Teachers' Perceptions of Self-Determination among Deaf / Hard of Hearing Students

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Abstract: *Background*: This study aims to assess the level of self-determination skills acquired by deaf and hard of hearing students (HISs) as perceived by their teachers. And to examine whether their levels differ due to variations in severity, type of disability, students' age, or teachers' years of experience as independent variables. The dependent variable is the level of self-determination skills.

Methods: A descriptive-analytical method was used. The study sample consisted of 90 teachers who responded to a self-determination skills questionnaire. The data were analyzed with descriptive statistics through averages, standard deviations, relative weight, the Kruskal–Wallis test, and the Mann–Whitney test to validate the study hypotheses.

Results: The findings revealed that HISs acquired a high level of self-determination skills in their teachers' views (M = 3.638, RW = 72.8%). In addition, there were significant differences in the level of self-determination skills acquired by HISs in relation to disability severity and the students' ages. On the other hand, no significant differences were detected according to the type of disability or the teachers' years of experience. Independent variables significantly contribute to determining the level of self-determination skills in the deaf and hard of hearing.

Conclusion: The study's findings present empirical evidence indicating the feasibility of improving self-determination skills for the hearing impaired and suggest further studies.

Keywords: Self-Determination, Hearing Impairment, Skills, Level of Impairment.

INTRODUCTION

Aksu & Bal and Wehmeyer & Shogren [1, 2] conceptualized self-determination as a general psychological construct within the organizing structure of theories of human agentic behavior. Early in this decade, researchers in self-determination have primarily focused on exploring how important self-determination is for students with disabilities as early as the age of 16 [3, 4].

Self-determination looks different over time, and different supports are needed at different ages. However, recently they shifted their focus from researching the benefits of teaching self-determination at transition age to the benefits, strategies, and barriers to teaching self-determination at a younger age [3]. For example, Palmer and Wehmeyer [5] found that students can learn about themselves and be involved in educational decision-making even at a young age. Hence, researchers began looking at various age groups [6].

Children who are deaf or hard of hearing should be taught self-determination skills that are essential for them [6]. Self-determination can be practiced by promoting student involvement in the transition and IEP process, having students problem-solve challenging social situations, asking students to establish their own literacy goals, and encouraging students to set up meetings with teachers to discuss issues they may have [6].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a highly visible and comprehensive macro-theory developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan to explain the origins and outcomes of human agentic action Wehmeyer and Shogren [2]. According to SDT, three basic psychological needs, competence, autonomy, and relatedness, must be met in order to support healthy psychological development [2].

Self-determination creates students' conviction that they are capable of reaching more advanced stages rather than remaining under the control of others. Self-determination skills support independence, create social relationships, and ensure self-efficacy [7], as they support the transition from each level of education—primary, middle, and high school—to the next and, ultimately, to the more complex university environment. A lack of autonomy leads to a lower level of production and motivation [8]. Regarding the applied level, self-determination skills are important for students with learning disabilities (LD) at all stages of education and beyond [9].

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Self-determination skills are essential for PWDs, whose challenges increase in the adolescent stage, and their characteristics differ from those in childhood. There is a correlation between self-determination skills and the academic performance of SWDs. Those with the skills of independence, psychological empowerment, and self-realization have been shown to achieve higher academic outcomes [10].

Adolescents suffer from obstacles and disorders in their self-concept and exhibit insufficient knowledge of their abilities and skills. They also display fear and hesitation in expressing their opinions and ideas and a low level of accountability for the tasks assigned to them. Furthermore, they are unable to make a smooth transition in the instructions targeting them [11-14].

Self-Determination Skills of Students with Disabilities

The literature indicates that students with mild mental disabilities possess a moderate level of self-determination skills but then show remarkable improvement after the implementation of a training program that links their experiences with reality in the development of the skills of making choices and decision-making [9,13]. The level of psychological empowerment, self-regulation, and self-realization among students with mental disabilities varies on the scale of self-determination skills in accordance with the opportunities available in the community and at home. It has also been found that their level of independence increases when the disabled are at home versus at school[8], LD students in the middle stage have a moderate level of self-determination skills. There is also a strong correlation between life satisfaction and self-determination—the higher the level of life satisfaction, the higher the level of self-determination.

