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A Qualitative Case Study on The Formation of High Self-Esteem in Visually Impaired Adolescents Based on Coopersmith's Theory

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the process of developing high self-esteem among visually impaired adolescents at SLB A Bina Insani, Bandar Lampung, based on Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Theory (1967). A qualitative approach with a multiple case study design was used to explore in depth the psychological and social processes underlying self-esteem. Three participants with high self-esteem were selected using the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI). Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed thematically. The results show that high self-esteem is formed dynamically through the interaction of internal and external factors. Coopersmith's four factors : acceptance, control, expectations and standards, and rewarding of competence interact with aspects of self-esteem : significance, competence, virtue, and power through self-acceptance, realistic expectations, independence, and appreciation of self-competence. Social support from family, teachers, and peers strengthens this process, resulting in independence, optimism, and resilience in the face of stigma and obstacles. This study emphasizes the importance of unconditional acceptance from family, an inclusive and supportive learning environment, and a culture of appreciation to support the development of positive self-esteem in visually impaired adolescents

Kata Kunci:

Self-Esteem;
Remaja Tunanetra;
Teori Coopersmith;
Penelitian Kualitatif;
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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi proses pembentukan self-esteem tinggi pada remaja tunanetra di SLB A Bina Insani, Bandar Lampung, berdasarkan Self-Esteem Theory dari Coopersmith (1967). Pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus multipel digunakan untuk menggali secara mendalam proses psikologis dan sosial yang melandasi self-esteem. Tiga partisipan dengan self-esteem tinggi dipilih menggunakan Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI). Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa self-esteem tinggi terbentuk secara dinamis melalui interaksi faktor internal dan eksternal. Keempat faktor Coopersmith : acceptance, control, expectations and standards, serta rewarding of competence berinteraksi dengan aspek self-esteem : significance, competence, virtue, dan power melalui penerimaan diri, harapan realistis, kemandirian, dan penghargaan terhadap kompetensi diri. Dukungan sosial dari keluarga, guru, dan teman sebaya memperkuat proses ini, menghasilkan kemandirian, optimisme, dan ketangguhan menghadapi stigma dan hambatan. Penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya penerimaan tanpa syarat dari keluarga, lingkungan belajar inklusif dan suportif, serta budaya penghargaan untuk mendukung perkembangan self-esteem positif pada remaja tunanetra.

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescents with visual impairments face challenges that are far more complex than those experienced by adolescents in general, particularly in the development of identity and self-esteem. Visual impairment not only limits physical activities but also affects how these adolescents are perceived and accepted within their social environments. Adolescents with visual impairments are categorized as children with special needs who experience functional limitation that affect daily activities, learning processes, and social interaction, thereby requiring specific educational and psychosocial support (Lubis et al., 2024). Such conditions often give rise to anxiety, feelings of helplessness, and self-doubt. Recent intervention-based research indicates that psychological treatments, such as schema therapy, are effective in reducing social isolation and improving self-esteem among individuals with visual impairments (Abbasi et al., 2025). Nevertheless, some adolescents with visual impairments are able to demonstrate high levels of self-esteem despite living with these limitations. This phenomenon constitutes the focus of the present study, which aims to explore how high self-esteem is formed within a context characterized by persistent challenges.

