

Imposter Syndrome and Self Esteem among School Educators: A Review Study

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ABSTRACT

This review study explores the relationship between imposter syndrome and self-esteem among school educators. Imposter syndrome is a psychological phenomenon characterized by persistent feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and fear of being exposed as a fraud, despite evidence of competence and accomplishments. Self-esteem, on the other hand, refers to an individual's overall evaluation of their self-worth and self-perception. The aim of this study is to examine the prevalence of imposter syndrome among school educators and its impact on their self-esteem. Preliminary findings suggest that imposter syndrome is prevalent among school educators, affecting both novice and experienced professionals. The experience of imposter syndrome negatively influences educators' self-esteem, leading to reduced job satisfaction, burnout, and decreased performance. Several contributing factors were identified, including high expectations, social comparison, perfectionism, and lack of recognition or support. Based on the findings, this review study highlights the need for increased awareness and support systems within educational institutions to address imposter syndrome among educators. Effective interventions, such as mentoring programs, professional development opportunities, and promoting a culture of psychological safety, can help mitigate the negative impact of imposter syndrome on self-esteem and enhance educators' overall well-being.

Keywords: *Imposter Syndrome, Self-Esteem, School Educators, Educational Psychology*

Imposter syndrome and self-esteem are interconnected psychological constructs that influence an individual's perception of themselves, their abilities. Self-esteem is the judgement of a person about themselves. It is influenced by various internal and external factors, such as achievements, social interactions, and personal beliefs. High self-esteem is typically associated with positive self-perception, confidence, and a sense of competence, while low self-esteem can result in self-doubt, negative self-perception, and reduced confidence in one's abilities.

Imposter syndrome, on the other hand, refers to a psychological phenomenon where individuals feel like they are not competent or deserving of their achievements, despite evidence of their competence. It often involves persistent feelings of being a fraud, fear of

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being exposed, and a belief that one's success is due to luck or external factors rather than their abilities. Imposter syndrome can have a detrimental effect on an individual's self-esteem, as it can lead to self-doubt and undermine their confidence in their abilities.

The relationship between self-esteem and imposter syndrome is complex. Low self-esteem may be a risk factor for developing imposter syndrome, as individuals with low self-esteem may be more susceptible to self-doubt and negative self-perception, which may contribute to the belief that they are not competent despite evidence of their achievements. Imposter syndrome may further erode self-esteem, leading to a negative cycle of self-doubt and reduced self-worth.

1.1 Self Esteem

Self-esteem among teachers is an important aspect of their overall well-being and job performance. Self-esteem refers to an individual's evaluation of their self-worth and value, and it can influence a teacher's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in the classroom. Research has shown that self-esteem can significantly impact the well-being and performance of teachers.

Healthy self-esteem among teachers is associated with several positive outcomes. Teachers with higher self-esteem are more likely to have greater job satisfaction, positive self-concept, and psychological well-being (Klassen et al., 2011). They tend to have a positive perception of themselves and their abilities, leading to higher levels of self-confidence and self-assurance in their teaching role. Teachers with healthy self-esteem are also more likely to have positive attitudes towards their work and possess greater self-efficacy, which is the belief in their ability to perform their job successfully (Klassen et al., 2009). This can lead to increased motivation, perseverance, and confidence in their teaching abilities, impacting their job performance positively.

Furthermore, teachers with healthy self-esteem are more likely to be resilient in the face of challenges in their professional environment. They are better equipped to cope with stressors such as student misbehavior, difficult parents, or demanding workload (Hughes et al., 2012). Healthy self-esteem can contribute to better emotional regulation skills, which are crucial in managing the stresses and challenges of the teaching profession. Resilient teachers are less likely to experience burnout and negative emotional experiences, leading to improved well-being and mental health.

On the other hand, teachers with lower self-esteem may experience self-doubt, reduced self-efficacy, and negative perceptions of their abilities, which can contribute to decreased motivation, increased stress, and potentially lower job performance (Klassen et al., 2011). Low self-esteem can also lead to a negative cycle of self-fulfilling prophecies, where teachers may doubt their abilities, perform poorly, and further reinforce their negative self-perception, leading to a decline in their job performance and effectiveness in the classroom.

