



Exploring the Role of Educational Institutions in Fostering Self-esteem and Motivation among Students through the Lens of Looking-Glass Self Theory

¹Shreya Singh, ²Boby Joseph Thadathil

¹Scholar, Department of Social Work, St. Xavier's College, Loyola Campus, Kathmandu, Nepal

²Educationist, Director, St. Xavier's College, Loyola Campus, Kathmandu, Nepal

Email – ¹thakurisinghshreya@gmail.com, ²director@sxc.edu.np

Abstract: Educational institutions play a crucial role in enhancing a student's self-esteem and motivation. The study was conducted to assess the influence of educators and peer groups on a student's sense of self through the lens of looking-glass self-theory. A mixed method design was applied where 201 respondents and 9 participants partook in the data collection process. The quantitative data was extracted through Google Forms and qualitative data through interviews of the selected participants. Data analysis was done utilizing the chi-square test tool on SPSS to examine the relationship among the variables. The findings suggest that meaningful social relationships and interactions with educators and peer groups during school aid in the formation of a positive sense of self among the students. The study provides significant insights into roles the educational bodies can concentrate on to ensure the holistic development of the students.

Key Words: Self-esteem, Educational Institutions, Students, Self-perception, Motivation.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The progress of a student relies on various aspects including self-esteem, motivation, and interactions which eventually contribute to the academic standing of the student (Acosta-Gonzaga, 2023). The educational institutions play a crucial role in helping the students achieve those qualities. They help construct the individuality of the students which is further developed by the growth of their skills and abilities. The institutions being the best environment for imparting the knowledge of equality, liberty, and kinship must prepare the students for a wider scenario averting biases (Boruah, 2020). For this, educators can create a positive learning environment to support the self-esteem of students which contributes to their academic and social success and positive mental health. Similarly, peer influence in schools can encourage students to practice competence and autonomy which fosters positive values among them in the future (You, 2011). Students' self-perception, academic, and social success depend on the teacher's professional way of guiding, relating, and supporting the students followed by active involvement of the students with a positive social group. However, the majority of educators in Nepal are unaware of motivational strategies to be implemented in the schools (Regmi, 2022). Hence, this study aims to make the readers aware of the significance of educational institutions in a student's life suggesting some key roles they can follow to nurture healthy self-perception and motivation among the students.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

- To study the influence of educators and peer groups in constructing a student's self-perception.
- To understand the role of educators in cultivating a positive self-image and motivation among students.



3. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Self-esteem of students

Self-esteem refers to a deep acceptance of one's true being and faith in one's skills and abilities. It enables us to live in harmony within ourselves and among others encouraging growth (Mecca, Smelser, & Vasconcellos, 1989). It is how we view ourselves and our beliefs regarding our identity. Positive self-esteem is considered a protective factor that enhances well-being and fosters positive social attitudes. It promotes healthy functioning, reflected in aspects of life such as achievement, success, satisfaction, and the ability to withstand diseases such as cancer and heart disease. Conversely, unstable self-image and low self-esteem may contribute to the development of various psychological disorders and social problems such as depression, trauma, anorexia neurosis, anxiety, abuse, conflict, etc.

According to a study conducted by Okafor, Obi, & Oguzie (2018), student's self-esteem is often inter-related with their academic performance. Students tend to feel more worthy and successful when they are academically competent. They are able to cope with academic struggles and strive to perform better. A student with high self-esteem perceives him/herself as able, worthy, and of higher value. This boosts their energy to perform well and work hard for progress in school thus achieving success in the academic field. Thus, academically competent students are believed to have higher self-esteem than other students.

Motivation among students

Motivation is defined as behavior distinguished by will and desire. There are two types of motivation; intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is observed by personal interests, joy, and pleasure whereas extrinsic motivation is driven by external incentives. It involves a combination of interrelated values, perspectives, interests, and performance. Motivation among individuals differs across areas and tends to increase with age. It is believed that children who are motivated are likely to have more motivation throughout their lives. They appear to get into school with superior intrinsic motivation which slowly wanes as they move to higher classes (Lai, 2011).

