

Research Paper

Psychological Well-being and Cultural Identity Among Students with Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

This topic is of significance in understanding how the psychological health of students with disabilities affects academic success, social engagement, self-esteem and life satisfaction. Cultural identity is also important as it affects many aspects of an individual's sense of self, relationship to other cultural groups, and feeling of belonging to their community. "In this regard, psychological wellbeing and cultural identity are especially important for students with disabilities because they typically experience a cross-over between cultural identity and disability, as well as disability and inclusion, and disability and societal attitudes. In this study, the relationship between psychological well-being and cultural identity among students with disabilities is explored, focusing on how cultural values, traditions, language, family support and community belonging can impact their emotional and psychological growth. This paper reviews aspects of psychological health such as self-acceptance, autonomy, positive relationships, personal growth, environmental mastery and purpose in life, and the mechanisms by which culture is developed and sustained. It points to the potential of a positive and strong cultural identity as a protective factor to improve mental and social resiliency, self-confidence and social connectedness. On the other hand, discrimination, exclusion, stigma and cultural marginalization can have a negative impact on psychological health and identity formation. The study aims to comprehensively understand the barriers and enablers of lived experience of students with disabilities in varying cultural contexts through an analysis of literature and theory. The paper builds on the expanding literature about inclusive education by highlighting the role of culturally responsive support systems and policies in acknowledging the intersection of disability and cultural identity. Overall, the study highlights the importance of creating school, family and community environments that support students with disabilities in a way that promotes their psychological wellbeing and cultural affirmation, which facilitates their holistic learning and engagement in society in a meaningful way.

Keywords: *Psychological Well-being, Cultural Identity, Students with Disabilities, Inclusive Education, Social Identity Theory, Disability Studies*

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Two key pillars of human development, the psychological health and cultural identity can have a profound impact on one's overall quality of life, sense of self and capacity to contribute to society. In a modern educational context, more focus has been placed on the experiences of students with disabilities, which includes mental health, social adjustment and identity development. Students with disabilities face a variety of challenges beyond those related to physical, sensory, intellectual or learning disabilities, such as social stigma, discrimination, exclusion, access to services and support, and participation in school and community. This experience may impact on their psychological health that is positive mental functioning, emotional stability, self-acceptance, personal growth, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and the ability to have meaningful relationships. Being psychologically healthy is a critical part of healthy development as it helps people meet challenges, stay resilient, accomplish their personal goals, and enjoy an active life in the community. In a school setting, students with disabilities face an even greater challenge to achieve and sustain positive psychological well-being in addition to managing the demands of the school curriculum, and attitudinal and accessibility obstacles that can impede their full participation and development in society. Cultural identity is also a crucial factor in the development of understanding of self and in the world, in addition to psychological health. Cultural identity is the values, beliefs, traditions, customs, language, ethnicity, religion, and social practices of an individual that link him or her to specific cultural groups and communities. It offers a sense of belonging, continuity and meaning, which helps to build self-esteem, confidence and social connectedness. The formation of cultural identity starts early in life and is shaped in the context of the family, peers, schools, communities and society more generally. For students with disabilities, cultural identity can be formed by the cultural context as well as the experiences of disability and inclusion, and social recognition. In many of these students, they have to negotiate multiple identities at the same time as players of both culture and disability. This process can be enriching and challenging depending on the support, acceptance and inclusion they have within their families, schools and communities.

Because research has indicated that a strong, positive cultural identity may be a protective factor that fosters resilience, emotional stability and positive self-concept, there has been a growing interest in the relationship between psychological well-being and cultural identity. Pupils who feel good about their own culture and who feel valued in their community are typically more resilient to adversity, have a healthy self-esteem and are more likely to have good mental health. On the other hand, episodes of cultural marginalization, discrimination, social isolation and exclusion can have a negative impact on one's psychological well-being, self-esteem and identity development. The difficulties that people with disabilities encounter could be exacerbated by negative social attitudes and discrimination against people with disabilities and institutional barriers to participation and expression. Schools can make a significant contribution to these issues by creating an inclusive climate that embraces diversity, celebrates cultural differences, and promotes the health of all students. In addition to the physical and academic barriers being removed, inclusive education also stresses socially and culturally responsive learning environments that make the pupil with a disability feel respected and valued, and empowered. It is therefore critical for educators, policy makers, researchers and practitioners working with students with disabilities to understand the relationship between psychological wellbeing and cultural identity if they want to support the development of students with disabilities and equal opportunities. There is a need for more attention to how cultural identity can affect the mental health of students with disabilities in various cultural and social contexts in the educational setting, despite the growing awareness of the importance of mental health and identity in educational settings.