For adolescents with visual impairments, the development of identity and self-worth is a demanding process. From a psychosocial developmental perspective adolescence is a critical stage for identity formation and self-evaluation, in which successful resolution contributes to positive self-concept and self-esteem (Rusuli, 2022). Physical barriers, limitations in social interaction, and experiences of discrimination often render them vulnerable to feelings of inferiority and social alienation (Saleem et al., 2023). Fatimah et al. (2022) identified that self-esteem among individuals with visual impairments is shaped by multiple interacting factors, including family support, social acceptance, and opportunities for competence development. Previous studies have shown that social support plays a significant role in strengthening confidence and positive self-evaluation among individuals with visual impairments (Omnihara et al., 2019). However, empirical evidence indicates that not all adolescents with visual impairments experience low self-esteem. A qualitative study by Agustina and Syah (2021) demonstrated that adolescents with visual impairments can develop high self-esteem through the dynamic interaction of acceptance, control, and competence, as conceptualized in Coopersmith's theory. An intervention study by Putri and Rusli (2022) demonstrated that self-recognition training significantly improved self-esteem among visually impaired adolescents, indicating that self-esteem can be developed through structured psychological support. Khoiroh (2014) found that adolescents with visual impairments attending special schools who received positive social support were able to exhibit high self-esteem, as reflected in mature self-confidence and the courage to make decisions. Similarly, Luca and Mihăilescu (2021) reported that students with visual impairments in Romania demonstrated higher average levels of self-esteem than their non-disabled peers. This phenomenon appears paradoxical, as it emerges within conditions that are generally restrictive. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how the formation of high self-esteem occurs dynamically, particularly within the daily lives of adolescents with visual impairments who navigate both supportive environments and inherent limitations.

Coopersmith's (1967) theory of self-esteem serves as the primary theoretical foundation of this study. Coopersmith conceptualizes self-esteem as an individual's evaluative judgment of the self, shaped through four formative factors—acceptance, control, expectations and standards, and

rewarding of competence—and reflected in four core aspects: significance, competence, virtue, and power. This study not only seeks to map these factors and aspects but also to examine how they interact dynamically in the process of forming high self-esteem among adolescents with visual impairments. Such an approach is essential for extending theoretical understanding of how subjective experiences, social support, and psychological adaptation operate simultaneously in shaping self-worth. Moreover, given that prior research has largely employed quantitative approaches and focused predominantly on external factors, a qualitative multiple case study design was adopted to address this methodological gap by capturing in-depth experiences capable of revealing the psychological mechanisms underlying the formation of self-esteem.

The self-esteem theory proposed by Coopersmith (1967) provides a critical framework for understanding this phenomenon. Coopersmith defines self-esteem as an individual's evaluation of the self, reflecting the extent to which a person perceives themselves as valuable, capable, and meaningful. He identifies four primary formative factors: acceptance from significant others, belief in self-control, realistic standards and expectations, and recognition of competence. In addition, Coopersmith highlights four key aspects—significance, competence, virtue, and power—as central indicators of self-esteem. In the present study, Coopersmith's theory is applied operationally to examine how these factors and aspects interact in shaping high self-esteem among adolescents with visual impairments.

Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of social support and parenting patterns in the development of positive self-esteem among individuals with visual impairments. Habibah (2020) found that acceptance from family members and peers plays a substantial role in strengthening the self-concept of children with visual impairments. Family support has also been identified as a key determinant of academic achievement and psychosocial adjustment among children with visual impairments, highlighting the central role of the family in fostering both competence and self-esteem (Virgiana et al., 2024). Putri (2023) emphasized that positive parenting practices and environmental support enhance the self-confidence of adolescents with visual impairments in Bali. In addition, structured self-development activities aimed at exploring personal potential have been shown to foster independence, confidence, and positive self-evaluation among children with visual impairments (Rahmawati, 2018). Similarly, Hadiananto (2021) revealed that educational parenting styles emphasizing skill development and emotional support contribute to healthy self-esteem development. However, most of these studies focus primarily on external factors and rely on quantitative approaches, thereby limiting their ability to capture the underlying psychological processes involved in the formation of high self-esteem. Furthermore, research examining how the factors and aspects of Coopersmith's theory interact dynamically across the life course of adolescents with visual impairments remains scarce. Accordingly, this study employs a qualitative multiple case study approach to address these substantive and methodological gaps, with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the dynamic process of high self-esteem formation within Coopersmith's theoretical framework.

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of understanding how adolescents with visual impairments are able to develop positive self-esteem despite the limitations and social stigma they frequently encounter. This phenomenon is particularly compelling, as not all adolescents with visual impairments experience low self-esteem; some demonstrate strong self-acceptance, high self-confidence, and notable achievements. SLB A Bina Insani was selected as the research site because the school provides not only academic instruction but also life-skills

training, such as cooking and handicraft production, which emphasizes independence and personal responsibility. This context renders the study highly relevant for examining the dynamics of high self-esteem formation among adolescents with visual impairments who grow within environments that actively support autonomy.