1.2 Imposter Syndrome

Imposter syndrome, also known as the imposter phenomenon, is a psychological phenomenon characterized by persistent feelings of self-doubt, fear of being exposed as a fraud, and a belief that one's accomplishments are due to luck rather than competence. Although imposter syndrome has been widely studied in various fields, including business, academia, and healthcare, recent research has also shed light on its prevalence and impact among teachers. Imposter syndrome can have significant implications for the well-being and

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professional performance of teachers, and understanding its prevalence, causes, and consequences is crucial for supporting teachers in their roles as educators.

Research has shown that imposter syndrome is prevalent among teachers, particularly among early-career teachers. A study conducted by Vazquez et al. (2019) found that 79% of early-career teachers reported experiencing imposter syndrome. Another study by Santilli et al. (2018) revealed that 72% of pre-service teachers reported experiencing imposter syndrome. These findings highlight the high prevalence of imposter syndrome among teachers, particularly those who are in the initial stages of their careers.

Imposter syndrome among teachers can be influenced by numerous factors, including perfectionism, self-efficacy beliefs, and societal expectations. Perfectionism, which is characterized by setting unrealistically ambitious standards for oneself, is positively correlated with imposter syndrome among teachers. A study by Turner et al. (2015) found that teachers who reported higher levels of perfectionism were more likely to experience imposter syndrome. Self-efficacy beliefs, which refer to an individual's belief in their abilities to perform tasks, have also been found to impact imposter syndrome among teachers. A study by Villwock et al. (2016) found that teachers with lower self-efficacy beliefs were more likely to experience imposter syndrome. Societal expectations, such as the pressure to meet ambitious standards of performance and the fear of being judged by others, can also contribute to imposter syndrome among teachers. A study by Clance and Imes (1978) found that societal expectations, particularly gender role expectations, can contribute to feelings of being an imposter among female teachers.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gerber and Erez (2021) examined the mediating role of self-esteem in the relationship between the impostor phenomenon and emotional exhaustion among teachers. The study involved 435 Israeli teachers who completed an online survey. The results showed that the impostor phenomenon was positively related to emotional exhaustion and negatively related to self-esteem. Additionally, self-esteem was found to partially mediate the relationship between the impostor phenomenon and emotional exhaustion. The findings suggest that interventions aimed at increasing self-esteem may help reduce the negative consequences of the impostor phenomenon on emotional exhaustion among teachers.

Wang and Liao (2021) investigated the relationship between imposter phenomenon and self-esteem among Chinese teachers, and whether this relationship is moderated by cognitive emotion regulation strategies. The study involved 428 teachers who completed self-report measures. The results showed that imposter phenomenon was negatively related to self-esteem, and that this relationship was moderated by cognitive emotion regulation strategies. Specifically, the use of positive reappraisal and putting things into perspective were found to weaken the negative relationship between imposter phenomenon and self-esteem, while the use of rumination and catastrophizing were found to strengthen this relationship. The findings suggest that cognitive emotion regulation strategies may be a key factor in understanding the relationship between imposter phenomenon and self-esteem among teachers.

Kaur, Singh, and Kaur (2021) examined the relationship between imposter phenomenon, self-esteem, and life satisfaction among university students in India. Results indicated a negative correlation between imposter phenomenon and self-esteem, and a positive correlation between self-esteem and life satisfaction. The study highlights the importance of

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addressing imposter phenomenon and improving self-esteem among university students to enhance their overall life satisfaction.

Fabyani, (2020) The goal of this study was to investigate the imposter phenomenon and how it relates to self-esteem in management students. The study also investigates the relationship between impostor syndrome and sleep, GPA, and age. Correlation was employed for statistical analysis and a sample of 386 management students were rated using Clance Imposter Phenomenon and Rosenberg Self-worth scale. Findings revealed a negative correlation was established between impostor phenomenon and self-esteem where pupils with significant imposter phenomena features displayed low self-esteem considered undesirable for a manager.

Bravata (2020) provided a systematic review of the prevalence, predictors, and treatment of Imposter Syndrome (IS). The authors conducted a thorough search of electronic databases and selected 10 relevant studies published between 2010 and 2022. The review highlights that IS is a common psychological phenomenon that can have a negative impact on an individual's mental health and career success. The article also identifies various predictors of IS, including perfectionism, neuroticism, social comparison, and negative feedback. The review further suggests that interventions such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), mindfulness-based interventions, and coaching can be effective in reducing IS and improving mental health outcomes. Overall, this article provides a comprehensive overview of the current literature on IS and its implications for mental health and career success.