Self-Determination and Deaf / Hard of Hearing Students

Deaf / Hard of Hearing people has to constantly advocate for their needs as they navigate inaccessible settings in schools and other settings [15]. Because of this continual self-advocacy, self-determination skills are crucial for them; hence, these skills need to be an important component in their lives. Suppose their levels of self-determination are high, and they process autonomous motivation during their academic lives. In that case, they are more likely to enroll in college, live independently, have positive self-beliefs, make more money at work, and have more opportunities for career advancement [16]. All people have the potential for strong self-determined behavior but need intentional spaces to make their own choices and practice those skills. Deaf / Hard of Hearing Students is no exception [17].

The Role of Teachers in Developing Self-Determination Skills

Special education institutions and programs affiliated with the Ministry of Education lack legislation or rules that regulate their work on the skills of self-determination for disabilities. This negatively affects some teachers' commitment to providing students with self-determination skills or including them in their individual educational programs. Their failure to present self-determination skills to these students may be due to poor competencies, inadequate absorption of the academic courses in their university preparation, or not having received in-service training courses or workshops on these skills. When that is the case, students score a moderate level of self-determination skills, so it is of paramount importance to develop the competencies of teachers through training programs that focus on teaching self-determination skills [18].

Aims of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate teachers' perceptions of self-determination among deaf/hard-of-hearing students.

Problem Statement

Teachers' perceptions of self-determination have been shown to vary based upon the disability category [3], with some teachers thinking that self-determination is not possible for all children—especially the most severely impacted students. Expanding the self-determination research focused on students who are deaf or hard of hearing is a must. Very little is written about self-determination for these students.

Study Questions

Main Question: What are the levels of Self-Determination among Deaf / Hard of Hearing Students as perceived by their teachers?

1. Are there differences in the level of self-determination skills according to the type of disability (deaf, hard of hearing)?

2. Are there differences in the level of self-determination skills according to the severity of the disability (profound, severe, moderate, and mild)?

3. Are there differences in the level of self-determination skills according to students' ages (less than 8 years, 8–12 years, and more than 12 years)?

4. Are there differences in the level of self-determination skills according to teachers' years of experience?

Hypothesis

H1: There are differences in the level of self-determination skills according to the type of disability (deaf, hard of hearing).

H2: There are differences in the level of self-determination skills according to the severity of the disability (profound, severe, moderate, and mild).

H3: There are differences in the level of self-determination skills according to students' ages (less than 8 years, 8–12 years, and more than 12 years).

H4: There are differences in the level of self-determination skills according to teachers' years of experience.

METHOD

Design

For this study, quantitative survey research was employed. The independent variables are the type of disability (deaf, hard of hearing), students' ages (less than 8 years, 8–12 years, and more than 12 years), teachers' years of experience, and level of self-determination skills the dependent variable.

Sampling Procedures

This study's target population was educators working with students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Participants were selected among individuals currently working with the student population as a teacher of deaf or hard of hearing students.

Participants

Participants in this quantitative study were 90 teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. All of them were females. All participants have experience working with students of a varied age range.

Data Collection Tool

A 31-item survey instrument was developed specifically for this research study. The first part collects demographic data, and the second part comprises the questions. A five-point Likert scale was used to score the answers—strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, somewhat agree = 3, agree = 4, and strongly agree = 5. The content validity of the scale was examined by a group of 10 experts. They assessed the relevance of each item using a four-point Likert scale (from irrelevant = 1 to highly relevant = 4) and provided suggestions and comments. The 22 items were scored as sufficiently or highly relevant. A content validity index was calculated at the item level (I–CVI = 0.90). Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha showed that all four variables used in this research were reliable, as shown in Table **1**.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis

Axis	Cronbach's alpha	Remarks
Self-governance	0.841	Reliable
Self-regulation	0.837	Reliable
Self-realization	0.887	Reliable
Self- empowerment	0.874	Reliable
Total score	0.883	Reliable

Procedures

Before administering the scales, teachers were informed of the purpose of the study, assured of the anonymity of their data, that their responses were for research purposes only, and that their participation would have no consequences relating to their jobs. They voluntarily signed consent forms before proceeding. To ensure that they responded honestly, they were asked not to disclose their identity in any way on the questionnaire. All data were keyed into an SPSS file.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and descriptive statistics and calculating means, standard deviations, relative weight, the Kruskal- Wells test, and the Mann-Whitney test to examine the level of self-determination skills.

