



Title : **Assessing the Level of Self-Esteem, Social Engagement and Emotional Regulation of Learners with Special Needs in Inclusive Environment**

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10997544>

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Abstract:

This study aimed to evaluate the psychosocial well-being of learners with special educational needs (LSEs) in inclusive settings during the 2023-2024 school year at Luray II National High School, serving as a basis for an action plan. The research employed a descriptive evaluative and correlational method to gather data and determine the impact of mainstreaming LSEs into regular classes on their psychosocial well-being. The respondents for this study were learners with special educational needs who had been mainstreamed into regular classes, selected through purposive sampling techniques. To collect data, a two-part adapted questionnaire was utilized. The first part gathered demographic information about the LSEs, including age, gender, grade level, and type of disability. The second part consisted of questions related to the students' psychosocial well-being. The collected data were statistically analyzed using frequency, simple percentage, mean, and Chi-square tests of independence. The findings revealed that the majority of respondents were 15 years old and above, comprising 24.80% of the sample, and were in the 8th grade. Additionally, a majority of the respondents were male, accounting for 60.00% of the sample. Furthermore, most respondents hailed from low-income families, with 1-2 siblings, constituting 43.33% of the sample. The study also uncovered that the most prevalent disabilities among the learners were hearing impairment, intellectual disability, and autism. Regarding psychosocial well-being, the findings indicated that self-esteem levels were low, with a mean average of 2.41. Conversely, social connectedness was high, with a mean average of 2.55. Emotional regulation, however, was reported as low, with a mean average of 2.41. These results suggest that learners with special educational needs often experience diminished psychosocial well-being when integrated into regular classes.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Psychosocial Well-being, Learners with Special Educational Needs, Descriptive-Correlational Method



Introduction:

Inclusive education, which advocates for the education of all learners, regardless of ability, has received a lot of attention in recent years. This educational method strives to provide equitable chances for all students to actively engage, succeed, and thrive within a general education environment.

The view that, to the greatest extent possible, all Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEs) should be enrolled in their local schools and given support services and instruction tailored to their skills and requirements, is a crucial component of the concept of inclusive education. This concept is founded on the fundamental principles of respect for human variety and the right to equitable educational opportunities for all, as promulgated in the Salamanca Statement on Special Needs Education.

Students with special needs may compare themselves to their typically developing peers and perceive themselves as "less capable" or "different." This negative self-perception can affect their self-esteem and overall well-being. Research by Shoshani and Steinmetz (2013) found that children with special needs often perceived themselves as less competent, attractive, and socially accepted compared to their typically developing peers, leading to decreased self-esteem.

In addition, students with special needs often face difficulties in being included and accepted by their peers, which affects their social connectedness. They may experience rejection, isolation, or bullying due to their differences. Moreover, LSEs may have limited opportunities to engage in social interactions with their peers, leading to reduced social connectedness. They may have segregated classrooms or limited participation in extracurricular activities (Davis & Byrd, 2017; Koutsoftas & Gray, 2021).

They often struggle with developing and maintaining social-emotional skills, including emotional regulation. They may have difficulty identifying and understanding their own emotions, as well as regulating and expressing them appropriately (Zuckerman, 2018). Indeed, emotional regulation can be particularly challenging for students with special needs when faced with changes in routine or transitions between activities. These changes can disrupt their sense of predictability and stability, causing anxiety, frustration, and emotional dysregulation (Kern et al., 2016).

Integration is the practice of inclusive education practiced throughout the public schools in the Philippines. Teachers try to help these learners by integrating them into mainstream classes. This approach may have its origins in the Policies and Guidelines for Special Education (1997), which state that the ultimate goal of special education is the integration or mainstreaming of learners with exceptional needs into the general school system.

While inclusive education has been commended for its capacity to build a more diverse and welcoming society, there is a need for rigorous empirical research to investigate its effectiveness and impact on students' academic, social, and emotional outcomes. The fundamental reason for undertaking a study to examine inclusive education is the potential benefits it gives to learners of various capacities. According to research, inclusive education can promote better academic outcomes for students with disabilities, such as improved reading and arithmetic performance. However, fewer studies have researched the impact of social connections and friendships between students with and without disabilities, including their emotional development in the process.

