



International Journal of Information Research and Review Vol. 12, Issue, 04, pp.7990-7996, April, 2025



RESEARCH ARTICLE

ENVIRONMENTAL AND INDIVIDUAL FACTORS IN SELF-DETERMINATION: INSIGHTS FROM INDIAN ADOLESCENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received 18 th January, 2025 Received in revised form 24 th February, 2025 Accepted 25 th March, 2025 Published online 23 rd April, 2025	This study examined self-determination skills among adolescents with intellectual disabilities (ID) in India and analyzed the relationship between self-determination and various socio-demographic factors. Employing a descriptive survey design, the research assessed 60 adolescents with mild to moderate ID using the adapted AIR Self-Determination Scale. Results indicated that most participants (53.3%) demonstrated moderate levels of self-determination, with 31.7% showing low levels and only 15% exhibiting high levels. Participants scored highest in "opportunity at home" and lowest in
Key words:	"capacity for self-determination." Significant differences in self-determination were found based on age, associated conditions, education level, vocational training, parental education, and father's
Self-Determination, Intellectual Disability, Adolescents, Socio- Demographic Factors, Vocational Training.	occupation. Older adolescents, those without associated conditions, those receiving vocational training, and those with parents having higher education levels demonstrated significantly higher self-determination scores. No significant differences were found based on gender, type of schooling, family type, or mother's occupation. The findings highlight the importance of both individual capacities and environmental opportunities in fostering self-determination. Implications include the need for balanced interventions addressing capacity-building and opportunity provision, tailored approaches for different subgroups, and family-centered strategies to promote self-determination among adolescents with intellectual disabilities in India.

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INTRODUCTION

Self-determination has emerged as a critical construct in educational programs for individuals with disabilities over the past three decades. Defined as "the ability to select and have those choices determine one's actions" (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 38), self-determination represents both a capacity and an inherent propensity that drives purposeful behaviors. When individuals exercise self-determination, they act out of choice rather than obligation, adopting an autonomy mindset that enables them to "use information to make decisions and manage themselves in pursuit of self-selected goals" (Wehmeyer et al., 2017). The conceptual framework of selfdetermination has evolved significantly since its emergence in psychological literature. In social psychology, the most comprehensive investigation of this phenomenon is found in motivation research, particularly in the work of Deci and colleagues (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Their self-determination theory (SDT) established a framework for understanding human motivation based on two key assumptions: behavior is driven by an innate desire for growth, and self-motivation is fundamental to human development (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Self-determination theory posits that humans are inherently motivated toward growth and integration, actively seeking to develop a cohesive sense of self through mastering challenges and engaging with new

experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2017). While acknowledging the role of external rewards (extrinsic motivation), SDT emphasizes the importance of internal sources of motivation such as the desire for knowledge and autonomy (intrinsic motivation) (Deci & Ryan, 2015). Research has established that self-determination comprises multiple component elements, including choice-making, decision-making, problemsolving, goal setting and attainment, self-advocacy, selfefficacy, self-awareness, and self-regulation (Shogren et al., 2015). These elements work in concert to enable individuals to act as causal agents in their lives-making things happen rather than having things happen to them (Wehmeyer et al., 2019). Historically, people with intellectual disabilities (ID) have often been denied their right to self-determination. Many have experienced overprotection and involuntary segregation, with others making critical life decisions on their behalf (Shogren & Ward, 2018). This denial of opportunities to make choices and experience the "dignity of risk" has impeded individuals with ID from exercising their right to selfdetermination and limited their potential to become contributing, valued community members who live lives of their own choosing (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016). Intellectual disability, as defined by the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD, 2021), is "a disability characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior, which covers

many everyday social and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 22." This definition emphasizes the ecological perspective of disability, focusing on the expression of limitations within a social context and recognizing that personalized supports can significantly improve human functioning (Schalock et al., 2021). The construct of intellectual disability has evolved considerably over time, shifting from a deficit-oriented model to a strengths-based approach that emphasizes person-environment interactions (Thompson *et al.*, 2018). This evolution reflects broader changes in how disability is conceptualized, moving from a medical model that locates disability within the individual to a social model that recognizes the role of environmental barriers in creating disability. Over the past two decades, selfdetermination has become increasingly important in disability services and advocacy, particularly in education and adult service contexts (Shogren et al., 2022). This shift reflects growing recognition that self-determination skills are essential for successful transitions to adulthood, particularly for youth with intellectual disabilities who face unique challenges in developing and exercising these skills (Palmer et al., 2019). Several conceptual models have been developed to operationalize and describe self-determination in the context of individuals with disabilities. These models represent early attempts in the special education field to define and articulate this complex concept in practical terms.