Previous research, such as that conducted by Putri (2023) and Hadianito (2021), has highlighted the role of positive parenting and environmental support in enhancing the self-esteem of adolescents with visual impairments. However, these studies remain largely quantitative and descriptive, thus failing to uncover the psychological mechanisms and internal processes that shape high self-esteem. In addition, much of the existing literature has not employed a comprehensive theoretical framework, such as Coopersmith's theory, to examine the interplay between external and internal factors. Consequently, the present study seeks to address this gap by investigating how the factors and aspects of self-esteem proposed by Coopersmith dynamically interact and evolve over time within the lived experiences of adolescents with visual impairments. This approach is expected to contribute theoretically to the field of developmental psychology and to offer practical insights for educators and families in supporting the development of positive self-esteem.

Based on these considerations, this study focuses on adolescents with visual impairments who demonstrate high self-esteem at SLB A Bina Insani. The purpose of the study is to explore the processes and dynamics underlying the roles of Coopersmith's self-esteem factors—acceptance, control, expectations and standards, and rewarding of competence—in the lives of adolescents with visual impairments, as well as to understand how the aspects of significance, competence, virtue, and power are gradually formed and manifested in their everyday experiences. The findings are expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of positive self-esteem formation and to serve as a reference for families, schools, and communities in delivering appropriate support to adolescents with visual impairments.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a multiple case study design. This design was selected because it involved three participants with different backgrounds and life experiences, thereby enabling the researcher to compare variations in the processes through which high self-esteem is formed across cases. Qualitative research in psychology emphasizes the exploration of subjective meaning, lived experience, and contextual psychological processes, making it particularly suitable for understanding complex phenomena such as self-esteem formation (Nurhayaty, 2023). A multiple case study design allows for cross-case analysis and the identification of recurring patterns across diverse contexts (Yin, 2018). Epistemologically, the case study approach is appropriate for understanding complex and contextual psychological processes that cannot be adequately explained through quantitative methods. Accordingly, this study seeks to interpret the subjective meanings and socio-psychological dynamics experienced by adolescents with visual impairments within the context of their real-life situations. The pre-research phase was conducted in June 2025 for field reconnaissance and instrument development, while the main data collection was carried out in August 2025.

Research participants were selected using the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI), which had been adapted by Nailu Rokhmatika and Muslikah (2024). Of the five students with

visual impairments who participated in the initial screening using the CSEI, three students with the highest scores were selected as the main participants in this study. This selection was based on theoretical considerations and data saturation principles, as the three participants demonstrated consistently high self-esteem while differing in family backgrounds and social experiences, thereby providing contextual diversity for in-depth analysis. According to Coopersmith's (1967) classification, scores of ≥ 112 are categorized as high self-esteem. The scores of the three participants in this study ranged from 115 to 127, indicating consistently high levels of self-esteem. These considerations ensured that participant selection was deliberate and representative of the phenomenon under investigation. Accordingly, the research assumption was that these scores reflected high self-esteem, and the three students who met this criterion were designated as the research subjects.

The three research participants were as follows:

1. RA (female, 18 years old) – Grade XI student at SLB A Bina Insani.
2. A (male, 19 years old) – Grade XI student at SLB A Bina Insani.
3. ATND (male, 19 years old) – Grade XII student at SLB A Bina Insani.

SLB A Bina Insani was selected as the research site based on its distinctive characteristics as a school specifically serving adolescents with visual impairments, its record of student achievements, and its provision of vocational skill instruction, such as cooking and handicraft production. This environment was considered appropriate for exploring the formation of high self-esteem among adolescents with visual impairments.

The participant inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) adolescents with visual impairments enrolled at SLB A Bina Insani, Bandar Lampung; (2) individuals who demonstrated high self-esteem scores based on the CSEI; and (3) willingness to participate fully in the study. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure alignment with the research focus. Data were collected using four techniques: (1) psychological testing using the CSEI for participant screening; (2) semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted three times with each participant; (3) participatory observation at the school, also conducted three times, to examine daily behavior, social interactions, and self-expression; and (4) documentation, including school records and supplementary information provided by teachers.