RESULTS

The main question is that" What are the levels of Self-Determination among Deaf / Hard of Hearing

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviation of the Level of SDS Acquired as seen by Teachers

Dimension	M	SD	RW	Level	Rank
Self-governance	3.294	0.825	65.9%	Moderate	4
Self-regulation	3.944	0.841	78.9%	High	1
Self-realization	3.549	0.637	71%	high	3
Psychological empowerment	3.764	0.849	75.3%	high	2
Total	3.638	0.733	72.8	high	

Deaf / Hard of Hearing Students scored a high level of self-determination skills from their teachers' perspectives (M = 3.638, RW = 72.8%).

Students as perceived by their teachers ?" To answer this question, the Means and standard deviation of the level of SDS acquired as seen by teachers were calculated. Results are shown in Table **2**. As shown Means and standard deviation of the level of SDS acquired as seen by teachers.

Hypotheses Testing

The first hypothesis states that" There are differences in the level of self-determination skills according to the type of disability (deaf, hard of hearing)". To test this hypothesis, the Mann–Whitney test was used, and the values of U and Z were calculated as a nonparametric method to identify the significance of the differences between the mean ranks of the two groups' scores. The results are shown in Table **3**. As shown in Table **3**, (z) value was smaller than the limit value (1.96), indicating that the variable of the type of disability did not affect the level of self-determination skills.

Table 3: The Differences in the Level of Self-Determination Skills according to the Type of Disability

Dimension	Total score	
Group	Deafness	Hard of hearing
Number	25	65
Rank average	41.00	47.23
Rank sum	1025	3070
U value	700	
Z value	-1.015	
Significance level	0.310 (insignificant)	

The second hypothesis states that" There are differences in the level of self-determination skills according to the severity of the disability (profound, severe, moderate, and mild)". The researcher used Kruskal–Wallis test. As shown in Table **4**, mild disability was the highest perceived level. In other words, the disability severity variable affected the self-determination level (see Figure **1**).

Table 4: The Results of the Kruskal–Wallis Test for Disability Severity

Dimension	Total score			
Group	Profound	Severe	Moderate	Mild
Number	10	19	54	7
Rank avg	13	31.16	55.69	52.29
Kruskal value	29.971			
Significance level	0.000 Significant at (0.01)			

The third hypothesis states that" There are differences in the level of self-determination skills according to students' ages (less than 8 years, 8–12 years, and more than 12 years)". The researcher used Kruskal–Wallis test. As shown in Table **5**, there are significant differences at the level (0.01) in the self-determination skills level acquired by HISs from their teachers' perspectives in favor of older students.

The fourth hypothesis states that" There are differences in the level of self-determination skills according to teachers' years of experience". The researcher used Kruskal–Wallis test. As shown in Table **6**, there are significant differences at the level (0.01) in the self-determination skills according to teachers' years of experience in favor of more experienced ones.

DISCUSSION

Self-determination has been a recognized best practice in special education transition [19-21]. The importance of promoting the development and expression of self-determination has received significant attention [22-26]. This study investigates

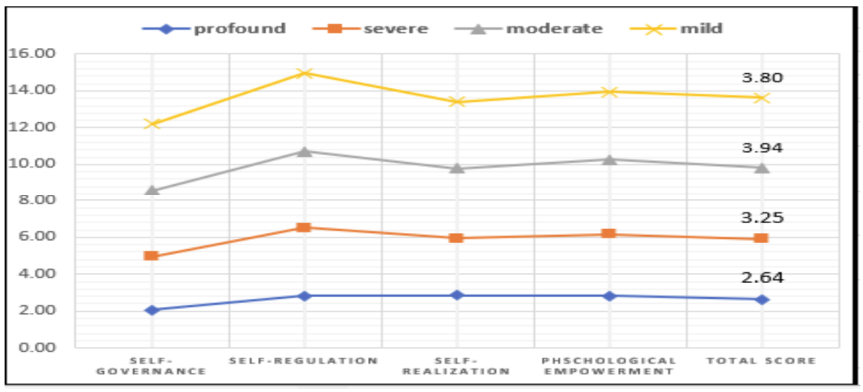

Figure 1: Level of skills of self-determination according to the severity of disability.