Field and Hoffman (1994) proposed a model emphasizing that self-determination is influenced by factors both within an individual's control (values, knowledge, skills) and environmental variables (opportunities for choice-making, attitudes of others). Their model comprises five major components: knowing oneself, valuing oneself, planning, acting, and experiencing outcomes and learning. This framework highlights the importance of both internal processes and external actions in developing self-determination. Wehmeyer's (1999) functional model of self-determination conceptualizes it as having four essential characteristics: autonomous action, self-regulation, psychological empowerment, and self-realization. This perspective views self-determination as a dispositional characteristic that emerges across the lifespan as individuals develop skills and attitudes enabling them to become causal agents in their lives (Wehmeyer et al., 2017). Mithaug's (2003) model, rooted in self-regulation theory, posits that self-determined individuals self-regulate their choices and actions more successfully than others and are less influenced by external factors when setting and pursuing goals. This model involves six steps: identifying needs and interests, setting expectations and goals, making choices and plans, taking action, evaluating results, and adjusting plans until goals are achieved.

Abery's (1994) ecosystem model adopts a broader perspective, viewing self-determination as emerging from interactions between an individual and the various environments in which they function. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, this model considers how micro-systems (immediate settings), eco-systems (external contexts), meso-systems (interactions between settings), and macro-systems (cultural patterns and ideologies) influence the development and expression of self-determination. The development of self-determination skills is a lifelong process that begins in childhood and continues throughout adulthood. While important for all individuals, it is particularly crucial—and often more challenging to develop—for young people with

disabilities (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016). Research has consistently demonstrated that youth with disabilities who have higher levels of self-determination are more likely to experience positive post-school outcomes, including employment, community participation, and independent living (Martorell et al., 2008; Shogren et al., 2015; Wehmeyer et al., 2019). A seminal study by Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) found that students with disabilities who were more selfdetermined when they left school were more than twice as likely to be employed one year after graduation and earned significantly higher wages than their peers who were less selfdetermined. Self-determination involves numerous attitudes abilities. including self-awareness, assertiveness. and creativity, pride, problem-solving, and self-advocacy (Wehmeyer et al., 2017). To take charge of one's life, an individual must be able to set goals, evaluate options, make choices, and work toward achieving their objectives. Since these skills are most effectively learned through practice, students with disabilities should have ample opportunities to use their self-advocacy, decision-making, and socialization skills well before leaving high school (Burke et al., 2020).

Purpose and Objectives: Despite the recognized importance of self-determination, students with intellectual disabilities often struggle with key self-determination skills, including self-awareness, goal setting, problem-solving, self-evaluation, decision-making, and self-advocacy (Palmer et al., 2019). These difficulties may include limited awareness of their abilities and preferences (Fejes-Mendoza et al., 1995), poor self-control (Kapp, 1997), ineffective problem-solving strategies (Simonian *et al.*, 1991), and underdeveloped communication skills (Smith et al., 2020). While the importance of self-determination has been emphasized internationally, research specific to the Indian context remains limited (Keshwal & Thressiakutty, 2011; Raman et al., 2019). This gap highlights the need for further investigation into selfdetermination among adolescents with intellectual disabilities in India, considering the unique cultural, social, and educational contexts that may influence the development and expression of self-determination.

The present study aims to address this research gap by exploring self-determination skills among adolescent students with intellectual disabilities in India. Specifically, this research seeks to:

- Assess the level of self-determination skills among adolescent students with intellectual disabilities.
- Analyze self-determination skills in relation to selected socio-demographic variables, including age, gender, associated conditions, education level, type of schooling, vocational training, family structure, and parental education and occupation.