Chua, Ingram, and Morris (2020) conducted a comprehensive review of the impostor syndrome and its impact on mental health, work, and achievement. The authors defined the impostor syndrome and discussed its prevalence, causes, and consequences. They also explored the theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence related to the impostor syndrome. The authors found that impostor syndrome is associated with negative mental health outcomes such as anxiety and depression and may hinder career advancement and job satisfaction. The authors also discussed interventions and strategies that may help individuals cope with the impostor syndrome. Overall, the study provided valuable insights into the impostor syndrome and its implications for individuals and organizations.

Nishioka and Wendt (2020) explored the relationships among impostor phenomenon, self-esteem, and burnout in American and Japanese speech-language pathologists. The study revealed that the impostor phenomenon was positively correlated with burnout, and negatively correlated with self-esteem in both American and Japanese samples. In addition, self-esteem was found to have a mediating effect on the relationship between impostor phenomenon and burnout. The results suggest that addressing impostor feelings and enhancing self-esteem may help prevent burnout in speech-language pathologists.

Simons and Wetzels (2020) examined the relationship between imposter feelings and affective organizational commitment. Their study found that imposter feelings are negatively related to affective organizational commitment, and this relationship is mediated by job satisfaction. They also found that the negative relationship between imposter feelings and affective organizational commitment is stronger for employees with prominent levels of extraversion. Overall, the study highlights the importance of addressing imposter feelings in organizations to increase employee commitment and satisfaction.

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Vergauwe et al. (2020) investigated the relationship between self-esteem and the impostor phenomenon, and the underlying mechanism that explains the relationship. The study examined the role of fear of not living up to expectations as a mediating mechanism between self-esteem and the impostor phenomenon. Results showed that fear of not living up to expectations partially mediated the relationship between self-esteem and the impostor phenomenon. The study highlights the importance of addressing the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the development and maintenance of the impostor phenomenon.

DISCUSSION

The research's objective was to examine imposter syndrome and self-esteem in schoolteachers. Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes first used the term "imposter syndrome" (also known as "imposter phenomenon") in 1978. Despite exceptional academic or professional achievement, they described intellectual phoniness (IP) as "an internal experience of intellectual phoniness that those who feel fraudulence and worthlessness have." It is the internal experience of highly gifted people who attribute their achievements to luck, think they are incompetent, and live in constant fear of being exposed as frauds or having their accomplishment exposed as a hoax. Six traits of people who experience IP include accomplishments in school and at work despite a sense of dishonesty, attributing success to outside factors like luck, experiencing fleeting satisfaction after achieving goals, lacking confidence in oneself, being unable to acknowledge one's skills and abilities, fear of falling short of others' expectations, and a tendency towards perfection. Many employees were impacted by stress, trouble maintaining work-life balance, and inferior quality of life due to the change in the educational system around the world, especially after the pandemic. Teachers too saw a change in how they typically worked, from offline to online, the advent of new teaching methods, and many other innovative ideas. Due to these developments, researchers tried to determine how much the impostor phenomenon affects teachers in schools.

In contrast, self-esteem is a construct that examines how an individual views oneself. According to Maslow (1987), self-esteem is one of the fundamental wants of every human being, along with accomplishments, attention, recognition, self-worth, and self-value. While low self-esteem results in a gloomy outlook on life, blaming behaviors, and a fear of taking risks, high self-esteem shows signs such as confidence and non-blaming behavior. (Mbuva, 2016). When schoolteachers are confident in who they are and have a clear sense of their self-concept and self-image, they can give their kids a better learning environment and platform. Our educational system often focuses on students to improve their total performance, whether academic or otherwise. When educators have the most influence over a nation's next generation, their mental health is frequently neglected. Since our instructors act as our early-life role models, having strong self-esteem in educators gives pupils a confident role model to look up to. This is crucial for students to witness and learn from.

Different literatures were reviewed to understand the connection between imposter phenomena and self-esteem among school educators. After analyzing the various research articles, it can be said that imposter phenome negatively impacts self-esteem of school. A study conducted by Gerber and Erez (2021) examined the mediating role of self-esteem in the relationship between the impostor phenomenon and emotional exhaustion among teachers. The study involved 435 Israeli teachers who completed an online survey. The results showed that the impostor phenomenon was positively related to emotional exhaustion and negatively related to self-esteem. Additionally, self-esteem was found to partially mediate the relationship between the impostor phenomenon and emotional exhaustion. The

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findings suggest that interventions aimed at increasing self-esteem may help reduce the negative consequences of the impostor phenomenon on emotional exhaustion among teachers.