According to Boström & Bostedt (2020), teachers play a crucial role in a student's academic progress. Students evaluate a teacher's attitude and behavior in the class. They find joyful, fair, and understanding teachers to be very motivating. The students are more willing to learn and interact with the teachers when they find the teachers encouraging. Furthermore, safety and security inside the school premises and peer groups act as a motivational factor for the students. The students involved in the study acknowledged that the outdoor learning environment including premises and seating areas also contributed to their drive to study.

Self-esteem and motivation through looking glass-self theory

Charles Horton Cooley (1902) constructed a theory named "looking glass-self theory" using 'mirror' as a metaphor. According to him, one's 'self' is a social construction built by emitting one's gaze into the mirror created by society to discover the opinions of others toward oneself. Thus, the other individuals are the mirror to whom we look for knowing about ourselves. Cooley asserted that when the people around us have high regard for us we tend to feel the same about ourselves whereas when they don't, it can lead to low self-esteem and feelings of self-doubt. People evaluate their self-worth based on their bond with other individuals and hence unknowingly mirror their beliefs (Harter, 1993).

Emotionally reassuring relationships and interchange with the teachers result in a sense of inclusion and kinship in students that simultaneously contribute to a positive sense of self, taking on socially wise norms and values, and the enhancement of social and academic proficiency (Wentzel, 2009). Therefore, students who have a good relationship with their teachers are more likely to have a positive approach to academics and life. They are self-assured and motivated in their pursuits which enhance their self-worth and competencies in social spheres.

Influence of teachers on students

A bond between the students and teachers is essential for the students to develop trust and faith among the educators. It encourages interpersonal communication which makes the students more willing to share their insights and ask questions in the classroom. The students become inclined to present their concerns often regarded as 'stupid' or 'risky' questions. Teachers realize the importance of making the students engaged in their sessions by creating a safe learning environment hence they can work towards promoting interpersonal relationships with the students which can eventually add to students' ability to read, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the information (Frymier & Houser, 2000).

Furthermore, teachers play an indispensable role in advancing morals, values, attitudes, and a sense of self within the students. They can help the students cope with feelings of self-doubt and low self-esteem by avoiding social comparisons in school. Changing the students' perspectives and judgments regarding their abilities can also aid in



altering their self-perceptions. Encouraging the students to concentrate on their improvement without emphasizing comparisons with their peer groups can contribute to positive self-perception and motivation (Manning, 2007).

Peer influence in school

People find school more joyful, worthwhile, and fun when they are convinced that the others in the setting admire or appreciate them. If the students believe that the other people at school support them, favor them, and care for them, it makes them feel worthy of success in the school realm. Peer relationships can be considered to be the relationships that possess the potential to impart uplifting provisions such as a sense of support, validation, safety, and warmth (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Wentzel & Muenks, 2016).

Students tend to be selective towards whom they associate themselves with. They feel safe to explore their capabilities and express their true selves in front of their group. This in time promotes the student's ability to explore their academic identities as well (Wentzel & Muenks, 2016). The results of a study by Lee & Lee (2023) demonstrate that positive and encouraging peer relationships in the school environment improve children's satisfaction in life. Therefore, the children associate themselves with a circle aligned with their motivational attributes. However, if they don't receive such companionship, they may end up feeling worthless and incompetent.

Self-esteem and motivation among Nepalese students

According to a study report by Paudel, Adhikari, Chalise, and Gautam (2020), one-fourth of the respondents including undergraduate students had low self-esteem which affected their academic competence. Academic performance is believed to have an insignificant influence on students' self-perception and worth. Additionally, students who received support and care from their close ones, associates, family, and groups had greater self-esteem contrary to those who did not. Therefore, family members and peers have a positive impact on the well-being and personality of the students. Their feedback, encouragement, praise, and aid can shape a student's life.

