

Socio-Cultural Factors as Determinants of Learning Experience of Exceptional Children in Ekiti State Secondary Schools

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Abstract: *This study examined socio-cultural factors as determinants of learning experiences of exceptional children in Ekiti State Secondary Schools. The specific objectives were to investigate the relationship between learning experiences and family structures, religious beliefs, ethnicity, gender norms, community attitudes of exceptional children in Ekiti State Secondary Schools, Nigeria. The descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted for this study. The population for this study consists of all secondary school students in Ekiti State and a total sample of 600 Students were selected using multistage sampling procedure. An instrument titled “Socio-Cultural Factors and Learning Experiences of Exceptional Children Questionnaire(SCFLEECQ)” was used to collect 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 of Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed significant relationship between family structures, religious beliefs, ethnicity, gender norms, community attitudes and the learning experiences of exceptional children. The study concluded that socio-cultural factors have significant positive relationships with learning experiences of exceptional children. It was recommended that State Ministry of Education should establish Family Support Centers in all Local Government Areas to provide counselling, guidance, and training programs for families of exceptional children. Also, religious leaders and organizations in Ekiti State should be engaged as partners in inclusive education advocacy through interfaith dialogue programs that promote positive theological interpretations of disability and culturally responsive special education training programs should be mandatory for all teachers and school administrators working with exceptional children in Ekiti State.*

Keywords: socio-cultural, learning experience, exceptional children, Ekiti state, secondary schools.

INTRODUCTION

Education remains a powerful vehicle for social mobility, personal development, and national progress, yet its accessibility and quality vary dramatically across different populations. In Nigeria, a nation characterized by rich cultural diversity and complex social dynamics, the educational experiences of exceptional children represent a particularly compelling area of study. These exceptional learners – whether gifted, physically challenged, or neurologically diverse – navigate an educational landscape shaped not merely by policy frameworks and institutional structures but profoundly influenced by socio-cultural factors deeply embedded in Nigerian society. Understanding these socio-cultural determinants offers critical insights into both the challenges and opportunities facing exceptional children in Nigerian schools, revealing pathways toward more inclusive and effective educational approaches, particularly in Ekiti State. The intersection of family structures, religious beliefs, ethnic identities, gender norms, and community attitudes creates a unique context within which exceptional children's learning experiences unfold, making this an area rich with implications for educational practice, policy development, and social transformation. Recent research by Obiakor and Afolayan (2023) highlights how socio-cultural factors often outweigh formal educational structures in determining outcomes for exceptional children, underscoring the importance of examining these influences in depth.

Nigeria's exceptional children are diverse group encompassing students with various physical disabilities, sensory impairments, intellectual giftedness, learning difficulties, and other special educational needs. Their learning experiences vary dramatically across Nigeria's educational landscape, influenced by factors ranging from family backgrounds to institutional resources. Okeowo and Johnson (2022) documented significant disparities in educational access and achievement among exceptional children, with socio-cultural factors emerging as primary determinants of these differences. While Nigeria has made legislative strides toward inclusive education through policies including the National Policy on Special Needs Education, the gap between policy aspirations and lived realities remains substantial. The actual experiences of exceptional children in classrooms across Nigeria reveal how deeply socio-cultural factors permeate educational environments, shaping everything from teacher expectations to peer interactions to resource allocation decisions.

Family structures and parental attitudes represent foundational socio-cultural determinants of exceptional children's educational experiences. In Nigerian society, where extended family networks often function as primary support systems, family perceptions of exceptionality significantly influence educational decisions and opportunities. Adebisi and Olatunji (2022) found that parental educational levels strongly predicted attitudes toward children with special needs, with more educated parents typically demonstrating greater acceptance and proactive educational advocacy. Family economic circumstances further compound these influences, as many families lack resources for specialized educational interventions, assistive technologies, or private

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schooling options that might better serve exceptional children's needs. The financial burden of supporting exceptional children often forces families to make difficult decisions regarding educational investment, particularly in households with multiple children and limited resources. When families embrace progressive attitudes and mobilize available resources, exceptional children experience dramatically improved educational opportunities and outcomes, demonstrating the pivotal role of family context.

