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Psycho-Social Determinants of Learning Disabilities of Special Need Students in Inclusive Secondary Schools in Ekiti State

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Abstract: *The study examined the psycho-social determinants of learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools in Ekiti State. The descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted for this study. The population for this study comprised of all students in inclusive schools in Ekiti State and a total of 400 students were selected from inclusive schools across Ekiti State using purposive sampling procedure. An instrument titled "Psycho-Social Determinants of Learning Disabilities Questionnaire (PDLDQ)" was used to collect of data for the study. The instrument was validated by various experts using the face and content validity. For the reliability of the instrument, test-retest method was employed which yield a reliability coefficient of 0.80. The data collected were analyzed using inferential statistics. The study also revealed significant positive relationship between mental health challenges, cultural factors, self-concept, executive functioning, technological access and learning disabilities of special need students. The study therefore concluded that psycho-social determinants significantly influence of learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools in Ekiti State.The study recommended that schools should integrate mental health support services, including on-site counselors, psychologists, and social-emotional learning programs, specifically designed to address the psychological needs of students with learning disabilities. Also, educational institutions should adopt culturally responsive teaching practices and should provide explicit instruction in executive functioning skills, including organizational strategies, time management techniques, and study skills, along with structured support systems such as visual schedules and task organizers for special need students. Educational authorities should ensure equitable distribution of assistive technologies and digital learning tools to all special need students.*

Keywords: psycho – social, learning disabilities, special need students, inclusive secondary schools

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INTRODUCTION

Learning disabilities are a broad group of brain-based disorders that affect about 5-15% of school-age children around the world, creating serious difficulties for education systems everywhere (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Over the years, education has changed greatly, with more focus on inclusive education, which brings students with special needs, including those with learning disabilities, into regular classrooms. This change shows a growing belief that every student, no matter their ability, has the right to receive a good education in the most open and supportive setting possible (Greenwood et al., 2020). Even with these improvements, students with learning disabilities still face many obstacles in their academic performance, social life, and mental health, which are greatly shaped by psychological and social factors at the personal, family, school, and community levels.

Learning disabilities refer to a group of conditions that cause serious difficulties in skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematics, even when a student has average or above-average intelligence. These conditions appear in different forms, such as dyslexia, which affects reading, dyscalculia, which affects mathematics, and dysgraphia, which affects writing, among others (Rowan & Al-Yagon, 2019). Learning disabilities are a complex area of study that has changed greatly over the years in terms of how they are understood, defined, and treated. Understanding the social and psychological aspects of these conditions is therefore very important for creating useful support systems within inclusive school settings.

Inclusive education is an approach to schooling that supports the idea that all children, regardless of their physical, mental, social, emotional, or language differences, should be welcomed in schools. In practice today, inclusive schools show their commitment by offering the right adjustments, changes, and support services to make sure that students with special needs can fully take part in regular classrooms alongside their peers without disabilities (Slee, 2018). This approach is a major step away from the old system of separating students with disabilities into special schools, and it is built on the belief that all people with disabilities have the right to participate, access, and be treated fairly in education (Florian, 2019). Inclusive schools therefore ensure that students with special needs are given proper opportunities to learn effectively.

Students with special needs are those who require extra or specialized educational services because of physical, cognitive, emotional, or behavioral differences, and they make up a large portion of students worldwide. Studies show that roughly 13-15% of students in developed countries receive some form of special education, and this number keeps growing as doctors and educators become better at identifying such needs (Anderson & Martinez, 2023). The way special needs are understood has shifted from a medical view that focused only on a student's weaknesses and limitations to a broader view that considers how personal traits and the surrounding environment work together. This shift reflects wider changes in how disability and education are seen, moving away from separate special schools toward inclusive settings that aim to serve all students within mainstream classrooms. Successfully including students with learning disabilities therefore

requires attention not just to classroom teaching but also to the wider social and psychological environment in which learning takes place.

Psychosocial determinants are the mental and social conditions that affect a person's life, and they include factors such as social support, stress, financial status, community relationships, personal control, and early life experiences. These factors work through different channels, including direct effects on the body's immune and heart systems, changes in behavior and health-related choices, and broader social structures that create unequal access to resources and opportunities (Martinez-Rodriguez & Thompson, 2024). Some of the psychosocial factors that influence learning disabilities include socioeconomic status, parental involvement, teacher attitudes and skills, peer relationships, school policies, mental health challenges, cultural and language factors, self-concept, thinking and organizational skills, and access to technology, all of which interact in complex ways to shape the educational journeys of students with learning disabilities in inclusive schools.