Motivation can be an effective tool for enhancing teaching and learning activities in Nepal. If the classrooms lack resources, the teachers can work on implementing motivational strategies among the students to make the pedagogical environment productive. They can motivate the students to imagine their future selves and strive to achieve their goals. This can foster motivated learning behavior ensuring higher academic and personal success (Laudari, 2014). Hence, educators in Nepal can play an indispensable role in motivating and encouraging students to perform well in their personal as well as professional pursuits.

Role of educational institutions in a student's life

The contemporary shift in priorities in the education system demands alteration in the way students engage and perform in school institutions. To foster motivation and positive character among students of junior school age, educational institutions must prioritize the formation of groups in the classrooms. This can promote socialization skills, personality attributes, and competence in educational activities among the students. There must be a model built specifically for this purpose which shall be systematic, fact-based, practical, reflective, and collective. The effectiveness of the model can be assessed through the evaluation of success and motivation among the students (Aminov & Mirxayitova, 2023).

As per a study conducted by Wong & Chapman (2023), higher education institutions need to realize the pivotal role of informal interactions among the students which is believed to have a significant influence on their satisfaction levels in the institution. They must find ways to construct structures that encourage student-to-student engagement. They also need to emphasize student support initiatives and formal interactions with the school educators. Age and gender were considered factors associated with formal interactions among educators and students. Therefore, the institutions should implement wider practices to ensure every individual gets to enjoy the facilities offered by the administration.

4. METHOD:

The study was conducted in Kathmandu, Nepal specifically targeting students from St. Xavier's College, Kathmandu. This research encompasses both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. A total of 201 students participated in the quantitative research study. The focal point is students aged 15 to 23 attending college. A survey form including 18 structured questions was circulated to collect data among students spanning grades of higher secondary level and Bachelor in different programs. Data compilation was facilitated through a Google form. The qualitative data collection was conducted through face-to-face interviews involving nine students, six female and three male, utilizing a predetermined set of questions. Hence, a total of 210 students participated in the study. To ensure



comprehensive data collection and triangulation, a mixed-method approach was adopted. A pilot study was conducted before the data collection to ensure the credibility and relevancy of the interview questions.

5. RESULTS:

Table 1: Student’s relationship with the teachers

How would you rate your relationship with your teachers during school days?			
		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Good	96	50.0
	Very good	60	31.3
	None	36	18.8
	Total	192	100.0
Missing	System	2	
Total		194	

Table 1 illustrates that 50% of the total respondents rate their relationship with their teachers as a good one, 31.3% say it was very good, and 18.8% believe it was none.

Table 2: Student’s relationship with their peers

How would you rate your relationship with your peers during school days?			
		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Good	97	50.8
	Very good	70	36.6
	Bad	13	6.8
	None	11	5.8
	Total	191	100.0
Missing	System	3	
Total		194	

Table 2 shows that 50.8% of the total respondents think they had a good, 36.6% think they had a very good, and 6.8% think they had a bad relationship with their peers whereas 5.8% think they had none.

Table 3: Student’s self-concept at school

How would you define your school self?			
		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Timid, shy, socially aloof	39	20.3
	Fun, carefree, social butterfly	50	26.0
	Determined, confident, focused	68	35.4
	Stressed, confused, unsure	35	18.2
	Total	192	100.0
Missing	System	2	
Total		194	

Table 3 demonstrates that 20.3% of the total respondents were timid, shy, and socially aloof, 26% were fun, carefree, and social butterfly, 35.4% were determined, confident, and focused, and 18.2% were stressed, confused, and unsure at school.

Table 4: Student’s present self-concept

How would you define your present self?			
		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Timid, shy, socially aloof	18	9.4
	Fun, carefree, social butterfly	39	20.4



	Determined, confident, focused	73	38.2
	Stressed, confused, unsure	61	31.9
	Total	191	100.0
Missing	System	3	
Total		194	

Table 4 illustrates that 9.4% of the total respondents feel timid, shy, and socially aloof, 20.4% are fun, carefree, and social butterfly, 38.2% are determined, confident, and focused, and 31.9% are stressed, confused, and unsure as of now.