The interview guide was developed based on two main components of Coopersmith's theory: the formative factors of self-esteem (acceptance, control, expectations and standards, and rewarding of competence) and the aspects of self-esteem (significance, competence, virtue, and power). Content validity of the interview guide was examined through expert judgment involving two developmental psychology experts and one special education expert, using Lawshe's (1975) Content Validity Ratio (CVR) approach. Construct validity was assessed by referring to the construct validity principles proposed by Cronbach and Meehl (1955). This approach is consistent with Kane's validity framework, which emphasize the systematic evaluation of assessment instruments through evidence-based argumentation to support the interpretation and use of research instruments (Chuisano et al., 2022). The adapted CSEI instrument developed by Rokhmatika and Muslikah (2024) demonstrated good internal reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.87 in the Indonesian language and cultural adaptation testing. In this study, a pilot test involving five students yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.85, indicating adequate internal consistency for identifying participants' self-esteem levels prior to the qualitative phase. Thus, the claim that the three participants possessed high self-esteem is supported by valid and reliable data.

Data analysis was conducted using an integrated thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), combining inductive and deductive strategies. Procedurally, the researcher first conducted inductive open coding to capture participants' subjective meanings and experiences without being constrained by a specific theoretical framework. Subsequently, Coopersmith's theoretical framework was applied deductively as a template for coding to interpret and categorize themes related to the four self-esteem factors and four self-esteem aspects. This integrative process allowed the analysis to remain open to emergent findings while remaining grounded in a robust theoretical framework. Data trustworthiness was enhanced through source triangulation (interviews, observations, and documentation), peer debriefing, and member checking with participants to ensure that the researcher's interpretations aligned with their lived experiences. This approach ensured that the findings were methodologically credible, consistent, and transparent.

Throughout the research process, ethical principles were upheld by obtaining formal approval from the school, securing informed consent from participants and their guardians, ensuring confidentiality through the use of initials, and granting participants full autonomy to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

RESULT

This study aims to understand the process of self-esteem formation among adolescents with visual impairments at SLB A Bina Insani. Based on the analysis of interview data, several key findings emerged that illustrate how both external and internal factors contribute to the development of self-esteem. These findings were subsequently categorized into the dimensions of self-esteem factors and aspects as proposed in Coopersmith's theory.

Cross-case analysis revealed that all participants experienced three main phases in the formation of self-esteem:

1. The self-acceptance phase (acceptance–significance), which begins with experiences of being accepted by significant others, such as family members and peers, fostering a sense of security and personal worth.
2. The strengthening of control and competence phase (control–competence), which develops as participants become aware of their abilities, begin making independent decisions, and adjust their expectations to align with their capacities.
3. The independence and power phase (power–virtue), which emerges when individuals are able to interpret their life experiences positively and demonstrate independence as well as social responsibility.

The results of the study are visually summarized in tables that present the stages of the process, cross-subject descriptions, and theoretical analyses. The tables are presented separately for each research subject to ensure clarity and structural coherence.

The cross-case synthesis table provides an overview of the recurring patterns identified through interviews with the three participants. To deepen understanding and clarify the meaning underlying these data, the following narrative descriptions are presented for each subject. These explanations illustrate the dynamics of self-esteem formation in a more comprehensive manner, supported by relevant theoretical perspectives.

Tabel 1. Cross-Case Synthesis Stages of Developing High Self-Esteem in Blind Adolescents Based on Coopersmith's Theory