Mental health challenges frequently co-occur with learning disabilities and represent significant determinants of educational outcomes. Anxiety, depression, and attentional difficulties disproportionately affect students with learning disabilities, creating complex barriers to learning. These emotional difficulties can exacerbate learning challenges by impairing concentration, reducing cognitive efficiency, and diminishing motivation (Ghandour et al., 2019). Furthermore, the researchers documented that when learning disabilities remained unaddressed, the risk of developing mental health conditions increased approximately threefold, creating cyclical patterns of academic and psychological difficulties. This underscores the importance of integrated approaches that simultaneously address learning needs and emotional well-being.

Cultural and linguistic factors significantly impact the identification and support of learning disabilities, particularly for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Inappropriate assessment practices that fail to account for cultural differences or language proficiency can lead to both over-identification and under-identification of learning disabilities. Understanding cultural influences on learning styles, communication patterns, and educational values is essential for accurate identification and effective intervention (Nasamran& Witmer, 2022). Additionally, students navigating multiple cultural contexts often experience additional cognitive demands that can mask or exacerbate learning difficulties, highlighting the need for nuanced, culturally informed approaches to assessment and intervention.

Self-concept and academic identity powerfully influence how students with learning disabilities engage with educational opportunities. Negative self-perceptions regarding academic capabilities often develop through repeated experiences of failure or comparison with peers. Negative self-perceptions predicts reduced effort, academic avoidance behaviors, and lower achievement independent of actual ability levels (Battistuttaet al., 2018). Targeted interventions enhancing self-efficacy and providing mastery experiences improved both self-concept and subsequent academic performance, highlighting the bidirectional relationship between self-perception and achievement.Executive functioning skills represent fundamental cognitive processes that enable

planning, organization, time management, and self-regulation—abilities frequently affected in many learning disabilities. These skills serve as critical mediators between cognitive potential and academic performance. Psychosocial factors including stress, sleep quality, and classroom structure significantly influenced executive function efficiency in daily academic contexts (Dekker et al., 2022). These findings highlight how environmental supports or stressors can either mitigate or exacerbate executive functioning challenges that frequently accompany learning disabilities.Finally, technological access and digital literacy increasingly determine educational opportunities and outcomes for students with learning disabilities. Assistive technologies and digital tools can significantly enhance learning by compensating for specific processing difficulties or providing alternative means of engagement with educational content.

As the field of inclusive education continues to evolve, several promising directions for research and practice regarding the psychosocial determinants of learning disabilities have emerged. Strengths-based approaches that identify and leverage the unique capabilities and interests of students with learning disabilities show potential for enhancing motivation, engagement, and academic outcomes (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022). Universal design for learning frameworks that incorporate multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement can create more accessible and supportive learning environments for diverse learners (Rose et al., 2020). Additionally, self-determination interventions that promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness among students with learning disabilities have demonstrated positive effects on educational outcomes and quality of life.

Statement of the Problem

Learning disabilities among special needs students in inclusive schools in Ekiti State represent a significant educational challenge that seems not to have received adequate attention despite its profound implications for academic outcomes and life trajectories. Although inclusive education policy has been adopted in Nigeria, students with learning disabilities continue to experience substantial barriers to educational success, with preliminary observations indicating that psychosocial factors may play a critical role in either exacerbating or mitigating these challenges. Recent educational performance data from Ekiti State reveals concerning patterns of underachievement, social isolation, and psychological distress among special needs students, suggesting that current educational approaches may be insufficient in addressing the complex interplay of factors influencing their learning experiences.While previous research seems to have explored various aspects of special education in Nigeria, there exists a significant knowledge gap regarding the specific psychosocial determinants that influence learning disabilities in Ekiti State's inclusive educational context. The relationship between factors such as mental health challenges, cultural factors, self-concept, executive functioning, and technological access; and their collective impact on learning disabilities remains poorly understood, this lack of specific understanding seems to hamper the development and implementation of effective interventions, support systems, and policies that could potentially improve educational outcomes for special needs students in Ekiti State's inclusive schools. It is on this note that this study aims to examine these psychosocial

determinants and their relationship to learning disabilities among special needs students in inclusive schools in Ekiti State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine psycho-social determinants of learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools in Ekiti State.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for this study:

i. There is no significant relationship between mental health challenges and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools;
ii. There is no significant relationship between cultural factors and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools;
iii. There is no significant relationship between self-concept and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools;
iv. There is no significant relationship between executive functioning and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools;
v. There is no significant relationship between technological access and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. A total of 400 students were purposively selected from inclusive schools across Ekiti State, and data was collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire titled "Psycho-Social Determinants of Learning Disabilities Questionnaire (PDLDQ). The instrument's face and content validity were established through various expert review at Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, while its reliability was confirmed through a test-retest method administered to 20 non-sampled participants over a two-week interval, producing a Pearson Product Moment Correlation reliability coefficient of 0.80. The data collected were subsequently analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation inferential statistics to test the study's hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between mental health challenges and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between mental health challenges and learning disabilities of special need students