Hypotheses

H1: There is an association between the academic performance of students and their relationship with teachers

H2: There is an association between the students' relationship with peers and the peers' perception of them

H3: There is an association between student's self-concept at school and university

Table 5: Chi-square test to test the association between the academic performance of students and their relationship with teachers

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	31.349 ^a	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	32.163	6	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.403	1	.011
N of Valid Cases	200		

a. 3 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .90.

Evidence from the table above demonstrates that there is an association between the academic performance of students and their relationship with teachers ($p < 0.05$). Hence, H1 was supported.

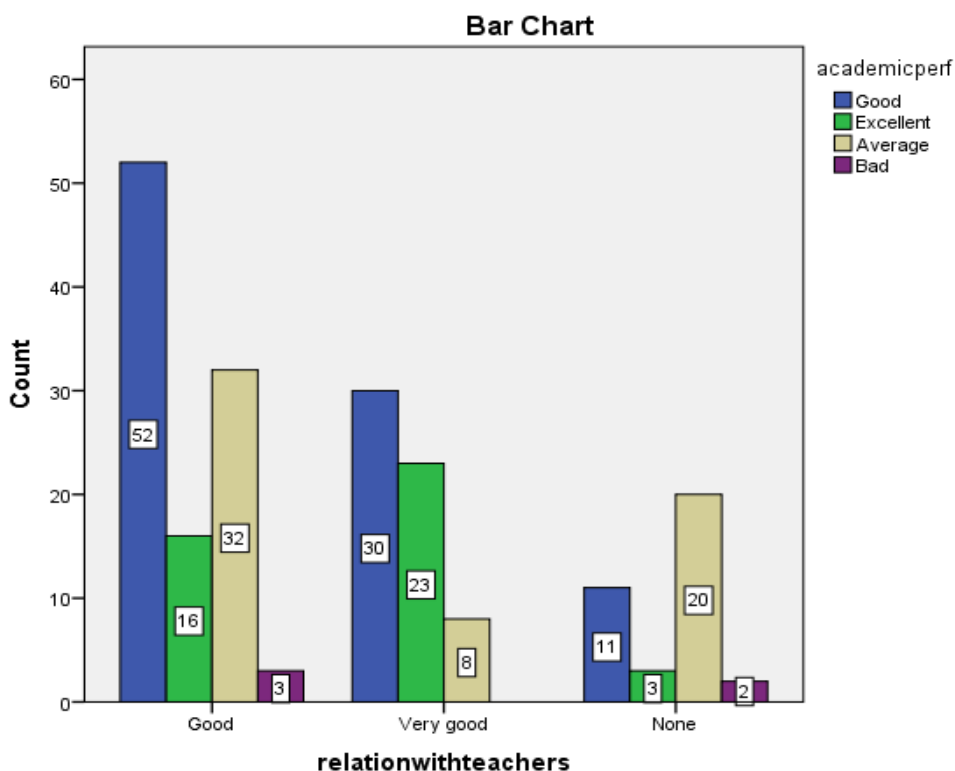


Figure 1: Chi-square test to test the association between the academic performance of students and their relationship with teachers



Table 6: Chi-square test to test the association between the students' relationship with peers and the peers' perception of them

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	55.598 ^a	9	.000
Likelihood Ratio	57.269	9	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.904	1	.005
N of Valid Cases	199		

a. 6 cells (37.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .83.

Evidence from the table above demonstrates that there is an association between the students' relationship with peers and the peers' perception of them ($p < 0.05$). Hence, H2 was supported.