METHODS

Research Design: This study employed a descriptive survey research design to investigate self-determination skills among adolescents with intellectual disabilities. This approach allows for systematic collection of data about the current status of self-determination skills and permits analysis of relationships between variables without manipulating the study environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Variables of the Study: The primary dependent variable was the level of self-determination skills among adolescents with intellectual disabilities. Independent variables included sociodemographic factors such as age, gender, associated conditions, educational level, type of schooling, vocational training status, family type, and parents' educational level and occupational status.

Tools and Techniques

Self-Determination Scale: To assess self-determination skills, the AIR Self-Determination Scale (Wolman et al., 1994) was utilized. This standardized instrument has been widely used in research with individuals with intellectual disabilities and provides a comprehensive measure of self-determination capacities across multiple domains. The AIR Scale consists of 24 questions measuring self-determination across four domains: (1) capacity for self-determination, (2) opportunity for self-determination at school, (3) opportunity for selfdetermination at home, and (4) knowledge, ability, and perception about self-determination. The AIR Self-Determination Scale has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) ranging from 0.91 to 0.98 and test-retest reliability of 0.74 (Wolman et al., 1994). The scale was adapted and validated for use in the Indian context through a rigorous translation and cultural adaptation process, demonstrating acceptable internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.88) in the pilot phase.

Socio-Demographic Information Form: A structured form was developed to collect data on the independent variables, gathering information about participants' age, gender, associated conditions, educational background, type of schooling, vocational training status, family structure, and parents' education and occupation.

Population and Participants

The target population consisted of adolescent students with intellectual disabilities in the age range of 12 to 25 years. Participants were included if they:

- Were diagnosed with mild to moderate intellectual disability according to AAIDD criteria
- Were between 12 and 25 years of age
- Were currently enrolled in special education centers, Departments of Adult Independent Living, or receiving services at the National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities
- Could respond to questionnaire items with or without assistance
- Had parental/guardian consent and provided participant assent

Individuals were excluded if they had severe or profound intellectual disabilities, significant communication impairments that prevented participation even with assistance, or exhibited severe behavioral challenges that impeded assessment.

Sampling Procedure: Participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques. The sample comprised 60 adolescents with intellectual disabilities from special education center, DAIL programs, and NIEPID services. Efforts were made to include participants across different age groups, gender categories, educational backgrounds, and family structures.

Procedure for Data Collection: Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the institutional research ethics committee, with written informed consent secured from parents or legal guardians and simplified assent obtained from participants using accessible formats. The data collection process unfolded in three distinct phases. In the preparation phase, researchers established rapport with participating institutions, obtained necessary permissions, and scheduled assessment sessions. During the assessment phase, the AIR Self-Determination Scale was administered individually to each participant in a quiet, distraction-free environment, with appropriate accommodations provided as needed, such as simplified language, visual supports, or additional time. The final verification phase involved checking all collected data for completeness and accuracy, with follow-up sessions arranged when necessary to address any missing or unclear information, ensuring the integrity of the dataset before proceeding to analysis.

Statistical Techniques: Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 26.0. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize participants' socio-demographic characteristics and self-determination scores. For the first objective (assessing the level of self-determination), descriptive statistics were used to determine the overall distribution of self-determination levels. For the second objective (analyzing differences based on socio-demographic variables), t-tests for dichotomous variables and one-way ANOVA for variables with more than two categories were employed, with post-hoc tests (Tukey's HSD) for significant ANOVA results. The significance level was set at p < 0.05.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings of our study on selfdetermination skills among adolescents with intellectual disabilities (ID). The data was collected and analyzed to address the two primary objectives: (1) to assess the level of self-determination skills among adolescents with ID, and (2) to analyze differences in self-determination skills relative to various socio-demographic variables.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=60)