This study attempts to contribute to the current body of literature by addressing many research gaps through a comprehensive evaluation of mainstreaming Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEs) in regular class. While numerous studies have looked into the influence of inclusive education on academic achievement, few have examined students' psychosocial well-being (Wolfendale et al., 2020). Research findings on self-esteem, social connectedness, and emotional regulation in students with special needs may vary due to the wide range of disabilities and needs within this population. Generalizing findings across different groups may be challenging, making it less attractive for researchers.

This research seeks to fill that gap by investigating the benefits of inclusive education on students' self-esteem, social interactions, and emotional development from the perspective of the teachers. It aims to expand our understanding of inclusive education and its potential advantages for students with a wide range of abilities. It strives to provide useful insights that can guide educational policies, practices, and interventions aimed at promoting more inclusive and equitable learning environments by assessing academic, social, and emotional outcomes within a rigorous research framework.

Literature Review:

The current study is grounded in three main theoretical frameworks: the PERMA theory of Well-being, Psychosocial Development Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory. These theories provide a robust foundation for understanding various aspects of human development and well-being.



Seligman's (2011) PERMA theory of well-being is central to this study, emphasizing five elements—positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment—that contribute to overall well-being. Positive emotions have been found to broaden individuals' cognitive and behavioral repertoires, enhancing physical health, immune functioning, and social relationships (Fredrickson, 2001). Engagement, represented by the state of flow, highlights the importance of immersive, enjoyable activities in promoting self-esteem and personal growth (Seligman, 2011). Relationships, crucial for well-being, provide social support and meaningful interactions that buffer against negative life events (Pinquart & Sorenses, 2003). Finding meaning in life fosters psychological well-being and resilience, while accomplishing goals enhances self-efficacy and subjective well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Steger, 2012).

Ryff's (2008) theory of psychological well-being complements Seligman's model, emphasizing six dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. These dimensions collectively contribute to individuals' psychological well-being, underscoring the interconnectedness of various aspects of positive psychological functioning (Ryff & Singer, 2008; Ryff, 2014).

Erikson's psychosocial theory delineates eight stages of human development, each characterized by unique conflicts or crises. Successful resolution of these stages leads to psychosocial growth and well-being, while failure may result in maladaptive outcomes. Erikson's theory highlights the interaction between biological and social factors in shaping human development across the lifespan (Erikson, 1950).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory emphasizes the dynamic interplay between individuals and their environments. This theory posits five ecological systems—microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem—that collectively influence human development. Understanding these systems provides insights into the complex interactions between individuals and their environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Additionally, the Salamanca Statement (2004) provides a framework for inclusive education, ensuring equal educational opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities or special needs. This statement underscores the importance of inclusive educational policies and institutions in fostering equitable learning environments (Lebeco & Verano, 2023).

Legal foundations for inclusive education in the Philippines are established through laws such as Republic Act No. 7277 (Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities) and Republic Act No. 11650 (Inclusive Education Act). These laws mandate equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities, prohibit discrimination, and promote inclusive educational practices (Republic of the Philippines, 1992; Republic of the Philippines, 2021).

DepEd policies, including DepEd Order No. 44 (Policy Guidelines on Educational Services for Learners with Disabilities) and DepEd Order No. 72 (Inclusive Education as Strategy for Increasing Participation Rate), provide guidelines and strategies for implementing inclusive education in the Philippines. These policies underscore the importance of creating supportive, inclusive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of all learners (Department of Education, 2021; Department of Education, 2009).

Methodology:

Design

This study utilized the descriptive evaluative and correlational method to assess the impact of mainstreaming Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEs) into regular classes on their psychosocial well-being. The descriptive survey design aimed to determine the range and distribution of social characteristics and their potential relationship with specific behavior patterns or attitudes. Additionally, the study examined the degree of association between two variables—the profile of LSEs and their psychosocial well-being. The data collection process involved treating, analyzing, and interpreting the gathered data, which included conducting surveys to assess the students' self-esteem, social connectedness, and emotional regulation from the perspective of their teachers.

Respondents

The research respondents were LSEs from the perspective of regular receiving teachers at Luray II National High School. The study focused on LSEs with hearing impairment, visual impairment, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), intellectual disability, and learning disabilities. Regular receiving teachers, who had undergone formal training on psychosocial well-being assessment, evaluated the psychosocial well-being of the learners. These teachers participated in a survey questionnaire about the profile of the LSEs and the status of their psychosocial well-being.