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Previous studies tend to examine disability or cultural identity individually; fewer research studies explore the intersection and combined effects of disability and cultural identity on well-being. This relationship can be explored to gain insights to the strengths, challenges and supports of students with disabilities in their lives. This information can help create better educational strategies, counselling services, community initiatives and policies that will address the multiple identities and lived experiences of these students. In addition, the study of psychological wellbeing and cultural identity brings into focus the need to take a holistic approach that recognises students with disabilities not only as disabled people, but students who have complex socio-cultural, emotional and personal identities. This is in line with the modern concept of disability which promotes inclusion, empowerment, human rights and respect for diversity. Hence, the present study aims to investigate the correlation between psychological well-being and cultural identity in students with disabilities, focusing on the factors of cultural belonging, social support, self-perception, and inclusive experiences in their psychological growth and well-being. The study will explore these interwoven aspects to foster a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to positive outcomes for students with disabilities and to emphasize the need to provide educational and social spaces that nurture students' psychological health and cultural affirmation, all while fostering successful integration, personal growth and full participation for students with disabilities.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Psychological Well-being

Psychological wellness is a complex issue and it is a person's general level of positive psychological function, emotional wellness, and life satisfaction. While mental disorder lacks a positive emphasis, psychological wellbeing focuses on the 'good' elements of human experiences such as happiness, self-realisation, resilience, personal fulfillment and functioning in the world. It is a reflection of how people see themselves, how they deal with challenges, how they interact, how they connect to others, how they live their lives, and how they find meaning in their lives. Psychological wellness is recognized as an essential aspect of general health that affects emotional stability, social adjustment, academic outcomes and quality of life. Psychological well-being is especially important for students with disabilities, since it can impact their ability to manage their education, to conquer social obstacles, to build confidence, and to be active members of the school and community.

Psychological well-being is a multi-faceted construct that integrates various interrelated areas that are essential for a positive development and life satisfaction of a person. A key dimension is "self-acceptance"—the feeling of being good, positive, and appreciative of both strengths and weaknesses, but not overly critical. Self-acceptance is a mental acceptance of past experiences, identity, and a feeling of self-worth even though they are not perfect or without problems. Self-acceptance is an important factor in building confidence and resilience in students with disabilities and helps them to see their disability as part of their identity, and not a limiting factor. People with a high level of self-acceptance tend to be better at dealing with challenges, emotional regulation, and gaining a positive sense of self. Personal growth is another dimension of psychological health, in which people strive to develop their abilities, knowledge, skills, and potential throughout the lifespan. Personal growth is an individual's readiness to take in new experiences, willingness to learn and a desire to improve oneself. It is identifying opportunities for growth, and making an effort to reach personal objectives and dreams. Many students with disabilities thrive and make significant personal progress when managing obstacles to success, learning new skills, and

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meeting challenges. Often, the enhancement of this dimension of well-being takes place in educational contexts that promote learning, creativity and self-development.

People who grow feel more capable, empowered and confident about their future. Another aspect of psychological well-being is being able to form and sustain positive interpersonal relationships. Human beings are social creatures and supportive relationships are important to emotional well-being, happiness and feeling a sense of belonging. Positive relationships are based on trust, empathetic, respectful and good communication and emotional support. Students with disabilities should have healthy relationships with family members, peers, teachers and community members, as these relationships offer them encouragement, acceptance and opportunities for social participation. Positive social connections decrease the sense of loneliness, isolation, and discrimination, increase self-esteem and emotional security. People who have meaningful relationships are more likely to have a sense of satisfaction, resilience and belonging to their community. Autonomy is another part of psychological health, defined as the capacity to think independently, make decisions and control behavior based on personal values and beliefs. Independent people have the ability to voice their own views, make decisions and act independently of excessive social influences. Students with disabilities will be particularly aware of the need for autonomy, as they can sometimes find themselves in a scenario where decisions are made for them. Promoting independence and self-determination allows these students to build confidence, responsibility and control over their lives. Supports for choice-making and self-advocacy within educational and social settings are important factors in developing autonomy.