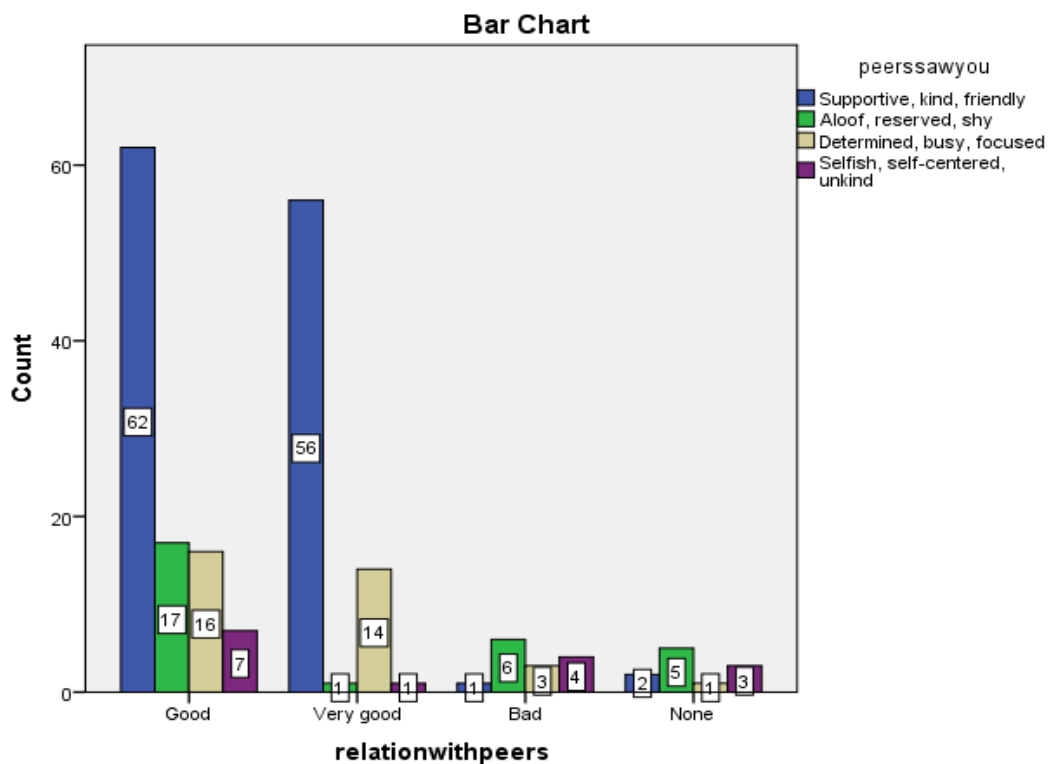


Figure 2: Chi-square test to test the association between the students' relationship with peers and the peers' perception of them

Table 7: Chi-square test to test the association between student's self-concept at school and university

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	58.462 ^a	9	.000
Likelihood Ratio	52.405	9	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	18.232	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	200		

a. 2 cells (12.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.70.

Evidence from the table above demonstrates that there is an association between the student's self-concept at school and university ($p < 0.05$). Hence, H3 was supported.