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Luray II National High School	30	100%
Total	30	100%



Instruments

The study employed a two-part adapted-modified questionnaire. The first part gathered the profiles of LSEs, including age, gender, grade level, and type of disability. The second part consisted of questions related to students' psychosocial well-being, categorized into self-esteem, social connectedness, and emotional regulation. The questionnaire items were adapted and modified from established works in the field and underwent content validation.

Data Gathering Procedure

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the data gathering process. Approval was obtained from relevant authorities, and consent forms were provided to the respondents. The data gathering stage involved face-to-face distribution of survey questionnaires or online submission through Google Forms, ensuring convenience for both respondents and the researcher. After data collection, questionnaires were reviewed for completeness, and statistical analysis was conducted. Data privacy was strictly observed to prevent misuse of information.

Statistical Treatment

The collected data were encoded, tabulated, and statistically analyzed using appropriate methods. Frequency and simple percentage were used to analyze the profile of LSEs, while weighted mean and standard deviation were employed to assess their psychosocial well-being. The Chi-square Test of Independence was utilized to determine any significant relationship between the profile of LSEs and their well-being status.

Scoring Procedure

Responses on the status of learners' psychosocial well-being were rated based on a scale. The scale included categories for self-esteem, social connectedness, and emotional regulation, each with corresponding interpretations based on mean scores.

A. Self-Esteem

Rate	Mean Range	Verbal Description
4	3.25 - 4.00	Strongly Agree
3	2.50 - 3.24	Agree
2	1.75 - 2.49	Disagree
1	1.00 - 1.74	Strongly Disagree

B. Social Connectedness

Rate	Mean Range	Verbal Description
4	3.25 - 4.00	Strongly Agree
3	2.50 - 3.24	Agree
2	1.75 - 2.49	Disagree
1	1.00 - 1.74	Strongly Disagree

C. Emotional Regulation

Rate	Mean Range	Verbal Description
4	3.25 - 4.00	Strongly Agree
3	2.50 - 3.24	Agree
2	1.75 - 2.49	Disagree
1	1.00 - 1.74	Strongly Disagree

Ethical Considerations

To address ethical considerations, caution was exercised in respondent selection to ensure accuracy and protect participant dignity and safety. Informed consent was obtained from respondents and organizations involved, and privacy and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study. No financial incentives were involved, and respondents were free to withdraw from the study without penalty. Vulnerable groups were not involved, and known risks were mitigated. Overall, the study adhered to ethical standards and prioritized participant welfare.

Results and Discussion:



Types of Disability

Table 1 presents the results of learners' profile in terms of the type of learner's disability:

Types of Disability	Frequency	Percentage
Autism	5	16.67%
Dyslexia	2	6.67%
Intellectual Disability	9	30.00%
Visual Impairment	1	3.33%
Hearing Impairment	13	43.33%
Total	30	100.00%

Learners with educational special needs encompass a diverse group of individuals who require tailored instruction due to various types of disabilities. These disabilities can range from physical, sensory, intellectual, or developmental impairments to learning, emotional, behavioral, or communication difficulties. Each learner possesses unique strengths and challenges, necessitating an individualized approach to accommodate their specific needs and maximize their learning potential.

The table shows that 13 respondents (43.33%) are children with hearing impairment. Following these are learners with intellectual disability (9, 30.00%) and autism (5, 16.67%). Only 6.67% are LSEs with dyslexia, and 3.33% are LSEs with visual impairment. This implies that the majority of LSEs mainstreamed in regular classes have hearing impairment, intellectual disability, and autism.

Mainstreaming students with different disabilities can foster a sense of inclusivity and acceptance among their peers. Students without disabilities can learn empathy, tolerance, and understanding by being exposed to and interacting with individuals with diverse needs. This can contribute to a more inclusive and supportive school community. Different disabilities require different approaches to teaching and support. By knowing the specific type of disability, teachers can design and implement interventions that are tailored to meet the specific needs of the learners. This targeted approach enhances the effectiveness of interventions and ensures that appropriate support is provided.

LEVEL OF PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING

In this study, the level of psychosocial well-being of LSEs is classified in terms of their self-esteem, social connectedness, and emotional regulation. Tables 7 to 9 show its results.