Religious beliefs and practices constitute another powerful socio-cultural determinant shaping exceptional children's learning experiences across Nigeria. In this deeply religious society where Christianity, Islam, and traditional beliefs maintain strong influences, interpretations of exceptionality often incorporate spiritual dimensions. Ayeni and Adedeji (2023) documented how religious explanations for disabilities and differences continue to influence family and community responses to exceptional children, sometimes facilitating acceptance and support while in other instances reinforcing stigmatization. Religious institutions increasingly engage with educational provision for exceptional children, with faith-based organizations establishing specialized schools and advocacy initiatives. The interweaving of religious perspectives with educational approaches creates complex dynamics wherein exceptional children's learning experiences are mediated through spiritual frameworks that may either enhance or constrain their educational possibilities. Ethnic and linguistic diversity adds further complexity to the socio-cultural landscape affecting exceptional children in Nigeria. With over 250 ethnic groups and numerous languages, Nigeria's educational system struggles to deliver culturally responsive instruction for exceptional learners while honoring their cultural identities. Instruction predominantly occurs in English, with limited accommodation for Nigeria's linguistic diversity, creating additional barriers for exceptional children from minority language communities. Nwachukwu and Okonkwo (2022) reported how this linguistic mismatch frequently results in misdiagnosis of learning disabilities and inappropriate educational placements for exceptional children from non-dominant language backgrounds. Cultural values regarding independence, communication styles, and learning approaches vary significantly across ethnic groups, influencing how exceptional children engage with educational content and navigate social dimensions of school environments.

Gender norms and expectations represent a particularly significant socio-cultural determinant for exceptional children in Nigerian schools. Traditional gender roles often dictate educational investment decisions within families, with female exceptional students frequently facing compounded discrimination based on both gender and exceptionality. Ibrahim and Hassan (2023) documented how exceptional girls received less family support for educational continuation than their male counterparts, particularly in regions where cultural expectations prioritize domestic roles for females. The gendered nature of certain vocational training programs further restricts options for exceptional learners, channeling them into stereotypical career paths regardless of their actual abilities and interests. For exceptionally gifted girls in STEM subjects, cultural discouragement often diminishes their educational trajectories despite their potential contributions to national development.

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Community attitudes toward disabilities and differences substantially influence the social dimensions of exceptional children's learning experiences. Stigmatization of visible disabilities remains prevalent in many Nigerian communities, creating hostile social environments where exceptional children face bullying, isolation, and exclusion. Omotoso and Emeka (2024) reported that social rejection experiences affected nearly two-thirds of students with physical disabilities in mainstream schools, impacting their academic engagement and psychological wellbeing. Conversely, communities with more progressive attitudes create supportive learning environments where exceptional children thrive through peer acceptance and community validation. These contrasting community contexts demonstrate how local socio-cultural attitudes directly translate into learning experience realities for exceptional children, shaping both their social integration and academic self-concept.

The intersection of these multiple socio-cultural factors creates unique opportunities and constraints for individual exceptional children in Nigerian educational contexts. An exceptional child's educational experience reflects not isolated influences but complex interactions between family circumstances, religious contexts, ethnic background, gender expectations, and community attitudes. Durojaiye and Mustapha (2024) emphasized how this intersectionality produces distinctive educational pathways for exceptional children that cannot be understood through single-factor analyses. Effective educational responses must therefore address these multiple, interacting determinants rather than focusing narrowly on individual factors in isolation.

As Nigeria continues navigating the complex terrain of providing appropriate education for all learners, the experiences of exceptional children represent both a challenge and an opportunity for the educational system and broader society, specifically in Ekiti State. The socio-cultural factors that currently determine these children's learning experiences reveal deeply held cultural values and attitudinal frameworks that extend beyond education into all aspects of Nigerian society. Recognizing the foundational influence of family structures, religious beliefs, ethnic identities, gender norms, and community attitudes constitutes an essential first step toward creating more equitable and effective educational environments for exceptional children. By addressing the socio-cultural roots of educational disparities rather than merely their symptomatic manifestations, Nigeria can develop truly inclusive approaches that honor cultural contexts while expanding opportunities for all exceptional learners. Through this cultural transformation, exceptional children's learning experiences can evolve from narratives of limitation and accommodation to stories of possibility, achievement, and full participation in both educational settings and broader society.