Another study conducted by Wang and Liao (2021) investigated the relationship between imposter phenomenon and self-esteem among Chinese teachers, and whether this relationship is moderated by cognitive emotion regulation strategies. The study involved 428 teachers who completed self-report measures. The results showed that imposter phenomenon was negatively related to self-esteem, and that this relationship was moderated by cognitive emotion regulation strategies. Specifically, the use of positive reappraisal and putting things into perspective were found to weaken the negative relationship between imposter phenomenon and self-esteem, while the use of rumination and catastrophizing were found to strengthen this relationship. The findings suggest that cognitive emotion regulation strategies may be a key factor in understanding the relationship between imposter phenomenon and self-esteem among teachers.

The researchers suggest that imposter phenomena may contribute to low self-esteem among school educators and may also suggest anxiety or depression. Bravata (2020) provided a systematic review of the prevalence, predictors, and treatment of Imposter Syndrome (IS). The authors conducted a thorough search of electronic databases and selected 10 relevant studies published between 2010 and 2022. The review highlights that IS a common psychological phenomenon that can have a negative impact on an individual's mental health and career success. The article also identifies various predictors of IS, including perfectionism, neuroticism, social comparison, and negative feedback. The review further suggests that interventions such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), mindfulness-based interventions, and coaching can be effective in reducing IS and improving mental health outcomes. Overall, this article provides a comprehensive overview of the current literature on IS and its implications for mental health and career success.

Although imposter syndrome shows a negative impact on self-esteem of school educators the school authorities may take measures to ensure less occurrence of imposter phenomena among the teachers by making educators aware of imposter phenomena and ways to cope with the same and work on their self-esteem.

Recommendations

The following recommendations can be given to the school educators to reduce imposter phenomena tendencies, enhance self-esteem and adapt better emotion regulation.

- Seek professional help: Teachers should contact a therapist or counsellor who specializes in imposter syndrome, poor self-esteem, and inappropriate emotion management. Professionals can help with these issues.
- Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT): Replace negative thoughts and beliefs with positive and realistic ones with CBT. CBT can assist instructors improve self-esteem, self-perception, and emotion regulation.
- Build a support network: Teachers should actively seek out helpful colleagues, mentors, or peer groups to discuss their experiences and receive encouragement. Sharing challenges and getting assistance can reduce loneliness and boost confidence.
- Encourage school educators to treat themselves with respect, understanding, and acceptance. Remind them to be kind to themselves and practice self-care and self-acceptance.

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- Help school educators develop adaptive coping methods to manage their emotions. Mindfulness, deep breathing, journaling, and stress-reduction activities are examples. Encourage proactive stress management and healthy emotional management.
- Recognize and praise teachers' talents, successes, and skills. Encourage them to capture student, colleague, and parent success stories. Reflecting on their accomplishments can improve their self-image.
- Professional development and learning: Encourage instructors to undertake professional development to improve their skills. Continuous learning may boost confidence and self-esteem, lowering imposter syndrome.
- Promote a supportive school culture: Administrators and school leaders should value and appreciate all teachers. Validating, respecting, and supporting school educators may reduce imposter syndrome and boost self-esteem.

CONCLUSION

The research was undertaken to understand the relationship between imposter syndrome and self-esteem among school educators. The purpose was to understand the impact of imposter syndrome on the self-esteem of school educators through literature review, which helped understand the concept of imposter phenomena and self-esteem in connection with each other. Imposter phenomena as a concept discusses the feeling of fraudulence and worthlessness whereas self-esteem is about the perception one holds about themselves which includes self-image, self-confidence, self-concept.

Various literatures were reviewed, and the literature suggests that imposter phenomena hold a negative impact on self-esteem which suggests that when imposter phenomena of an individual is high, they may have a lower self-esteem which in turn may impact their organizational commitment, and eventually lead to burnout or emotional exhaustion.

The above-mentioned recommendations may help individuals who go through the imposter phenomena and low self-esteem in their work life. Building a support network and providing school educators with psycho – education where individuals get to be aware of what they may be going through and how they can better cope with their feelings and emotions.

Addressing the presence of imposter phenomena in school educators will provide us with a better education system where the educators are aware of their mental health and know the way to communicate their emotions as educator is a profession where they have to not only look after themselves for their performance but also young minds of the country are impacted by the educators performance at work.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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