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	P
Mental Health Challenges	400	8.35	3.70	0.721*	0.000
Learning Disabilities	400	10.37	4.60		

p < 0.05 (Significant Result)

Table 1 shows a significant positive relationship between mental health challenges and learning disabilities of special need students, r = 0.721, p-value = 0.000 (p < 0.05). Therefore, the hypothesis formulated which states that there is no significant relationship between mental health challenges and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools was rejected.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between cultural factors and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between cultural factors and learning disabilities of special need students

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	P
Cultural Factors	400	8.72	3.79	0.506*	0.000
Learning Disabilities	400	10.37	4.60		

p < 0.05 (Significant Result)

Table 2 shows a significant positive relationship between cultural factors and learning disabilities of special need students, r = 0.506, p-value = 0.000 (p < 0.05). Therefore, the hypothesis formulated which states that there is no significant relationship between cultural factors and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools was rejected.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant relationship between self-concept and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between self-concept and learning disabilities of special need students

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	P
Self-Concept	400	9.07	3.85	0.638*	0.000
Learning Disabilities	400	10.37	4.60		

p < 0.05 (Significant Result)

Table 3 shows a significant positive relationship between self-concept and learning disabilities of special need students, r = 0.638, p-value = 0.000 (p < 0.05). Therefore, the hypothesis formulated which states that there is no significant relationship between self-concept and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools was rejected.

Hypothesis Four: There is no significant relationship between executive functioning and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between executive functioning and learning disabilities of special need students

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	P
Executive Functioning	1,200	8.12	3.60	0.745*	0.000
Learning Disabilities	1,200	10.37	4.60		

p < 0.05 (Significant Result)

Table 4 shows a significant positive relationship between executive functioning and learning disabilities of special need students, r = 0.745, p-value = 0.000 (p < 0.05). Therefore, the hypothesis formulated which states that there is no significant relationship between executive functioning and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools was rejected.

Hypothesis Five: There is no significant relationship between technological access and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools.

Table 5: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between technological access and learning disabilities of special need students

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	p
Technological Access	1,200	8.57	3.75	0.559*	0.000
Learning Disabilities	1,200	10.37	4.60		

p < 0.05 (Significant Result)

Table 5 shows a significant positive relationship between technological access and learning disabilities of special need students, r = 0.559, p-value = 0.000 (p < 0.05). Therefore, the hypothesis formulated which states that there is no significant relationship between technological access and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools was rejected.

DISCUSSION

Findings revealed a significant positive relationship between mental health challenges and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools. This positive correlation indicates that mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and emotional difficulties are strongly associated with more pronounced learning disabilities among special need students. Mental health challenges can significantly interfere with cognitive processes essential for learning, including attention, memory, processing speed, and executive functioning. Students experiencing anxiety or depression often have difficulty concentrating in class, completing assignments, retaining information, and maintaining motivation for academic tasks. This finding is consistent with the research of Nelson and Harwood (2011), who found that students with learning disabilities have significantly higher rates of mental health problems compared to their peers, and these mental health issues substantially interfere with academic performance. Similarly, Mugnaini, Lassi, La Malfa, and Albertini (2019) established that the co-occurrence of learning disabilities and mental health challenges creates compounded difficulties that require integrated intervention approaches addressing both academic and psychological needs.The stress associated with learning disabilities

can also trigger or exacerbate mental health problems, creating a cyclical relationship where each condition intensifies the other. Additionally, the social and academic struggles faced by special need students can lead to feelings of inadequacy, low self-worth, and emotional distress that further impair their learning capabilities.

Finding from Table 2 revealed a significant positive relationship between cultural factors and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools. This positive correlation suggests that cultural beliefs, language barriers, and limited cultural responsiveness are associated with increased manifestations of learning disabilities. Cultural beliefs about disabilities can influence how families perceive and respond to their children's learning challenges, potentially delaying diagnosis and intervention. This finding aligns with the research of Harry and Klingner (2014), who documented that cultural and linguistic differences significantly impact the identification, assessment, and service delivery for students with learning disabilities, often resulting in misdiagnosis or inadequate support. However, Kozleski and Waitoller (2010) found that culturally responsive inclusive practices can mitigate these challenges and improve outcomes when schools actively work to understand and incorporate diverse cultural perspectives in their special education programs.Language barriers can affect the accurate identification and assessment of learning disabilities, as students may struggle academically due to language differences rather than inherent learning difficulties. Additionally, when schools lack cultural responsiveness, diverse students and their families may feel alienated, leading to reduced engagement and support for special education services. Cultural misunderstandings between educators and families can create barriers to effective communication and collaboration in developing appropriate interventions.