People with a strong sense of autonomy tend to be more self-reliant, confident and able to achieve their own objectives. Environmental mastery, or the ability to control one's environment, use resources, and adjust to change are also important factors of psychological well-being. Environmental mastery is feeling competent at taking care of oneself and one's surroundings, solving problems, and establishing conditions that enable personal needs and aspirations. Environmental mastery can mean making it through educational environments, receiving assistance, using assistive technology, and overcoming physical and social obstacles for students with disabilities. Mastery of the environment fosters self-confidence, self-sufficiency and a feeling of competence. People who score high on environmental mastery are more likely to adjust to difficulties, act successfully to achieve objectives, and stay psychologically well in stressful situations. Purpose in life is the last dimension of psychological well-being; it is having meaningful goals, direction and thinking that one's life has value and meaning.

With purpose in life comes motivation, hope and a sense of direction as to one's life experiences and future plans. People who have a purpose in life are more likely to participate in constructive activities, push through difficult times, and have a positive attitude. A sense of purpose can be especially empowering for students with disabilities, as it helps them to focus on their strengths, goals, and contributions in place of their disabilities. An individual's sense of purpose is influenced by educational experiences, family support, cultural values and personal achievements. Students will be more motivated, resilient, and healthy if they feel they have purpose in their lives and feel they can attain their goals. Self-acceptance, personal growth, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery and purpose in life are all components of psychological well-being and can be understood together in this broader framework. They are interrelated and reinforcing, and play a role in the person's ability to live a full, productive, and meaningful life. For students with disabilities, it is crucial that these dimensions are promoted to empower student inclusion,

student self-confidence, emotional health, and successful engagement in educational and social contexts. Thus, psychological health cannot simply be defined as the absence of distress, but as a process of positive functioning that helps individuals to achieve their potential, keep healthy relationships, cope and act towards life-long, purposeful activities.

Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is a feeling of belonging to a specific cultural group, and awareness of common values, beliefs, traditions, customs, language, heritage and social practices that define the individual and collective experiences of people. It is a key part of a person's identity which shapes their self-view, relationships with others and sense of belonging to society. Cultural identity helps people to feel a sense of continuity, sense of connection and sense of meaning as it connects them to a wider community and cultural heritage. It is not a static or concrete trait, but a dynamic process which takes place as a result of social interaction, life experiences and exposure to varying cultural influences. The components of cultural identity include various elements such as ethnicity, nationality, religion, language, customs, traditions, values, beliefs, social norms, and shared historical experiences. Together, these elements help develop an individual's sense of self and sense of place. Cultural identity can provide a sense of pride, self-esteem and emotional security, assist in the construction of a positive self-concept and a feeling of belonging. The development of cultural identity starts early in life and extends to the whole lifespan and can occur through interactions with family, peers, school and society. Childhood experiences of observation, participation, and socialization within the family and community shape children's cultural values, beliefs, and behaviours.

Later experiences in school, social groups, and in wider culture continue to influence their sense of cultural membership and identity as they get older. Building cultural identity includes engaging with cultural practices, assimilating social norms, and incorporating multiple elements of culture into self-image. Migration, globalisation, cross-cultural experiences, social acceptance and experiences of inclusion/exclusion may all be important factors in this development. A sense of being respected and valued in one's cultural groups can reinforce cultural identity, whereas experiences of discrimination and marginalisation can pose difficulties in identity development. Family is one of the many factors that shape the identity of the individual, it is important in passing cultural knowledge, values and traditions to the next generation. Children learn about cultural traditions, religious beliefs, social norms and moral values from their families which influences their worldview and sense of belonging. Family members are able to give children opportunities to learn about their culture and heritage in many ways, including daily interactions, storytelling, celebrations and involvement in culture events. Parents/caregivers are usually the leading role models who inculcate cultural values and create a positive attitude in children towards their culture. Beyond the family, cultural identity is important to the community and to the development of the community. Social networks, cultural institutions, and shared experiences create a sense of community, which enhances one's sense of connection to cultural groups. Being involved in community events, festivals, religious services, and cultural groups helps people connect with other people who have similar traditions and values, which helps them feel connected and belong to a group. Community support can also give emotional security and social acceptance which is important for healthy identity development. Language is also critical aspect of one's culture since it is a vehicle used to transmit culture or cultural knowledge, beliefs, traditions and values. Language allows people to describe their feelings, ideas, and cultural experiences and connect with others in their family and culture. Using a native or heritage language can contribute to an individual's