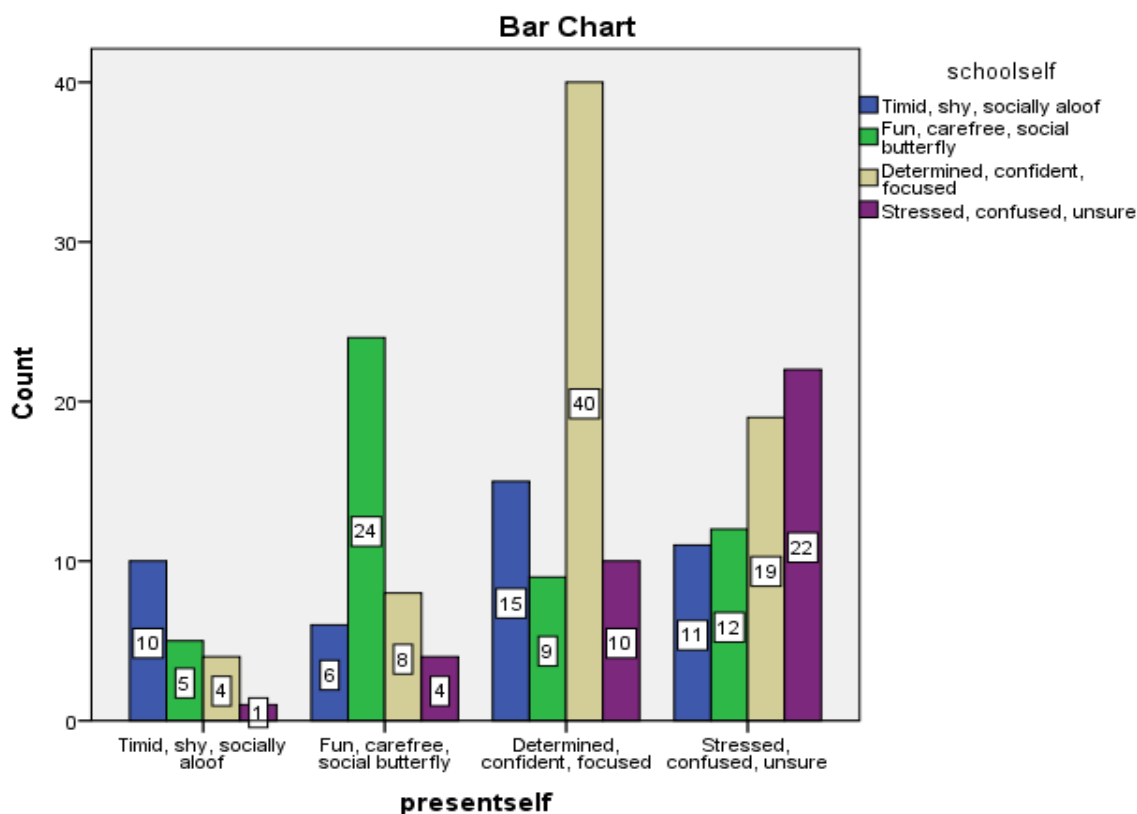


Figure 3: Chi-square test to test the association between student's self-concept at school and university

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:

The results show an association between the student's academic performance and their relationship with the teachers. As represented in Figure 1, the students who had good relationships with the educators were the majority of students who performed well in their academics.

Respondent 6 states, "The teachers would guide me whenever I made some mistakes in my paper and they were very gentle towards me whereas very harsh towards others who were academically weak."

The results are validated by Hussain, Abid, & Rafique (2019) who stated that educators are usually influenced by the students' success or failure. They might behave harshly with the academically weaker students which can cause less motivation among the students whereas they may gravitate towards the academically good students which develops a positive relationship among them and impacts the achievement of the students. This demonstrates that an academically good student might have higher self-esteem and motivation as compared to others as they tend to have healthy relationships with their educators. When educators are inclined more toward such students, they undoubtedly will regard themselves as worthy and competent.

Respondent 5 supports the above statement, "I was very sure that the teachers would always support me. They ignored my mistakes in the class because I was good in academics whereas my academically weak friends were punished for every mistake they made."

Furthermore, an association between the students' relationship with peers and the peers' perception of them was observed in the study results. Figure 2 illustrates that most of the respondents had a good relationship with their peers and thought they saw them in a positive light, i.e., as supportive, kind, and friendly.

Respondent 10 states, "I had a limited circle of friends but I was very close and supportive to them, therefore, I believe my friends saw me as a supportive and kind friend during school".

Similarly, Respondent 7 states, "My lifestyle does not revolve around my peers. I was more interactive and engaged with my teachers than my peers during school. I tried to help people around me but I am not sure if they saw me as a supportive or unsupportive one."



According to Maunder, & Monks (2019), reciprocity is crucial in peer relationships. If someone feels equally validated and accepted by their peer groups, they are more likely to feel important. This proves that students who are closely aligned with peer groups and have helpful and considerate friends tend to have a positive self-perception.