Table 5: The Results of the Kruskal–Wallis Test for Students' Ages

Dimension	Total score		
Group	**Less than 8 years**	**`8–12 years**	**More than 12 years**
Number	15	40	35
Rank avg	51.33	33	57.29
Kruskal value	17.079		
Significance level	0.000 Significant at (0.01)		

Table 6: The Results of the Kruskal–Wallis Test for Teachers' Years of Experience

Dimension	Total score		
Group	**Less than 5 years**	**5–10 years**	**More than 10 years**
Number	14	16	60
Rank avg	46.93	40.50	46.50
Kruskal value	0.718		
Significance level	0.698 Insignificant		

teachers' perceptions of self-determination among deaf/hard-of-hearing students. As results indicated through means and standard deviation of the level of SDS acquired as seen by teachers, Deaf / Hard of Hearing Students scored a high level of self-determination skills from their teachers' perspectives (M = 3.638, RW = 72.8%).

This goes in line with the results of Sebald [28] indicated that teachers believed self-determination to be important but may not intentionally teach those identified skills. For example, 96% reported that problem-solving was an important component of self-determination, 87% taught this skill to students, and 74% observed students using problem-solving in the classroom. Basic statistics (frequencies, medians, means, and standard deviations) were used to analyze how participants responded and aided in establishing an overall picture of teachers' perceptions. Reliabilities were established in the design of the instrument. Finally, multiple response items were analyzed using cross-tabulations presented as percentages.

As shown (z) value was smaller than the limit value (1.96), indicating that the variable of the type of disability did not affect the level of self-determination skills. This goes in line with the results of Sebald [28]. There are significant differences at the level (0.01) in the self-determination skills level acquired by HISs from their teachers' perspectives in favor of older students. This goes in line with the results of Sebald [28].

The results have shown significant differences in the level of self-determination skills of HISs because of

the students' age, favoring older students. It can be concluded that the older the HISs, the higher their level of self-determination skills. This result seems logical because the level of self-determination skills acquired by students with mild hearing disabilities would be higher than those with profound, severe, and moderate disabilities. It can also be concluded that the lower the severity of the disability, the higher the level of self-determination skills among HISs.

There are significant differences at the level (0.01) in the self-determination skills according to teachers' years of experience in favor of more experienced ones. This goes in line with the results of Sebald [28]. This result can be explained by the fact that teachers may discuss experiences, have consultations among themselves, and benefit from each other's experiences. A statement made by Kelsey guided the researcher to consider the special nature of DHH teachers teaching DHH students:

> … when you didn't understand something, or the process of listening takes energy, and sometimes when they're trying to process, like if they hear something. They're [the student is] like, 'oh, what did they just say?' By the time they try to figure out what was said, obviously, then the teacher has gone on. So, they lose stuff, so I don't know necessarily if it's more important, but certainly saying, "Hey, I didn't catch that"…I need more explanation or something like that [29].

CONCLUSION

Self-determination represents obtaining access to the basic human rights of people with disabilities, such as equal employment opportunity, equal protection, marriage, and raising children. Setting goals and objectives that relate to self-determination is an important factor in ensuring a successful transition from adolescence to adulthood for students who are deaf/hard of hearing students. It is said that a lack of skills related to self-determination of students with disabilities is the leading cause of lower status in post-secondary education and even graduation and completion rates.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Therefore, it is important that self-determination skills be promoted for students with hearing impairments as it helps them to cope well with day-to-day life demands [2] pointed out that self-determination is important for students, and it needs to be treated systematically in the school curriculum. Beginning to teach self-determination at this critical age can provide an energetic impact on continued school performance in the secondary setting for a young student with a disability. Further research is needed to realize the potential of self-determination in students starting in the elementary grades. A change needs to happen within Deaf education teacher preparation programs to include best practices in self-determination and school districts to promote professional development on the topic regularly.

LIMITATIONS

This study, like others, has a few limitations. Firstly, the study involved Deaf / Hard of Hearing Students only. In order to generalize the findings, the applicability to other students with disabilities must also be investigated. Second, the data is self-reported by teachers; hence biased can not be denied in reporting the responses.

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