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sense of belonging to a specific group or culture and to cultural pride. On the other hand, when language is lost, cultural ties are lowered and problems arise in preserving cultural identity. Traditions and customs also play a major role in cultural identity because of the ongoing continuation of their culture and the transmission of cultural heritage from one generation to the next. Traditional practices, ceremonies, festivals, and rituals, music, food, clothing, and religious observances afford individuals the opportunity to celebrate and affirm their cultural heritage and connection to their communities. These cultural practices provide an insight into the social history, values and shared life of the individual and builds a sense of pride and belonging. A key area of focus is cultural identity within the context of students with disabilities, as these students may be living with multiple identities, such as being a student with a disability as well as a student of another culture. Their experiences are influenced by cultural values and norms and also by the attitudes in the society towards persons with disability, accessibility, inclusion and participation. Disability can have various cultural, religious or traditional interpretations in different cultural settings and that may affect the way students think about themselves and how they are treated. There is a possibility that some students with disabilities may be well supported and accepted within their families and communities, and build a positive cultural identity and healthy self-esteem. Some people might experience stigma, discrimination or exclusion, which can have a negative impact on their psychological health and cultural identity. Educational institutions are important in supporting cultural identity among students with disabilities in a variety of ways, such as advocating for inclusive practices for students with disabilities, respecting cultural diversity and promoting environments that feel valued and represented to all students. If students with disabilities are encouraged to share their culture, express their culture and participate in cultural events, they have a good sense of belonging and a positive sense of self. A positive cultural identity can provide a protective factor to strengthen resilience, confidence, social connectedness, and overall wellbeing. Consequently, the study of cultural identity among students with disabilities is critical to the encouragement of inclusion, equality and holistic development, because it highlights the need for students to experience a sense of belonging as well as a sense of self-worth which are influential in achieving positive educational and life outcomes.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities are a heterogeneous population of students who have a physical, sensory, intellectual, developmental, emotional, behavioural, or learning disability that can impact their ability to engage in educational and social activities. Disability is seen as a limitation that occurs when a person's impairment interacts with environmental barriers that make it difficult to do a particular task or participate fully in everyday activities. The modern view of disability focuses not just on the disability, but also on the attitudes of society, the physical surroundings and the lack of assistance. Students who have disability are entitled to the same rights, aspirations and potential as other students and should be given equal opportunities to learn, grow and enjoy all the benefits of school and community life. There are many different kinds of disability, categorized by the type and severity of the disability. Physical disabilities encompass physical impairments or disabilities that impact the mobility, coordination or physical functioning of an individual, including cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, spinal cord injuries, and orthopaedic impairments.

Sensory disabilities are impairments of vision or hearing such as blindness, low vision, deafness or hearing loss. People with intellectual disabilities have severe restrictions in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior that interfere with learning, communication and daily living skills. Developmental disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder,

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impact social interaction, communication and behavior. Learning disabilities encompass a range of specific learning disabilities including dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia, where an individual's average or above-average intelligence is shown in weak academic performance. Emotional and behavioural disabilities are characterized by problems with emotional regulation, social behaviour and mental health which may affect educational performance and interpersonal relationships. While these classifications contribute to a general understanding of the needs and support required for individual students, it is important to acknowledge that each student will be different and may experience disability in different ways and to different extents based on personal, social and environmental factors. Students with disabilities may have many educational barriers that can impact their academic performance, academic processes, and learning environment. The restricted access to suitable education resources, specialized instruction, assistive technologies and support services is one of the most common challenges. In certain school contexts, classrooms might not be sufficiently equipped to serve the needs of a variety of learners, thereby creating barriers to participation and achievement. Students with disabilities may also experience problems with inaccessible teaching methods, inflexible curricula, an inadequate amount of individualized support, and the teacher's lack of knowledge or training in inclusive practices. Students with hearing, speech or developmental disabilities may also experience other communication barriers that make it more challenging for them to participate fully in classroom activities. Furthermore, some students might need accommodations to make it possible to participate in the learning process, either due to modified learning materials, extended examination time, alternative methods of evaluating performance, or special equipment. If these supports are not provided or are insufficient, students can become frustrated, suffer from poor academic achievement, have a lack of motivation, and lack self-confidence. In addition to the educational difficulties, students with disabilities are often faced with social problems that impact their emotional status, self-esteem, and feelings of belonging. Negative attitudes and stereotypes from society, prejudice and discrimination may lead to a sense of feeling excluded and isolated. There is a risk of some students being bullied, rejected socially or misunderstood by other students who are unaware of disability and inclusion. These experiences can contribute to loneliness, anxiety, stress and problems with positive social relationships.