Supporting the above claim, Respondent 4 states, “My friends have particularly influenced me a lot. They taught me not to speak ill to anyone which I practice to date. I believe I speak to everyone in a good manner.”

Additionally, an association between student’s self-concept at school and university was also observed in the study. Figure 3 shows that the majority of the respondents are still the same personalities they were during their school days.

Respondent 9 states, “I was determined and focused during school and still am to date. The teachers always favored me during school and they had high expectations of me. I used to overwork myself to meet their expectations. It did motivate me in some way. I still feel the same here in the college.”

Respondent 5 states, “Luckily, I got the same kind of friends I had during my school. I got to express myself as I used to. I am still the fun, carefree, and social butterfly I was before.”

According to Verhoeven, Poorthuis, & Volman (2019), schools have a crucial role in the identity formation of the students. The students practice what they have learned throughout their school life. The school experiences form a base for the students which determine their personality, beliefs, and practices they form and adhere to in the long run.

This proves that the educational institutions including educators and peer groups have a major role in promoting student’s healthy personality development and enhancing their school experiences.

Some of the ways recommended by the respondents to the school educators for fostering self-esteem and motivation among the students are mentioned below;

- They must not call out the students for their mistakes or discourage them.
- Instead of focusing on the individual talents of the students, educators must encourage students to participate in diverse activities.
- Seminars and conferences must be held often inside the premises to motivate the students.
- The school bodies must encourage the student to explore their interests and career opportunities while guiding them all the way.
- The educators must openly appreciate the students’ efforts in front of every student and their parents.
- They need to make sure the students are in good company of friends and if they find anyone having a bad experience in their peer group, they must make the effort to exclude the student from the group and integrate them into another.

7. LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY :

The study includes respondents belonging to St. Xavier’s College, Kathmandu only. The researchers did not use any self-esteem and motivation tests for the respondents. The entire study is based solely on the concept of looking-glass self-theory. It would have been more effective if the researchers had included educators in the study. The chi-square test was carried out to test the association among the variables therefore it doesn’t show causation. Despite the limitations, the study is useful for educators to reflect on their current pedagogical as well as motivational strategies in the classroom to promote the healthy development of students. The findings demonstrate that relationships with educators and peer groups possess a great influence on a student’s self-perception and motivation hence educational institutions can work on devising ideas to foster meaningful social relationships inside the premises. This study will be an invaluable addition to academia especially in Nepal where the concepts of self-esteem, motivation, and self-perception are rarely talked about.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS:

Some of the recommendations by the researchers to the concerned educational bodies are mentioned below:

- The government must plan and allocate a budget prioritizing student’s well-being on the school premises.
- The educational institutions need to emphasize teacher-student interactions and meaningful social relationships.
- The educator must make sure to avoid biases based on age, gender, class, academic performance, etc. of the students.
- There must be the presence of a school counselor in every school to guide the students.
- Academicians of Nepal should work on similar projects to highlight the issues of self-esteem and motivation being faced by students.



9. CONCLUSION:

The looking-glass self-theory by Cooley asserts that an individual's self-perception is determined by their relationships and interactions with their social groups including peers, teachers, parents, and others. The study emphasizes the role of educators and peer groups in promoting healthy self-perception and motivation among the students. The findings dictate that the educators and the peer groups play a crucial role in a student's life. The students who perform well in academics and possess a supportive relationship with their peers hold a positive sense of self. The school experiences shape a student's personality and they are more likely to remain the same even after school. Hence, the educational bodies need to prioritize students' well-being and social relationships inside the premises to ensure their holistic development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors' gratitude to Ms. Indu Panicker Thapaliya who edited the research article and also express gratitude to all the individuals who supported this study.

