Social Class Difference in Self-Concept and Life Skill Awareness of Adolescent Women

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present education system is not limited to cognitive aspects, but rather to the socio-psychological development of the learner. The concept of life skills and self-concept is related to the cognitive, affective, and psycho-motor development of the child. The aim of this investigation is to study the differences in life skill awareness and self-concept of adolescent women according to their social category. A causal comparative research design was adopted, administering a self-concept and life skill awareness questionnaire to 120 adolescent women. Data analysis methods included descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA. Results indicate that life skill awareness and self-concept of adolescent women differ significantly across their social category ($p < .05$). Considering the empirical results, it is suggested that women from SC and ST classes need to be provided with parental and social support to enhance their life skills and ensure positive self-judgment. The result of the research is significant to teachers and students, showing that positive self-judgment and life skills contribute to their educational success. The study concludes that adolescents with a positive self-concept are able to judge how well their beliefs align with their actions or behaviors. Education that prioritizes life skills will enhance young adolescents' opportunities and chances in life if it is redesigned in line with the needs and demands of the 21st century.

KEYWORDS: Self-Concept, Life Skill Awareness, Adolescent Women, Social Category, Social Class Difference.

INTRODUCTION

Patterns of inequality and exclusion have persisted in India since independence, primarily as a result of ingrained social caste structure (caste, tribal, minority, and gender) that limit opportunities for members of society, preventing them from availing the resources, rights, and opportunities that are typically available to all. The Indian society is characterized by its diverse culture, ethnicity, religion, and language, within a framework of shared values. India's complex system of stratification results in a wide range of socioeconomic categories. Opportunities that are accessible to all are deprived by the backward sections of society due to rigid social class structure. With respect to social category, Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), Other Backward Caste (OBC), and General are the officially classified castes in India. The castes listed in the Government of India's August 1950 ordinance are identified as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This population is often considered as "Dalit Class" (Yadav, 2025) and "Disadvantaged Section" in Indian society (Kumar and Singh, 2022). The enlistment of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) to positions and services in the Union and State governments is envisaged in Article 335 of the Indian Constitution. It is an important clause that seeks to bring together the practical need for an efficient and competent bureaucracy with the constitutional and social justice for SCs and STs. Caste-based social prejudice and exclusion have historically been experienced by SCs and STs. The main historical data from Indian education indicate that this caste-based discrimination persisted in education and society. This disadvantaged group has been deprived of social justice, social participation, and provisions. However, in the

current context, efforts have been made by the government to implement proper provisions and policies to ensure equality in every sphere of life. In this direction, equality has been emphasized by providing necessary support and resources for each student, irrespective of their social category.

The values that need to be inculcated among the students are those incorporated through core areas such as democracy, social justice, rule of law, learning to live together, secularism, egalitarianism, peace, non-violence, self-confidence, respect for others, as well as a positive self-image (Daswani, 2002). Considering the empirical research gap, the present study aimed to investigate differences in life skill awareness and self-concept of adolescent women by their social category.

The aim of education system in 21st century placed greater emphasis on the core values that needs to be inculcated among the students. The values that need to be fostered can incorporate democracy, social justice, rule of law, learning to live together, secularism, egalitarianism, peace, non-violence, self-confidence, respect for others as well as a positive self-image (Daswani 2002). Considering the empirical research gap, the present study aimed to investigate differences in life skill awareness and self-concept of adolescent women by their social category.

Self-Concept

In literature, self-concept has been defined as "a person's appraisal of oneself and an assessment of their assessment of how the individual concerned" (Chaplain, 2008). It is also considered an idea of the individual that is a blend of their physical, psychological, socio-emotional beliefs, and accomplishments. It is affirmed that the self-concept of an individual consists of three aspects, i.e. knowledge, hope, and evaluation. What people know about themselves (physical completeness or deficiency, age, gender, ethnicity, occupation, and so on) is considered as knowledge. Hope in self-concept refers to their ideal self; like whom a person wants to be in future. Evaluation in self-concept is referred to as judgment about one's self (Gurfon, 2010). From the aforementioned definitions, it can be inferred that self-concept is individual perception and assessment about himself or herself as a whole.

Life Skills

There is no specific understanding of life skills. Furthermore, no definition of life skills is universally accepted. As defined by the International Bureau of Education (IBE), life skills

can be considered as "personal management and social skills which are necessary for adequate functioning on an independent basis." The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) defines life skills as "psychosocial and interpersonal skills that are generally considered important." The most important life skills identified by UNESCO, UNICEF, and WHO are diagrammatically presented in Figure-1.