Variable	Categories	N	Percentage
1.72	12-17 years	35	58.3
Age 12-17 years 35 58.3 18-25 years 25 41.7 Gender Male 38 63.3 Female 22 36.7 ssociated Conditions Present 24 40.0 Absent 36 60.0 0 Primary 18 30.0 Secondary 31 51.7 Vocational training 11 18.3 0.0 Secondary 31 51.7 Vocational training 11 18.3 0.0 Secondary 31 51.7 Vocational training 11 18.3 30.0 Secondary 31 51.7 Vocational training 11 18.3 30.0 Receiving 27 45.0 Vocational Training Receiving 27 45.0 Not receiving 33 55.0 Family Type Nuclear 37 61.7 Joint/Extended 23 38.3 Frimary or below 16 26.7 Secondary 25<	41.7		
Condon	Male	38	63.3
Gender	Female	22	36.7
	Present	24	40.0
Associated Conditions	Absent	36	60.0
	Primary	18	30.0
Education Level	Secondary	31	51.7
	Vocational training	11	18.3
Tune of Sabaoling	Special education	42	70.0
Type of Schooling	Inclusive setting	18	30.0
Varational Testation	Receiving	27	45.0
vocational Training	Not receiving	33	55.0
Family Type	Nuclear	37	61.7
ranny Type	Joint/Extended	23	55.0 61.7 38.3
	Primary or below	16	26.7
Father's Education	Secondary	25	41.7
	Higher education	19	31.6
	Primary or below	22	36.7
Mother's Education	Secondary	27	45.0
	Higher education	11	18.3
	Unemployed	4	6.7
Father's Occupation	Manual/Unskilled	21	35.0
Skilled/Professiona	35	58.3	
Mather's Occupation	Homemaker	33	55.0
womer's Occupation	Employed	27	45.0

Domain	Low	Moderate	High	Mean Score (SD)
Capacity for self-determination	23 (38.3%)	28 (46.7%)	9 (15.0%)	23.45 (5.78)
Opportunity at school	18 (30.0%)	31 (51.7%)	11 (18.3%)	25.63 (6.12)
Opportunity at home	15 (25.0%)	30 (50.0%)	15 (25.0%)	27.81 (5.95)
Knowledge and perception	21 (35.0%)	29 (48.3%)	10 (16.7%)	24.12 (6.03)
Overall self-determination	19 (31.7%)	32 (53.3%)	9 (15.0%)	101.01 (18.67)

Table 2. Distribution of Self-Determination Levels Among Participants (N=60)

Table	3. 9	Self-l	Determ	ination	Scores	bv	Socio-	Demographi	e V	ariables (N=60))
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Variable	Categories	Mean (SD)	t/F value	p-value
Age	12-17 years	97.43 (17.54)	t=2.13	0.037*
•	18-25 years	106.24 (19.31)		
Gender	Male	100.76 (18.92)	t=0.18	0.856
	Female	101.45 (18.52)		
Associated Conditions	Present	94.58 (17.98)	t=2.42	0.019*
	Absent	105.31 (18.13)		
Education Level	Primary	93.67 (17.45)	F=4.83	0.011*
	Secondary	101.19 (18.21)		
	Vocational training	112.73 (16.75)		
Type of Schooling	Special education	99.29 (18.86)	t=1.45	0.153
	Inclusive setting	105.11 (17.93)		
Vocational Training	Receiving	106.81 (17.59)	t=2.67	0.010*
	Not receiving	96.30 (18.42)		
Family Type	Nuclear	102.95 (18.94)	t=1.26	0.212
	Joint/Extended	97.83 (18.06)		
Father's Education	Primary or below	93.19 (17.95)	F=3.58	0.034*
	Secondary	101.36 (18.14)		
	Higher education	107.26 (18.52)		
Mother's Education	Primary or below	94.27 (17.91)	F=3.76	0.029*
	Secondary	103.15 (18.43)		
	Higher education	109.55 (16.98)		
Father's Occupation	Unemployed	90.75 (16.84)	F=4.17	0.020*
-	Manual/Unskilled	96.38 (18.26)		
	Skilled/Professional	105.71 (18.05)		
Mother's Occupation	Homemaker	98.42 (18.74)	t=1.85	0.069
-	Employed	104.15 (18.24)		