Physical barriers, communication problems or lack of opportunities to participate in out-of-school or community life can also limit social participation. Moreover, a student with a disability may have difficulty in forming a positive self-image when society's emphasis is more on what he or she cannot do than on the things he or she can do. These educational and social hurdles can negatively affect a child's academic achievement, mental health and quality of life. Thus, overcoming these barriers is crucial to equal opportunities and all-around development. To address those challenges, the concepts of inclusion and accessibility have grown to be significant in current educational policies and practices. Inclusion is about the process whereby every child with or without disabilities is taught in a supportive and equitable learning environment. Inclusive education was founded on the principle that diversity can be a strength, and that all students deserve a full educational experience. Inclusive education aims to eliminate barriers and provide necessary support to achieve meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream schools. Accessibility is an important aspect of inclusion and is the creation of environments, resources and services that are usable by all students. Accessibility in educational institutions can be physical (e.g., ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, barrier-free infrastructure, etc.) or academic (e.g., assistive technology, accessible learning materials, alternative communication, etc.). Attitudes to diversity are also fostered in inclusive and

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accessible education institutions, peer support is encouraged and professional development of educators for the purpose of improving their capacity to address diversity in learning is fostered. Achieving inclusion is a collaborative effort between teachers, families, administrators, support personnel and the broader community to provide the necessary support so that all students with disabilities have the opportunity to participate and to be independent. Inclusion and accessibility in education can help children with disabilities achieve success in school, feel accepted in society, build their confidence and achieve better mental health. They have opportunities to practice and grow their skills, make meaningful connections and be involved in school life with other students. Identifying the needs, strengths and rights of students with disabilities is thus an important first step toward achieving educational equity, social justice and realization of human potential for all students.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Psychological Well-being Theory

Carol Ryff's Psychological Well-being Theory is one of the more influential theories that focuses on positive mental health and human flourishing. Ryff's theory is different from other theories of well-being, which have focused on the lack of psychological distress or mental illness. As per this theory, psychological health can be considered as the ability to become what one is capable of, and to be able to form meaningful relationships and have fulfilling lives. Ryff proposed six dimensions of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, personal growth, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery and purpose in life. Self-acceptance is a positive attitude towards oneself and seeing both strengths and weaknesses. Personal growth is an ongoing process of developing and being open to new experiences. Positive relationships with others focus on supportive and trusting relationships with others. Autonomy is defined as independence and self-determination in decisions.

Environmental mastery is the ability to effectively deal with life situations and adjust to changing situations. Purpose in life is the sense of having goals in life and direction. This theory can be useful in understanding the impact of educational experiences, social interactions and supportive environments on the psychological well-being of students with disabilities. Students who feel "accepted", "included" and have opportunities for personal growth are more likely to be psychologically healthy. On the other hand, these dimensions can be negatively impacted by barriers like discrimination, exclusion and lack of support. Ryff's theory emphasizes the need to prioritize positive mental health and not just worry about problems and deficits. In education, it promotes programmatic and intervention design that promotes self-confidence, resilience, social connectedness, and personal growth of students with disabilities. Accordingly, Psychological Well-being Theory provides a broad-based context in which to explore how students with disabilities can experience positive psychological functioning and live a meaningful and fulfilling life while facing challenges.

Social Identity Theory

Henri Tajfel and John Turner created the Social Identity Theory to explain how people develop a sense of identity from belonging to social groups. The theory states that individuals not only construct their identity based on their own attributes, but also on the basis of their membership to different social groups like ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, disability status, and so on. The theory suggests that social identity is the aspect of a person's self-concept which comes from his or her membership in a specific group and emotional investment in that group. The processes that underlie Social Identity Theory are