Figure-1. Ten core life skills identified by UNESCO, UNICEF, and WHO

These skills are dynamic in nature and change according to circumstances. It is necessary to adapt life skills according to unique situations. Referring to the World Health Organization (WHO), life skills education is "designed to facilitate the practice and reinforcement of psychosocial skills in a culturally and developmentally appropriate way; it contributes to the promotion of personal and social development, the prevention of health and social problems, and the protection of human rights." It has been remarked that "ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes" (Singh, 2003). The aforementioned facts underline the significance of life skill awareness in human lives. In short, life skills refer to a combination of behavior, attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge that indicate the ability to accomplish an endeavor or achieve a pre-determined aim in one's life. Despite their impact on an individual's empowerment, life skills have significance in a wide range of life situations.

AIM OF THE STUDY

It is evident from the existing body of knowledge that self-concept and life skill awareness are related

to the self-definition and self-empowerment of adolescents as independent beings. Educational institutions can enable students to successfully navigate the challenges of the twenty-first century and to lead a satisfying life by emphasizing the importance of life skills (Vemula and Lalaramthari, 2024). In order to provide young adults with a strong sense of empowerment, life skills are essential. Empowered citizens are able to identify and value themselves as well as others, and they may contribute to promoting social progress and transformation (UNICEF). In contrast to past literature, this study analyzed the influence of social categories on self-concept and life skill awareness among adolescent women enrolled in higher education. The present study aimed: -

1. To compare the self-concept of adolescent women with respect to their social category
2. To compare the life skill awareness of adolescent women with respect to their social category

Hypotheses

1. There is no difference in self-concept of adolescent women according to their social category
2. There is no difference in life skill awareness of adolescent women according to their social category

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

The study aimed to investigate the influence of the social category of adolescent women students on their self-concept and life skill awareness. As the attributed independent variable, i.e., social category, cannot be manipulated, a causal-comparative research method has been used in the present study. The target population size is about 2,199 students, differing in terms of their social category. The study included 120 adolescent women students between the ages of 10 to 19 as defined by WHO. The sample characteristics are presented in Table-1.

Table-1. Sample characteristics

Social Category	frequency	Percentage (%)
General	60	50
Scheduled Caste	30	25
Scheduled Tribe	30	25
Total	120	100%

As seen in Table-1, the sample under the present study is dominated by 50% (60) of adolescent women belonging to the general social category, whereas 30% (25) of participants were from the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe categories. For data collection, the investigator developed and standardized two survey instruments: the Self-Concept Scale and the Life Skill Awareness Questionnaire. To ensure content validity for determining the relevance and accuracy of the items, experts' judgments were taken into consideration. Accordingly, necessary modifications were made in the initial survey scale. A pilot test was carried out to establish the reliability coefficient of the scales. The self-concept scale has a Cronbach alpha reliability of .72, indicating high internal consistency of survey items. The scale consists of 24 items based on a five-point Likert rating ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The Life Skill Awareness Questionnaire has a reliability coefficient of .79. The measure incorporates 40 items based on 10 dimensions of life skill awareness.

RESULT

For data analysis, descriptive statistics (i.e., mean, standard deviations, ANOVA, and post-hoc analysis) were administered in SPSS-21 version. Before conducting the statistical analysis, normality of the data was tested.

Table-2. Descriptive statistics on life skill awareness and self-concept of adolescent women according to social category

Variable	Social Category	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Life Skill Awareness	General	60	30.71	5.03	.650
	Scheduled Caste	30	27.23	5.49	1.003
	Scheduled Tribe	30	28.46	3.95	.721
	Total	120	29.28	5.09	.465
Self-Concept	General	60	89.11	12.87	1.662
	Scheduled Caste	30	80.80	11.01	2.010
	Scheduled Tribe	30	83.73	8.98	1.639
	Total	120	85.69	12.01	1.096

Table-2 describes the mean and standard deviations of adolescent women on their life skill awareness and self-concept with respect to social category. The mean score of General adolescent women was found to be 30.71, which is higher than the mean scores (i.e., 27.23 and 28.46) respectively for SC and ST counterparts. The total mean score of adolescent women's life skill awareness was 29.28. In self-concept, adolescent women from the General category were found to have a mean score of 89.11, whereas women from SC and ST categories had mean scores of 80.80 and 83.73, respectively. The total mean score of adolescent women's self-concept was 85.69. To investigate differences in the mean scores of life skill awareness and self-concept of adolescent women according to social category, a One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was administered.