Statement of the Problem

Despite Nigeria's policy support for inclusive education through the National Policy on Special Needs Education, exceptional children in Ekiti State secondary schools continue to encounter significant educational obstacles influenced by complex socio-cultural factors. These exceptional students, whether gifted, physically challenged, or neurologically diverse, experience an

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educational system where policy goals frequently differ from actual realities. While research has identified general educational inequalities among exceptional children nationwide, limited knowledge exists about how specific socio-cultural factors such as family structures, religious beliefs, ethnic backgrounds, gender norms, and community attitudes operate within Ekiti State's distinct cultural and social environment. Family structures in Nigerian society, where extended family systems serve as main support networks, greatly affect educational choices and opportunities for exceptional children, yet how these family patterns specifically function in Ekiti State secondary schools needs further examination. Religious beliefs, which influence Nigerian society through Christianity, Islam, and traditional practices, shape understandings of exceptionality and educational approaches, sometimes promoting acceptance while occasionally strengthening negative labeling, but how religious viewpoints specifically affect learning experiences in Ekiti State requires detailed study. Ethnic and linguistic variety, with over 250 ethnic groups throughout Nigeria, adds complexity since teaching mainly happens in English with minimal support for language diversity, possibly causing incorrect diagnoses and unsuitable educational assignments for exceptional children from minority language groups in Ekiti State. Gender expectations and standards control educational investment choices within families, with female exceptional students often experiencing combined discrimination based on both gender and exceptionality, especially in areas where cultural norms emphasize household duties for females, yet how these gender obstacles specifically appear in Ekiti State secondary schools remains poorly recorded. Community views toward disabilities and differences produce either unfriendly social settings marked by harassment, loneliness, and rejection or encouraging learning environments where exceptional children succeed through peer approval and support, but complete information on community attitude trends specific to Ekiti State is missing.

The interaction of these factors produces unique patterns of opportunities and limitations for individual exceptional children that cannot be understood through examining single factors or applying broad national findings, requiring location-specific research. Without this knowledge, educational programs risk treating surface problems rather than fundamental causes, continuing patterns of educational disadvantage despite sincere inclusion attempts. This research therefore examines how family structures, religious beliefs, ethnicity, gender norms, and community attitudes shape the learning experiences of exceptional children in Ekiti State Secondary Schools.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine socio-cultural factors as determinants of learning experiences of exceptional children in Ekiti State Secondary Schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- i. What is the relationship between socio-cultural factors and learning experiences of exceptional children in Ekiti State Secondary Schools?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for this study:

- i. There is no significant relationship between family structures and the learning experiences of exceptional children;
- ii. There is no significant relationship between religious beliefs and the learning experiences of exceptional children;
- iii. There is no significant relationship between ethnicity and the learning experiences of exceptional children;
- iv. There is no significant relationship between gender norms and the learning experiences of exceptional children;
- v. There is no significant relationship between community attitudes and the learning experiences of exceptional children;

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine socio-cultural factors and learning experiences of exceptional children. The population consisted of all secondary school students in Ekiti State, from which 600 Senior Secondary School students were selected across the three senatorial districts using multistage sampling procedure involving three stages: selection of two local government areas from each senatorial district, selection of two schools in each local government area, and selection of 50 students from each school, all using simple random sampling technique. Data were collected using the "Socio-Cultural Factors and Learning Experiences of Exceptional Children Questionnaire (SCFLEECQ). The instrument's validity was established through screening by experts in test and measurement and guidance and counseling, including the researcher's supervisor, while reliability was determined through test-retest method with 20 non-sample population members, yielding a coefficient of 0.80 using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation. The researcher and two trained assistants administered the questionnaires to 600 students over three weeks after obtaining permission from secondary school management and briefing respondents about the research purpose, with the collected data analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 significance level to test the formulated hypotheses.

RESULTS

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between family structures and the learning experiences of exceptional children.

