faced by physically challenged individuals. These workshops will equip staff with the skills to provide appropriate support and ensure that students feel valued and included in all school activities.

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