A total of 60 adolescents with intellectual disabilities participated in the study. The sample comprised a higher proportion of males (63.3%) than females (36.7%), with a majority in the younger age category of 12-17 years (58.3%). Most participants (60%) did not have associated conditions alongside their intellectual disability. Regarding education, the majority (51.7%) were at the secondary level, with 70% enrolled in special education settings. Just under half (45%) were receiving vocational training, and most participants (61.7%) came from nuclear families. The results indicate that the majority of participants (53.3%) demonstrated a moderate level of overall self-determination skills, with 31.7% showing low levels and only 15% exhibiting high levels. Across specific domains, participants generally scored highest in the "Opportunity at home" domain, with 25% showing high levels and a mean score of 27.81 (SD=5.95). The domain with the lowest scores was "Capacity for self-determination," where 38.3% of participants showed low levels and only 15% exhibited high levels, with a mean score of 23.45 (SD=5.78). These findings suggest that while home environments may provide relatively more opportunities for self-determination, the participants' inherent capacity for self-determined behavior remains an area of concern. The analyses revealed significant differences in self-determination scores based on several sociodemographic variables:

- 1. Age: Older adolescents (18-25 years) exhibited significantly higher self-determination scores compared to younger adolescents (12-17 years) (t=2.13, p=0.037).
- 2. Associated Conditions: Participants without associated conditions demonstrated significantly higher self-

determination scores than those with associated conditions (t=2.42, p=0.019).

- 3. Education Level: A significant difference was found across education levels (F=4.83, p=0.011). Post-hoc analyses revealed that participants in vocational training had significantly higher scores than those at the primary level (p=0.009).
- 4. **Vocational Training**: Participants receiving vocational training scored significantly higher on self-determination than those not receiving such training (t=2.67, p=0.010).
- 5. **Parental Education**: Significant differences were found based on both father's education (F=3.58, p=0.034) and mother's education (F=3.76, p=0.029). Participants whose parents had higher education demonstrated significantly higher self-determination scores compared to those whose parents had primary education or below.
- 6. Father's Occupation: Significant differences were observed based on father's occupation (F=4.17, p=0.020). Participants whose fathers were employed in skilled/professional occupations had significantly higher self-determination scores compared to those whose fathers were unemployed or engaged in manual/unskilled work.

No significant differences in self-determination scores were found based on gender, type of schooling, family type, or mother's occupation.

DISCUSSION

This study explored self-determination skills among adolescents with intellectual disabilities in India, focusing on the overall level of self-determination and its relationship with

various socio-demographic factors. Our finding that the majority of participants demonstrated moderate levels of selfdetermination aligns with previous research suggesting that individuals with intellectual disabilities often face challenges in developing optimal self-determination skills (Wehmeyer et al., 2017). The higher scores in "Opportunity at home" suggest that family environments may provide relatively more opportunities for exercising choice and control compared to other settings, resonating with research by Palmer et al. (2019), who emphasized the role of home environments in fostering self-determination. The domain-specific findings highlight the importance of considering both capacity and opportunity when designing interventions to promote self-determination (Shogren et al., 2015). While providing opportunities is crucial, enhancing the capacity for self-determination through targeted skill development is equally important. The study revealed significant relationships between socio-demographic factors and self-determination skills in adolescents with intellectual disabilities. Age emerged as an important factor, with older adolescents (18-25 years) demonstrating significantly higher self-determination scores than their younger counterparts, supporting the developmental nature of self-determination as described in Wehmeyer et al.'s (2017) functional model. This finding suggests the need for developmentally appropriate interventions, with younger adolescents potentially requiring more structured support. Similarly, the absence of associated conditions correlated with higher self-determination scores, aligning with Shogren et al.'s (2022) observation that multiple disabilities can create additional barriers to developing self-determination. The study also found significant positive relationships between education level, vocational training, and self-determination skills, emphasizing the crucial role of educational experiences in fostering these capabilities. Burke et al. (2020) similarly demonstrated the positive impact of educational programs that incorporate explicit instruction in self-determination skills. The particularly strong relationship between vocational training and self-determination underscores Wehmeyer et al.'s (2019) finding that vocational experiences provide authentic opportunities to practice these skills in meaningful contexts.

Family factors also significantly influenced self-determination skills, with both parental education and father's occupation showing strong correlations with participants' scores. These findings align with Abery's (1994) ecosystem model of selfdetermination, which emphasizes how various environmental contexts shape the development of self-determination. Parents with higher education levels may better understand the importance of fostering independence and autonomy, providing more opportunities for their children to make choices and decisions (Shogren & Ward, 2018). The significant relationship between father's occupation and selfdetermination scores likely reflects broader socioeconomic factors that influence family resources, access to services, and opportunities for developing self-determination skills. These findings collectively highlight the complex interplay between individual characteristics, family dynamics, and educational experiences in shaping self-determination skills among adolescents with intellectual disabilities, suggesting the need for comprehensive interventions that address multiple ecological levels.