Table-3. Difference in life skill awareness and self-concept of adolescent women by social category

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Life Skill Awareness	Between Groups	269.350	2	134.675	5.578	.005
	Within Groups	2825.017	117	24.145		
	Total	3094.367	119			
Self-Concept	Between Groups	1536.742	2	768.371	5.748	.004
	Within Groups	15640.850	117	133.682		
	Total	17177.592	119			

The result of statistical analysis revealed a statistically significant difference $(F(2, 117) = 5.578, p < .05)$ in the life skill awareness mean scores of General, SC, and ST adolescent women. Similarly, with regard to self-concept, a significant difference $(F(2, 117) = 5.748, p < .05)$ was observed among adolescent women across their social categories. Hence, the formulated hypotheses i.e. "*There is no difference in self-concept of adolescent women according to their social category*" and "*There is no difference in life skill awareness of adolescent women according to their social category*" is not accepted at 0.05 level of significance. As the results indicated a significant difference, post-hoc analysis using the Scheffé test was employed for further statistical consideration.

Table-4. Scheffe Post-Hoc analysis for multiple comparison

Dependent Variable	(I) Social Category	(J) Social Category	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Self-concept	General	SC	8.31667*	2.58537	.007	1.9065	14.7269
		ST	5.38333	2.58537	.119	-1.0269	11.7935
	SC	General	-8.31667*	2.58537	.007	-14.7269	-1.9065
		ST	-2.93333	2.98532	.618	-10.3352	4.4685
	ST	General	-5.38333	2.58537	.119	-11.7935	1.0269
		SC	2.93333	2.98532	.618	-4.4685	10.3352
Life Skill Awareness	General	SC	3.48333*	1.09876	.008	.7590	6.2076
		ST	2.25000	1.09876	.127	-.4743	4.9743
	SC	General	-3.48333*	1.09876	.008	-6.2076	-.7590
		ST	-1.23333	1.26874	.625	-4.3791	1.9124
	ST	General	-2.25000	1.09876	.127	-4.9743	.4743
		SC	1.23333	1.26874	.625	-1.9124	4.3791
*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.							

Table-4 depicts the results of post-hoc analysis for multiple mean differences in self-concept and life skill awareness of adolescent women. In relation to self-concept, a significant difference was observed between General and SC categories $(p < .05)$, whereas the difference was not significant between General and ST, and between SC and ST $(p > .05)$ adolescent women. In life skill awareness, significant differences were

also found between General and SC category women (p < .05). No considerable difference was found between General and ST, and between SC and ST category (p > .05) adolescent women in their life skill awareness.

DISCUSSION

Social class is one of the considerable demographic factors that needs to be addressed in investigating differences in psychological constructs. In this study, it is observed that the self-concept of adolescent women students differs significantly across their social class. This result aligns with the past research, indicating the influence of socio-economic factors on self-concept (Rana and Anmol, 2020; Vollmer et al., 2020). The findings indicated that socioeconomic class has a significant impact on how individuals develop their self-concept (Easterbrook et al., 2020). Furthermore, it is observed that students belonging to the general category tend to have higher life skills than SC and ST counterparts. This result aligns with past studies, indicating that students from high socioeconomic backgrounds have better life skills than students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Pachauri and Kumar, 2024).

In contrast to the aforementioned results, it is reported that secondary school students from Dalit class, backward class, and general class do not differ significantly with relation to their level of life skill awareness (Yadav, 2025).

CONCLUSION

In this study, adolescent women belonging to SC and ST categories showed a lower level of self-concept and life skill awareness than general category students. Based on the empirical results, it is suggested that teachers may provide positive feedback to develop self-concept and a positive self-perception among students belonging to the backward social class. Educators need to adapt to environments where adolescent students can define themselves and their roles in a given context. Furthermore, teachers can facilitate situations where students from diverse backgrounds can interact in a democratic environment that shapes their behavior, attitudes, life skills, and self-concept. Self-concept supports positive self-perceptions that allow adolescents to assess how well their self-beliefs align with their actions or behavior. With regard to life skill awareness, the study suggested that education which incorporates life skills as a core component will improve the chances and options in the lives of young adolescents—if it is re-envisioned to meet the changing and evolving demands of the twenty-first century.

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