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social categorization, social identification and social comparison. Social categorization is a process of social understanding which consists of grouping people. Social identification is a process whereby people come to behave, think, and feel like their group. Social comparison is the comparison of one's group with other groups and can impact on self-esteem and group pride. A theory of self-worth and psychological well-being has been put forward that people try to maintain a positive social identity. Social Identity Theory can be used to better understand the ways in which a disability and cultural group memberships impact self-perception and social experiences for students with disabilities. Students can have strong feelings of belonging to their cultural and/or disability communities, which influences their self-perceptions and relationships with others. Acceptance and positive recognition of these identities can promote self-esteem, sense of belonging and psychological wellness. But when people have experiences of stigma and discrimination or negative stereotypes, it can cause an identity conflict and a decrease in their self-confidence. Schools are a significant arena for reinforcing positive social identities through inclusion and the acceptance of diversity and equal opportunity. Positive self-concept and psychological adjustment are more likely when a student with a disability is accepted and valued within his/her social and cultural environment. Therefore, Social Identity Theory offers helpful explanations for how group membership, cultural identity, and psychological well-being are related to students with disabilities.

Disability Studies Perspective

The Disability Studies Perspective is a theoretical approach which is interdisciplinary in nature, which looks at disability not as a purely medical issue, but as a social, cultural and political phenomenon. A traditional medical approach to disability emphasizes impairment and personal limitations and sees disability as a problem that requires treatment and/or correction. The Disability Studies Perspective, on the other hand, states that many of the difficulties faced by people with disabilities are the product of social barriers, inaccessible environments, discriminatory attitudes, and exclusionary practices. The social model of disability which differentiates between impairment and disability has a significant impact on this perspective. Impairment is a physical, sensory, intellectual or psychological condition and disability is caused by society's barriers that prevent participation and opportunities. From this point of view, disability is not an individual problem, but also a social justice problem of human rights and equality. The Disability Studies Perspective focuses on inclusion, empowerment, self-determination and diversity. It promotes the elimination of barriers of any kind, be they physical, social or institutional, and the full inclusion of people with disabilities in society. This attitude fosters an educational environment that demands the design of an accessible and inclusive school and/or university to serve various learning needs. The Disability Studies Perspective is a way to understand how societal attitudes and structures affect the educational experiences, the identity development and the psychological well being of students with disabilities. It emphasises the need to view the student as an individual with strengths and talents and rights, not just as an impairment. This attitude helps dispel stereotypes and encourages equal involvement, which fosters positive self-esteem, independence, and social integration. In addition, it gets the policy makers, educators and communities to think inclusive ideas that value diversity and equal opportunities. The Disability Studies Perspective thus has great relevance to understanding the experiences of students with disabilities and to intervening in the barriers that impact on their well-being and cultural identity.

The models of cultural identity development

Cultural Identity Development Models are theories which describe the process of over time becoming aware of, understanding, and accepting one's cultural backgrounds and group memberships. These models can help us understand that cultural identity is not static, but instead is a product of a series of experiences, social interactions and reflections. While there have been a number of models of cultural identity development proposed by various scholars, the general theme of the process is one of cultural awareness, exploration, commitment and integration. The process of cultural identity development starts in childhood, as they are exposed to family members, community traditions, language, religious practices and cultural values. As people develop and experience different social settings, they get more conscious of similarities and differences among different cultures and develop greater awareness of their own cultural roots. Identity development may be an exploration of cultural beliefs, traditions and experiences, and may involve negotiating relationships with other cultural groups.

When one develops a healthy cultural identity, the person feels a sense of belonging, self-esteem and pride in one's cultural background. Cultural identity development can be more complicated when a student has a disability as they may be trying to negotiate their multiple identities at the same time. They may belong to their cultural, ethnic, linguistic and/or religious communities and may form an identity around disability. These identities may interact and impact an individual's sense of self, interpersonal connections, and mental health. Positive cultural identity development can act as a protective factor which leads to resilience, confidence and belonging. Healthy identity development is addressed through family support, community acceptance, inclusive practices in education and opportunities to engage in cultural activity. However, negative experiences of discrimination, exclusion or cultural marginalisation can trigger struggles to develop a positive identity. Cultural Identity Development Models are significant for understanding how students with disabilities make meaning of their cultural experiences and how belonging to a culture is a key aspect of psychological well-being. These models draw attention to the importance of culturally responsive and inclusive spaces which focus on identity development and personal growth.