Implications and Limitations: The findings from this study on self-determination among adolescents with intellectual disabilities suggest several important practice implications for educators, families, and service providers. First, interventions should strike a careful balance between building internal capacity for self-determination and creating external opportunities to exercise these skills. Since participants demonstrated stronger performance in the "opportunity at home" domain than in "capacity for self-determination," educational approaches should particularly target developing the fundamental skills that enable self-determined behavior. Second, the significant differences across socio-demographic variables highlight the need for tailored interventions that address the specific needs of different subgroups. Younger adolescents, those with associated conditions, and those from families with limited educational backgrounds may require more intensive and structured support. Third, educational programs should explicitly incorporate instruction in selfdetermination skills, with vocational training emerging as a particularly promising context for developing these capabilities. Such programs should provide authentic opportunities for practicing self-determination skills in meaningful contexts, allowing students to experience both success and the "dignity of risk" necessary for growth. Finally, given the significant relationship between family factors and self-determination, a family-centered approach is essential. Programs that engage parents as active partners, enhance their understanding of self-determination, and provide strategies for fostering these skills at home could significantly improve outcomes for adolescents with intellectual disabilities.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. The relatively small sample size (N=60) limits the generalizability of findings to the broader population of adolescents with intellectual disabilities in India. Additionally, the cross-sectional design captures selfdetermination at only a single point in time, precluding conclusions about developmental trajectories or causal relationships between variables. A longitudinal approach would provide more robust insights into how selfdetermination skills develop over time and how various factors influence this development. There are also important conceptual limitations, as the construct of self-determination has been primarily developed within Western cultural frameworks and may not fully capture how self-determination is understood and expressed within Indian cultural contexts, which often emphasize interdependence and collective Methodologically, the decision-making. reliance on quantitative measures may not capture the full complexity and nuance of participants' experiences with self-determination. The study would have benefited from including data from multiple informants such as parents, teachers, and other caregivers to provide a more comprehensive understanding of participants' self-determination across different contexts. Finally, other potentially influential factors such as parenting styles, teacher attitudes, peer relationships, and access to support services were not examined but may play important roles in shaping self-determination skills.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated self-determination skills among adolescents with intellectual disabilities in India, providing important insights into both the current status of selfdetermination and the factors that influence these skills. The findings reveal that the majority of participants demonstrated moderate levels of self-determination, with notable strengths in

the domain of "Opportunity at home" and challenges in the domain of "Capacity for self-determination." Several socioinfluenced demographic factors significantly selfdetermination, including age, presence of associated conditions, education level, vocational training, parental education, and father's occupation. These findings highlight the complex interplay of individual, family, and educational factors in shaping self-determination. From a theoretical perspective, the study supports ecological models of selfdetermination that emphasize the importance of both individual capacities and environmental opportunities. From a practical standpoint, the study has implications for educational programming, family support, and policy development. Future research should address the limitations of the current study through larger, more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, mixed-method approaches, and consideration of additional factors that may influence self-determination. Particular attention should be given to cultural dimensions of selfdetermination and how these may shape its expression and development in different cultural contexts.

In conclusion, this study contributes to our understanding of self-determination among adolescents with intellectual disabilities in India and highlights the importance of considering both individual and environmental factors in promoting self-determination. By addressing both capacity and opportunity across multiple contexts, educators, families, and policymakers can work together to enhance self-determination and improve long-term outcomes for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our sincere gratitude to Dr. B. V. Ramkumar, Director of NIEPID, and Mr. Ganesh Sheregar, HoD, DSE, NIEPID, for granting permission to conduct this research as part of the first author's M.Ed. project. Their support and encouragement were instrumental in the successful completion of this study. We would also like to express our heartfelt thanks to all the adolescents with intellectual disabilities who participated in this research and their parents for their valuable time, cooperation, and willingness to share their experiences, without which this study would not have been possible.

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