Process Phase/Stage	General Description (Cross-Case)	Subject Quote (RA / A / ATND)	Theoretical Analysis (Coopersmith, 1967 and Supporters)
Self-Acceptance (Significance)	The initial phase is marked by acceptance from family and the social environment. This acceptance fosters a sense of security, appreciation, and value as a blind individual.	RA: They still accept and love me. There is no difference. A: "I used to feel inferior (in regular school), but here (at the special needs school) I feel accepted." ATND: "At first I was afraid of being rejected, but my friends turned out to be nice."	Social acceptance forms the basis of significance, which is the feeling of being valued and accepted. This becomes the emotional foundation for the development of high self-esteem. (Coopersmith, 1967; Rogers, 1951)
Phase 2: Strengthening Control and Competence	After feeling accepted, participants began to show control over their life choices and confidence in their abilities. Social support encouraged them to dare to try new things and develop their abilities.	RA: I chose it myself. A: "I decide my own path." ATND: "At first I was shy, but now I'm brave enough to participate in competitions."	This phase shows the relationship between control and competence, where a sense of acceptance strengthens self-confidence to act. Experiences of success (mastery experiences) strengthen self-control and self-efficacy. (Bandura, 1967)
Phase 3: Independence and Integrity (Power-Virtue)	At this stage, individuals demonstrate independence, responsibility, and moral orientation. Self-acceptance transforms into a belief in doing good and contributing to the social environment.	RA: "I will continue to do good." A: "I want to be useful to others." ATND: "Sometimes I still ask my parents, but I'm learning to be independent."	This phase reflects the development of power (the ability to influence oneself and one's environment) and virtue (moral maturity). Both emerge simultaneously as the end result of strong self-acceptance and self-control. (Coopersmith, 1967; Erikson, 1968)

The process of high self-esteem formation among adolescents with visual impairments at SLB A Bina Insani demonstrates a complex and continuous interplay between external and internal factors. Based on the cross-case synthesis, all participants (RA, A, and ATND) experienced relatively similar stages of self-esteem development, albeit through distinct experiential pathways.

The initial stage of self-esteem formation was characterized by experiences of self-acceptance (acceptance–significance). For RA, unconditional acceptance from her family since childhood served as a strong psychological foundation for developing a sense of security and self-confidence. She not only felt loved but was also involved equally in household activities. This acceptance functioned as emotional validation, fostering significance—a sense of being important and valued. Theoretically, this condition aligns with the views of Coopersmith (1967) and Rogers (1951), who emphasize that acceptance from significant others forms the basis of positive self-esteem by cultivating positive regard and internal perceptions of competence.

In contrast, A's process began with experiences of social rejection and feelings of inferiority. These negative experiences led to low self-evaluation until he entered SLB A Bina Insani. The supportive school environment became a psychological turning point, transforming feelings of rejection into experiences of acceptance. This transformation marked a critical moment in which A began to assert control over himself. By gradually determining his own life direction, he transitioned from acceptance toward control. This process illustrates how external acceptance can function as a catalyst for the development of internal control (internal locus of control). The cognitive and emotional changes observed reflect a mechanism of "self-esteem restoration" through consistent social validation.

For ATND, the journey of self-esteem formation unfolded more gradually. Although he initially felt awkward and anxious about potential rejection, positive experiences at school and support from peers fostered the courage to appear in public settings. Participation in school competitions became his first mastery experience, reinforcing a sense of competence. In line with Bandura's (1977) theory, mastery experiences strengthen self-belief and personal efficacy, which in turn enhance self-esteem.

The subsequent stage involved the strengthening of control and competence (control-competence). All three participants demonstrated that once they felt accepted, they became more willing to make decisions, choose activities independently, and align expectations with personal capacities. RA exhibited self-control through independence in assisting with household tasks, A began to define his own life direction, and ATND gradually gained confidence to express himself through public activities. This stage highlights the direct relationship between acceptance and control: feeling accepted creates psychological safety, which in turn enables the emergence of self-confidence and autonomous action.

The final stage was characterized by independence and self-integrity (power-virtue). At this phase, participants demonstrated the ability to regulate themselves and assume social responsibility. RA affirmed her moral values through a commitment to continue doing good deeds. A expressed life meaning through a desire to be useful to others. ATND, although still in the process of developing independence, showed a strong motivation to contribute and improve himself. This stage indicates that power and virtue represent the culmination of a prolonged journey of self-acceptance and self-control formation. As described by Coopersmith (1967) and Erikson (1968), independence and integrity constitute the peak of self-esteem development, wherein individuals not only trust their abilities but also possess a moral commitment to actualize themselves within society.