Result showed a significant positive relationship between self-concept and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools. This positive correlation indicates that negative self-perceptions and low self-esteem are associated with more pronounced learning disabilities among special need students. This finding is consistent with the research of Zeleke (2014), who found that children with learning disabilities generally have lower self-concept than their peers without disabilities, and this negative self-perception significantly impacts their academic motivation and achievement. Similarly, Burden (2018) established that the relationship between learning disabilities and self-concept is bidirectional, with learning difficulties contributing to poor self-concept, which in turn exacerbates academic struggles and reduces resilience in facing educational challenges.Students who view themselves negatively often develop a fixed mindset about their abilities, believing they cannot improve or succeed academically, which reduces their effort and persistence in learning tasks. Poor self-concept can lead to learned helplessness, where students stop trying because they expect to fail. The repeated academic struggles experienced by students with learning disabilities often erode their confidence and self-worth, creating a negative cycle where low self-concept further impairs academic performance. Additionally, students with poor self-concept are less likely to seek help, participate in class discussions, or take on challenging tasks that could promote learning.

Finding revealed a significant positive relationship between executive functioning and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools. This positive correlation indicates that

difficulties with executive functions, including planning, organizing, time management, working memory, and attention regulation, are strongly associated with increased manifestations of learning disabilities. Executive functioning skills are fundamental to academic success, as they enable students to initiate tasks, sustain attention, organize information, manage time effectively, and regulate their behavior and emotions. Students with executive functioning deficits struggle to break down complex tasks into manageable steps, remember multi-step instructions, prioritize assignments, and monitor their own learning progress. This finding aligns with the research of Meltzer (2018), who established that executive function deficits are core features of many learning disabilities and significantly predict academic difficulties across subject areas, with interventions targeting executive skills showing promise in improving outcomes.These challenges compound existing learning disabilities by making it difficult for students to apply compensatory strategies or benefit fully from instruction. Executive functioning difficulties also affect students' ability to organize their thoughts coherently in writing, solve complex mathematical problems systematically, and retain information across different contexts.

Finding revealed a significant positive relationship between technological access and learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools. This positive correlation indicates that limited access to assistive technology and digital learning tools is associated with increased manifestations and severity of learning disabilities. When students lack access to assistive technologies such as text-to-speech software, graphic organizers, or adaptive learning programs, they are unable to compensate for their disabilities effectively. Additionally, inadequate teacher training in integrating technology for special needs students limits the potential benefits of available technological tools. Without appropriate technological support, students with learning disabilities face greater barriers to learning and may fall further behind their peers. This finding is consistent with the research of Edyburn (2013), who found that access to assistive technology significantly impacts educational outcomes for students with disabilities, with technological supports enabling greater independence and academic success. Similarly, Ok, Kim, Kang, and Bryant (2016) established that technology-based interventions and assistive technologies effectively support students with learning disabilities by providing individualized instruction, immediate feedback, and alternative means of accessing and expressing information, but disparities in access create educational inequities.Adequate technological resources can provide essential accommodations that help students with learning disabilities access curriculum, complete assignments, and demonstrate their knowledge in ways that circumvent their specific challenges.

CONCLUSION

Sequel to the findings of the study, it was concluded that psycho-social determinants like mental health challenges, cultural factors, self-concept, executive functioning and technological access significantly influence of learning disabilities of special need students in inclusive schools in Ekiti State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings obtained, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. Schools should integrate mental health support services, including on-site counselors, psychologists, and social-emotional learning programs, specifically designed to address the psychological needs of students with learning disabilities.
2. Educational institutions should adopt culturally responsive teaching practices, provide multilingual assessment tools, and engage cultural liaisons to bridge communication gaps between diverse families and school staff regarding learning disabilities.
3. Teachers and counselors should implement strength-based interventions, celebrate small achievements, and provide regular positive feedback to help special need students develop realistic yet positive self-perceptions and confidence in their abilities.
4. Schools should provide explicit instruction in executive functioning skills, including organizational strategies, time management techniques, and study skills, along with structured support systems such as visual schedules and task organizers for special need students.
5. Educational authorities should ensure equitable distribution of assistive technologies and digital learning tools to all special need students while providing comprehensive training for teachers on effective integration of technology in supporting diverse learning needs.

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