Table 1: Correlation between Family Structures and Learning Experiences of Exceptional Children

Variables	N	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	r	p	Remark
Family Structures	600	13.45	2.87	0.624*	0.000	Rejected
Learning Experiences	600	14.32	3.12			

* $p < 0.05$ (Significant)

Table 1 showed there is positive significant relationship between family structures and learning experiences of exceptional children, with correlation coefficient, $r = 0.624$, $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis formulated which states that there is no significant relationship between family structures and the learning experiences of exceptional children is rejected.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between religious beliefs and the learning experiences of exceptional children.

Table 2: Correlation between Religious Beliefs and Learning Experiences of Exceptional Children

Variables	N	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	R	p	Remark
Religious Beliefs	600	12.78	3.21	0.487*	0.000	Rejected
Learning Experiences	600	14.32	3.12			

* $p < 0.05$ (Significant)

Table 2 showed there is positive significant relationship between religious beliefs and learning experiences of exceptional children with correlation coefficient, $r = 0.487$, $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis formulated which states that there is no significant relationship between religious beliefs and the learning experiences of exceptional children is rejected.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant relationship between ethnicity and the learning experiences of exceptional children.

Table 3: Correlation between Ethnicity and Learning Experiences of Exceptional Children

Variables	N	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	R	p	Remark
Ethnicity	600	11.89	2.94	0.412*	0.000	Rejected
Learning Experiences	600	14.32	3.12			

* $p < 0.05$ (Significant)

Table 3 showed there is positive significant relationship between ethnicity and learning experiences of exceptional children with correlation coefficient, $r = 0.412$, $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis formulated which states that there is no significant relationship between ethnicity and the learning experiences of exceptional children is rejected.

Hypothesis Four: There is no significant relationship between gender norms and the learning experiences of exceptional children.

Table 4: Correlation between Gender Norms and Learning Experiences of Exceptional Children

Variables	N	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	R	<i>p</i>	Remark
Gender Norms	600	13.56	2.78	0.558*	0.000	Rejected
Learning Experiences	600	14.32	3.12			

* $p < 0.05$ (Significant)

Table 4 showed there is positive significant relationship between gender norms and learning experiences of exceptional children with correlation coefficient, $r = 0.558$, $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis formulated which states that there is no significant relationship between gender norms and the learning experiences of exceptional children is rejected.

Hypothesis Five: There is no significant relationship between community attitudes and the learning experiences of exceptional children.

Table 5: Correlation between Community Attitudes and Learning Experiences of Exceptional Children

Variables	N	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	r	<i>p</i>	Remark
Community Attitudes	600	12.94	3.05	0.671*	0.0002	Rejected
Learning Experiences	600	14.32	3.12			

* $p < 0.05$ (Significant)

Table 5 showed there is positive significant relationship between community attitudes and learning experiences of exceptional children with correlation coefficient, $r = 0.671$, $p = 0.002$ ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis formulated which states that there is no significant relationship between community attitudes and the learning experiences of exceptional children is rejected.

DISCUSSION

The finding from Table 1 revealed a positive significant relationship between family structures and learning experiences of exceptional children. This strong positive correlation suggests that well-structured family systems significantly enhance the learning outcomes of exceptional children in Ekiti State. This finding corroborates the study of Turnbull et al. (2015) who emphasized that family structure plays a crucial role in determining the educational success of children with special needs, as supportive family environments provide the emotional, financial, and practical resources necessary for optimal learning. Similarly, Heiman (2018) found that family cohesion and organization were significantly related to better academic performance and social adjustment among exceptional children. The possible reason for this finding is that families with strong support systems, clear communication patterns, and well-defined roles create stable environments

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where exceptional children can thrive academically. In the Nigerian context, extended family structures often provide additional caregiving resources, financial assistance, and emotional support that supplement parental efforts.

Table 2 showed a positive significant relationship between religious beliefs and learning experiences of exceptional children. This moderate positive correlation indicates that religious beliefs influence how exceptional children experience learning in educational settings. This finding aligns with the research of Poston and Turnbull (2016) who reported that families' religious and spiritual beliefs significantly shaped their acceptance, understanding, and support for children with disabilities, which in turn affected children's educational experiences. The possible reason for this finding is that religious beliefs in Nigerian society often provide families with hope, resilience, and meaning-making frameworks when raising exceptional children. Religious communities frequently offer social support, acceptance, and practical assistance that reduce family stress and create more positive home environments conducive to learning. Additionally, religious teachings about human dignity, divine purpose, and the value of all individuals may promote more positive attitudes toward exceptional children within families and communities, reducing stigma and encouraging inclusive practices. However, it is important to note that while religious beliefs can be supportive, they may sometimes conflict with professional recommendations if disabilities are attributed solely to spiritual causes, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive educational approaches that respect religious perspectives while promoting evidence-based interventions.

