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Exploring and enhancing the self-concept of students with learning difficulties, with and without attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

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EXPLORING AND ENHANCING THE SELF-CONCEPT OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES, WITH AND WITHOUT ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER.

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from the

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

By

Waheeda Tabassam

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DECLARATION

I, Waheeda Tabassam, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Department of Psychology, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Waheeda Tabassam

7 March 2001.
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the self-concept, attributional style and self-efficacy beliefs of students with learning difficulties (LD) with and without attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), compared to normally achieving peers. The thesis also examines the effectiveness of the attributional retraining technique in enhancing the academic self-perceptions of students with learning and attentional difficulties.

The thesis is developed in three stages: Stage-1 is concerned with the development of two instruments for the assessment of academic attributional style and academic self-efficacy beliefs for students in Grade 3 to 6. This stage examines the factor analysis, reliability and validity outcomes of these instruments. Stage-2 concerns itself with a comprehensive examination of the self-concept, attributional style and self-efficacy beliefs of students with LD, students with comorbid LD/ADHD and normally achieving peers. Based on the existing literature, a number of hypotheses concerning the directions of the difference in the self-perceptions of students with LD and with comorbid LD/ADHD were examined. Stage-3 is concerned with the implementation and assessment of the effectiveness of an intervention program that was designed for the enhancement of academic self-concept. Students with LD and students with comorbid LD/ADHD whose academic self-concept scores fell in the lowest quartile participated in this intervention program. The intervention utilized the attributional retraining technique and the effectiveness of attributional retraining in enhancing academic self-concept of students with LD and with comorbid LD/ADHD was examined.

The results obtained from Stage-2 revealed that students with LD and students with comorbid LD/ADHD possessed significantly lowered academic self-concept compared to normally achieving peers. However the three groups (LD, LD/ADHD and normally achieving peers) did not differ significantly on non-academic self-concepts. A comparison between students with LD and students with comorbid LD/ADHD indicated that the two groups did not differ significantly on self-concept, attributional style and self-efficacy beliefs. The results obtained from Stage-3 supported the effectiveness of a cognitive model in changing maladaptive attributions and indicated that academic self-concept of students with LD and with LD/ADHD can be enhanced indirectly using attributional retraining technique.