Scope and Delimitations

The focus of the current study is on looking at the link between psychological well-being and cultural identity amongst students with disability, with specific interest in the impact of cultural experiences, social environments, and personal perceptions on their overall well-being and identity development. The study is specifically targeting a population of students with disabilities for the following reasons: Students with disabilities are a group that may face unique educational, social, emotional and cultural challenges that can have a significant impact on their psychological adjustment and sense of belonging. Students with disabilities can include those with physical, sensory, intellectual, developmental, learning and other known disabilities who are attending educational institutions. The focus on this group aims to extend our knowledge and understanding of the factors which support positive psychological functioning and the development of cultural identity in learners with a range of disabilities. The study acknowledges that disability is not a singular phenomenon, and that pupils can have varying types and levels of disability, as well as varying cultural, socioeconomic, educational and social support backgrounds. However, the emphasis is on gaining insight into the general relationship between psychological and cultural identity and not on the experiences of a particular disability group. In terms of context, the study is set in educational contexts where students with disabilities are involved in academic, social, and cultural experiences that impact on their personal development. Educational institutions are

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key settings for identity development, social engagement, psychological development and learning opportunities due to their opportunities for social interaction, cultural participation, peer learning and self-expression.

The study thus takes into account the importance of school, college, university, family and community in the experiences of children with disabilities. It explores the role of culture, values, family support, community engagement, language, traditions, inclusion and social acceptance in psychological wellness and cultural identity. Meanwhile, the study recognizes that students with disability exist in social and cultural contexts that can shape their experiences both by societal attitudes, policies, and through access to resources. While these are all acknowledged as being part of the broader picture, the investigation does not seek to cover all disability, mental health and cultural research and is limited to the interplay between psychological well-being and cultural identity. Study area is well defined to help cover a topic in a specific and manageable way. The study focuses on psychological well-being as assessed by a few dimensions including self-acceptance, personal growth, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery and purpose in life and cultural identity involving values, beliefs, traditions, language, cultural belonging and community participation. Beyond the scope of the research, it does not try to delve into the clinical mental health disorders, psychiatric diagnosis, or therapeutic interventions. Likewise, it will not be a particular emphasis of the study to deal with legal aspects, disability law, the medical dimension of disability or institutional policy analysis, although those aspects may be referenced where appropriate to the study. The focus of concern is to understand the interplay between psychological well-being and cultural identity in the lived experiences of students with disabilities. The delimitations of the study also help to clarify the coverage of the study by intentionally limiting the scope of the study in some areas that would otherwise expand the study beyond a reasonable extent. No comparisons are made between students with disabilities and students without disabilities, nor is a detailed comparison made among categories of disabilities. It also is not specifically directed towards a one ethnic, cultural, linguistic, or religious group but takes a general approach to cultural identity which may differ between groups. Additionally, the research is mostly based on theoretical frameworks and literature review on the subject, which may not represent all experiences of individuals or cultural variations. Local social, cultural and institutional contexts shape experiences of disability and identity; therefore, a further limitation is that the findings and discussion may not apply to all educational systems, geographical or cultural contexts. Moreover, the people's identity is complex and the issues about the gender, socioeconomic status, family structure, and personal experiences are not explored in detail in the present study, as they might also influence psychological well-being and cultural identity. Although these limitations cannot be ignored, the study offers insightful information of the connection between the psychological wellbeing and the cultural identity of students with disability and contributes to the understanding of the factors that positively facilitate inclusion, personal growth, self-esteem, cultural belonging and overall development. The study seeks to provide a coherent and meaningful exploration of an important field of educational and psychological research by keeping the boundaries clearly defined and the main concepts in focus.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter offered a detailed and theoretical understanding of psychological well-being and cultural identity among individuals with disabilities in educational settings, emphasizing the importance of integrating both concepts for holistic development and inclusion. The conversation started with the focus on increased need to study the experiences of student

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with disability in educational and social context. Psychological well-being and cultural identity are especially relevant issues for students with disabilities who face unique difficulties with regards to accessibility, social participation, self-perception and acceptance. The chapter defined psychological well-being as more than the absence of mental illness and includes positive functioning, emotional stability, personal growth and life satisfaction. It was described as a multi-dimensional construct, which allows people to function and handle challenges successfully, develop meaningful relationships, work towards goals, and sustain a positive self. Special focus was placed on the six areas of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, personal growth, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, and purpose in life. These dimensions together make up a person's capacity to live a meaningful and fulfilled life.