In summary, the findings of this study demonstrate that the formation of high self-esteem among adolescents with visual impairments is a dynamic process that progresses from external acceptance toward internal independence. This process is not linear but unfolds through reflective and emotional stages in which social support functions as a catalyst, and self-control emerges as the internalized outcome of acceptance. The interaction among acceptance, control, competence, and power reveals reciprocal relationships that shape an adaptive, stable, and resilient psychological system capable of withstanding social stigma and physical limitations.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the formation of high self-esteem among adolescents with visual impairments does not occur in a static or partial manner, but rather through a

progressive and mutually reinforcing process. Experiences of self-acceptance serve as the primary foundation, which subsequently develop into self-control, a sense of competence, and ultimately an awareness of personal power. Acceptance from family members, teachers, and peers functions as more than emotional support; it constitutes a foundation of psychological safety that enables adolescents with visual impairments to affirm their identities, make autonomous decisions, and develop the courage to express their capacities. Accordingly, acceptance should not be understood merely as an initial prerequisite for self-esteem, but also as a catalyst within the psychological mechanism that fosters the emergence of control, competence, and morally grounded independence.

This acceptance not only generates emotional security but also becomes the basis for the emergence of authentic self-control among adolescents with visual impairments. This process manifested differently across participants. For RA, consistent family support fostered stable self-confidence from an early age. In contrast, for A, experiences of social rejection led to a developmental delay until he encountered an accepting environment, at which point he began to assert personal autonomy. These findings illustrate that social acceptance operates as a catalyst rather than a passive variable, as it accelerates self-awareness and the capacity to regulate one's life, not merely the experience of being cared for. This demonstrates that in the formation of self-esteem among adolescents with visual impairments, acceptance triggers control when it is provided at a critical moment and within a strong emotional context.

The subsequent stage is reflected in the strengthening of competence, wherein adolescents with visual impairments begin to demonstrate their ability to confront challenges, develop skills, and validate their capacities. However, this competence is not merely the result of training or external guidance; it emerges from the internalization of the belief that they are valuable, deserving of being heard, and entitled to participate meaningfully. This is evident in the participants' decision-making, their willingness to compete in public events, and their consistent display of responsible behavior. Thus, competence represents the culmination of a value-formation process rooted in acceptance and the courage to test personal boundaries, rather than being solely attributable to external instruction.

At the final stage, awareness of power and virtue emerges, as adolescents with visual impairments come to understand that they are not only capable, but also able to contribute positively to their environment. However, the findings suggest that power does not always manifest as a stable or definitive final stage. For instance, ATND was still in the process of developing independence. This indicates that power, in the context of adolescents with disabilities, is more appropriately understood as a continuously evolving dimension rather than a fixed endpoint. The implication of this finding is that theories of self-esteem formation among adolescents with visual impairments should account for the fluidity and uncertainty inherent in their lived experiences, rather than imposing rigid hierarchical models. Accordingly, self-esteem formation should be conceptualized as an ongoing negotiation among vulnerability, opportunity, and social interaction.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the formation of high self-esteem among adolescents with visual impairments is a gradual process that begins with self-acceptance fostered through emotional support from family members, teachers, and peers. Within the context of visual

disability, acceptance plays a foundational role that enables the development of self-control, a sense of competence, and social empowerment, thereby extending the explanatory scope of Coopersmith's model. Accordingly, this study underscores the importance of consistent social support as a critical foundation for adolescents with visual impairments to internalize positive self-perceptions. This investigation is particularly relevant as it maps complex psychological dynamics while emphasizing that self-esteem formation is not static, but rather shaped by continuous interactions between internal and external factors.

Future studies are encouraged to include participants from more diverse social and cultural backgrounds to enable a broader understanding of self-esteem formation among adolescents with visual impairments. In addition, longitudinal approaches may be employed to document changes in self-esteem across developmental stages, as well as to explore the roles of assistive technologies, inclusive education policies, and cultural influences in shaping psychosocial independence among adolescents with visual impairments. Such efforts are expected to strengthen cross-contextual understanding and to open avenues for more targeted and effective interventions.

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