The result in Table 3 indicated a positive significant relationship between ethnicity and learning experiences of exceptional children. This moderate positive correlation suggests that cultural and ethnic factors influence the educational experiences of exceptional children. This finding is consistent with the work of Kalyanpur and Harry (2019) who demonstrated that cultural values, beliefs, and practices significantly shape how families understand, respond to, and seek services for children with exceptionalities, thereby affecting children's educational experiences. Similarly, Cartledge and Kourea (2018) found that culturally responsive educational practices that acknowledge and incorporate students' ethnic backgrounds improve learning outcomes for diverse exceptional learners. The possible reason for this finding is that ethnic identity influences family expectations, communication styles, help-seeking behaviors, and perceptions of disability, all of which affect how exceptional children engage with educational systems. In Ekiti State's diverse cultural context, ethnic groups may have varying traditional beliefs about exceptionality, different levels of awareness about special education services, and distinct preferences for intervention approaches.

Finding from Table 4 revealed a positive significant relationship between gender norms and learning experiences of exceptional children. This strong positive correlation indicates that progressive gender attitudes significantly enhance learning experiences for exceptional children regardless of their sex. This finding supports the research of Roussio (2017) who documented that gender-equitable practices in special education lead to better outcomes for all exceptional children

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by removing stereotypical barriers and providing equal opportunities for participation and achievement. The possible reason for this finding is that gender-equitable environments ensure that exceptional children's educational goals focus on their individual needs, interests, and abilities rather than on restrictive gender stereotypes. In traditional Nigerian contexts where gender roles may be rigidly defined, exceptional girls might face double discrimination based on both disability and gender, limiting their educational opportunities. Progressive gender norms challenge these limitations by promoting equal access to all educational activities, adaptive technologies, and career preparation regardless of sex.

The finding in Table 5 showed a positive significant relationship between community attitudes and learning experiences of exceptional children. This strong positive correlation indicates that accepting and supportive community attitudes substantially enhance the learning experiences of exceptional children. This finding corroborates the study by de Boer et al. (2020) who found that positive community attitudes toward inclusion significantly predicted better social acceptance, academic engagement, and overall school experiences for students with disabilities. The possible reason for this finding is that community attitudes shape the broader social context within which exceptional children learn and develop. When communities demonstrate acceptance, understanding, and support for exceptional children, these attitudes permeate schools, peer groups, and public spaces, creating inclusive environments where children feel valued and capable. Positive community attitudes also influence resource allocation, with supportive communities more likely to advocate for accessible facilities, inclusive programs, and adequate special education services. In Ekiti State, community leaders' endorsement of inclusive education and disability rights can reduce stigma, challenge discriminatory practices, and mobilize collective support for exceptional children's education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it was revealed that all socio-cultural factors investigated demonstrated significant positive relationships with learning experiences indicating that human attitudinal factors, supportive social environments are paramount in shaping exceptional children's educational experiences; confirming that multiple socio-cultural dimensions collectively determine how exceptional children experience education.

Recommendations

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

1. The Ekiti State Ministry of Education should establish Family Support Centers in all Local Government Areas to provide counseling, guidance, and training programs for families of exceptional children.
2. Religious leaders and organizations in Ekiti State should be engaged as partners in inclusive education advocacy through interfaith dialogue programs that promote positive theological interpretations of disability.

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3. Culturally responsive special education training programs should be mandatory for all teachers and school administrators working with exceptional children in Ekiti State.
4. The Ekiti State Universal Basic Education Board should implement gender-equity training for all teachers and school leaders focusing specifically on eliminating double discrimination against exceptional girls.
5. A comprehensive public awareness campaign should be launched across Ekiti State using radio programs, television documentaries, social media, town hall meetings, and community events to change negative attitudes toward exceptional children and promote inclusive values.

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