The importance of these elements was emphasized, particularly for students with disabilities, where psychological well-being fosters resilience, confidence, engagement in learning, and social inclusion. The chapter also investigated the notion of cultural identity, as an individual's sense of belonging to a cultural group that shares a common set of values, beliefs, language, traditions, customs, and historical experiences. Cultural identity has been viewed as a dynamic and evolving process, influenced by family, community, social interactions, and cultural experiences. The importance of family, community, language, and traditions as key factors in the formation and preservation of cultural identity were explored. The importance of cultural identity as a means of giving people a sense of belonging, continuity, pride and self-worth was emphasised. It also was noted that pupils with disabilities face many roles and identities, as they are expected to experience both cultural identity and disability identity. The chapter looked at the idea of having a student with a disability and gave a broad understanding of the different types of disability – physical disability, sensory disability, intellectual disability, developmental disability, learning disability and emotional disability. It shared information on the educational and social problems that these learners generally experience, including the challenges of learning, limited access to education, discrimination, stigma, and social exclusion. The inclusive education and accessibility were highlighted, stressing equal opportunities and participation in education. Inclusive education was said to be a fundamental element in providing a space for the learning, social, and emotional growth of children with disabilities. The chapter not only included conceptual discussion, but also several theoretical perspectives that provide a basis for the understanding of the relationship between psychological well being and cultural identity. Carol Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Theory accounted for the dimensions of positive psychological functioning and how they relate to wellbeing. Social Identity Theory emphasised the importance of group membership and social belonging in effects on one's self-concept and self-esteem. The Disability Studies Perspective focused on social construction of disability and called for inclusion, equality and elimination of barriers in the society. The Cultural Identity Development Models offered a better understanding of how individuals come to know and accept their cultural background and social identities. Together, these theoretical frameworks offered valuable perspectives for understanding the experiences of students with disabilities and the factors that influence their well-being and identity formation. Lastly, the chapter explained the scope and delimitations of the study, specifying the population to be covered and the conceptualizations and limitations in terms of coverage. The chapter therefore provided a solid theoretical and conceptual foundation for the understanding of the linkage of psychological well-being and cultural identity of students with disabilities. The ideas and attitudes in this chapter offer a foundation to continue exploring the role of cultural belonging, inclusion, social support, and personal growth in promoting student well-being with disabilities. The rest of the research paper

draws on this background by reviewing literature, discussing current research, and discussing implications of these ideas for education, policy, and further research.

CONCLUSION

In the current study, psychological well-being and cultural identity are considered important aspects of the lives of students with disabilities. The two are intricately tied and are profound in determining pupils' self-perception, social experiences, emotional wellbeing and development. Psychological well-being helps a student to handle life's demands, be resilient, form good relationships, have a sense of their own personal purpose, while cultural identity helps them feel a sense of belonging, continuity, self-worth, and connection to others. They work together to ensure the overall development and effective inclusion of students with disabilities in the educational and social context. The study shows that learners with disabilities are presented with many challenges in the educational, social and cultural aspects that can impact on their psychological health and identity development. Discrimination, stigma, exclusion, inaccessibility of environment and opportunities for participation can have a negative impact on their confidence, self-esteem and sense of belonging. Supportive families, inclusive educational institutions, positive peer relationships, and robust cultural connections, on the other hand, can act as protective factors to promote well-being and a positive identity formation. There is also stress on the need to consider disability as an experience, rather than just an individual limitation, informed by social attitudes, environmental conditions, and possibilities for inclusion. The findings of the study also support the need to encourage positive mental health, social acceptance and cultural affirmation for students with disabilities from a theoretical perspective. Psychological Well-being Theory emphasizes the importance of self-acceptance, personal growth, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships, and purpose in life, while Social Identity Theory and Cultural Identity Development Models focus on belonging to social and cultural groups and self-esteem and psychological adjustment. The Disability Studies Perspective emphasizes the importance of confronting social obstacles and developing inclusive settings which value diversity and human rights. As a whole, these views offer a holistic context for the rich experiences of pupils with disabilities. Overall, the study finds that the psychological well-being and cultural identity of students with disabilities is fundamental for their overall development and inclusion. The school, home, community and policy context share a responsibility to foster acceptance, accessibility, cultural respect and parity of opportunities. If society identifies, values and understands the strengths, ability and multiple identities of a student with disability, then that can enable their personal development, academic success and social inclusion". In conclusion, psychological well-being and cultural identity are inextricably linked and work together to create a more inclusive, equitable, and compassionate society, where everyone can live up to their full potential and enjoy a meaningful, fulfilling life.

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Conflict of Interest

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