REFERENCES:

1. Acosta-Gonzaga, E. (2023). The Effects of Self-Esteem and Academic Engagement on University Students' Performance. *Behavioral Sciences*, 13(4), 348.
2. Aminov, B., & Mirxayitova, S. (2023). THE TECHNOLOGY OF AWAKENING THE MOTIVATION OF INTEREST IN KNOWLEDGE IN CHILDREN OF JUNIOR SCHOOL AGE. *American Journal of Pedagogical and Educational Research*, 11, 1-5.
3. Boruah, J. (2020). SCHOOL AS A SOCIAL SYSTEM – A STUDY. *International Research Journal of Education and Technology*, 1(2), 2581-7795.
4. Boström, L., & Bostedt, G. (2020). What motivates students to study in upper secondary school?: A study on students' perspective on study motivation in four different study programs in Sweden. *International Journal of Teaching and Education*, 8(2), 18-34.
5. Frymier, A. B., & Houser, M. L. (2000). The teacher-student relationship as an interpersonal relationship. *Communication education*, 49(3), 207-219.
6. Goodenow, C., & Grady, K. E. (1993). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among urban adolescent students. *The Journal of Experimental Educational*, 60-71.
7. Harter, S. (1993, January). Visions of self: Beyond the me in the mirror. In *Nebraska symposium on motivation* (Vol. 40, pp. 99-144). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
8. Hussain, T., Abid, N., & Rafique, N. (2019). Educators' Favoritism: Evidenced based Opinions of Pupil Teachers. *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal (LICEJ)*, 10(1), 3128-3132.
9. Khatibi, M., & Fouladchang, M. (2015). Self-esteem; A brief review. *Journal of Educational and Management Studies*, 5(4), 240-243.
10. Lai, E. R. (2011). Motivation: A literature review. *Person Research's Report*, 6, 40-41.
11. Laudari, S. (2014). Motivation and Learning English: A Study on Nepalese Public High School Learners. *Journal of NELTA*, 19(1-2), 99-116.
12. Lee, M., & Lee, S. M. (2023). Teacher and peer relationships and life satisfaction: Mediating the role of student resilience in south korean elementary schools. *Journal of Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools*, 33(1), 13-25.
13. Manning, M. A. (2007). Self-concept and self-esteem in adolescents. *Student services*, 2, 11-15.
14. Maunder, R., & Monks, C. P. (2019). Friendships in middle childhood: Links to peer and school identification, and general self-worth. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 37(2), 211-229.
15. Mecca, A., Smelser, N. J., & Vasconcellos, J. (Eds.). (1989). The social importance of self-esteem. Univ of California Press.
16. Okafor, E. O., Obi, J. S., & Oguzie, A. E. (2018). Relationship between students' self-esteem and their academic achievement in Imo state. *HOFA: African Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 1(1), 24-32.
17. Paudel S, Adhikari C, Chalise A. (2020). Gautam H. Factors Associated with Self-Esteem among Undergraduate Students of Pokhara Metropolitan, Nepal: A Cross-sectional Study. *Europasian J Med Sci*.2020;2(2):98- 105.
18. Regmi, Y. (2022). Exploring motivational techniques used by secondary level english teacher (Doctoral dissertation, Department of English Education).



19. Tella, A. (2007). The impact of motivation on student's academic achievement and learning outcomes in mathematics among secondary school students in Nigeria. *Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education*, 3(2), 149-156.
20. Verhoeven, M., Poorthuis, A. M., & Volman, M. (2019). The role of school in adolescents' identity development. A literature review. *Educational Psychology Review*, 31, 35-63.
21. Wentzel, K. R. (2009). Students' relationships with teachers as motivational contexts. *Handbook of motivation at school*, 301, 322.
22. Wentzel, K. R., & Muenks, K. (2016). Peer influence on students' motivation, academic achievement, and social behavior. In *Handbook of social influences in school contexts* (pp. 13-30). Routledge.
23. Wong, W. H., & Chapman, E. (2023). Student satisfaction and interaction in higher education. *Higher Education*, 85(5), 957-978.
24. You, S. (2011). Peer influence and adolescents' school engagement. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 29, 829-835.