LSEs' Self-Esteem

Table 2 presents the respondents' level of psychosocial well-being as of their self-esteem:

Indicators	WM	Verbal Description
He/She feels confident about his/her abilities	2.33	Low
He/She feels satisfied with the way his/her body looks right now.	2.53	High
He/She feels confident about his/her performance.	2.27	Low
He/She feels that he/she understand things that he/she have read.	2.43	Low
He/She feels that others respect and admire him/her.	2.53	High
He/She doesn't feel self-conscious about his/her performance or during activities.	2.13	Low
He/She feels as smart as others.	2.30	Low
He/She feels good about his/herself.	2.67	High
He/She feels confident that he/she understand things.	2.37	Low
He/She feels like he/she is doing well in class.	2.53	High

Aggregate Weighted Mean: 2.41 (Low)

One important component of this study is the effect of mainstreaming on these learners' self-esteem. It is vital to explore how including students with educational special needs into traditional classes affects their overall self-perception, confidence, and sense of belonging in the educational context. Understanding and addressing the



barriers and opportunities that arise in terms of self-esteem is crucial to the success and well-being of students with special needs in inclusive educational settings.

The overall mean, which is 2.41, indicates that most of the respondents have low self-esteem. Though they feel good about themselves (2.67) and that their classmates respect and admire them (2.53), still they are not confident about their abilities (2.27) and that they feel conscious about their performance or during activities (2.13).

LSEns’ Social Connectedness

Table 3 presents the respondents’ level of psychosocial well-being in terms of their social connectedness:

Indicators	WM	Verbal Description
He/She is not disconnected from his/her classmates or peers.	2.57	High
Even around people, he/she knows that he/she belongs.	2.50	High
He/She is not distant from his/her classmates/peers.	2.50	High
He/She has a sense of togetherness with his/her peers.	2.60	High
He/She feels related to anyone.	2.47	High
He/She is not losing all sense of connectedness with his/her classmate.	2.57	High
He/She feels a sense of brotherhood/sisterhood among with his/her friends.	2.57	High
He/She participates with anyone or with any group.	2.57	High
He/She is cooperative with his/her classmates during activity or performance task.	2.57	High
He/She participates during class discussion or during group activity.	2.60	High

Aggregate Weighted Mean: 2.55 (High)

The social connectedness of learners with educational special needs when mainstreamed in regular classes is a vital aspect to consider in inclusive education. Understanding how students with special needs interact and connect with their peers in mainstream classrooms is critical for building inclusive and effective learning settings that encourage their general well-being and academic success.

The table shows that most of the learners with special educational needs feel like they have a sense of togetherness with their peers (2.60), that’s why they always participate during class discussions and group activities (2.60). All statements in the table earned answers in the high category. The data also shows that most respondents have a high level of social connectedness, as the aggregated mean of 2.55 is within the high range.

Regular interaction with peers can provide learners with special needs opportunities to improve their social skills, such as communication, cooperation, and empathy. Increased social connectedness can boost their self-esteem and confidence, positively influencing their overall well-being. Mainstreaming students with special needs in regular classes can promote a culture of acceptance and inclusion among all students. This can lead to reduced stigmatization and prejudice towards individuals with disabilities, fostering a more equitable and tolerant society.

LSEns’ Emotional Regulation

Table 4 presents the respondents’ level of psychosocial well-being in terms of their emotional regulation:

Indicators	WM	Verbal Description
When he/she feels happy, he/she will try to express it positively.	2.67	High
He/She keeps emotions to his/herself, especially when he/she is annoyed or frustrated.	2.57	High
When he/she feels sad or angry, he/she makes sure that it will be	2.50	High



expressed negatively.		
When he/she feels positive emotions like excitement or amusement, he/she is careful to express them.	2.47	Low
When faced with a stressful situation, he/she thinks about it in a way that helps him/her stay calm.	2.40	Low
He/She controls his/her emotions by not expressing them.	2.27	Low
When he/she wants to feel more positive emotion, he/she will try to reach out or share it with his/her classmates or peers.	2.57	High
He/She controls his/her emotions by changing the way he/she thinks about the situation they're in.	2.20	Low
When he/she feels bad feelings, he/she avoids expressing them.	2.10	Low
When he/she feels negative emotion, he/she changes the way he/she is thinking about the situation through talking or sharing it to a friend or classmate.	2.33	Low

Aggregate Weighted Mean: 2.41 (Low)

The emotional regulation of learners with educational special needs is a critical aspect to consider when they are mainstreamed in regular classes. As students with unique learning styles, abilities, and challenges are integrated into inclusive educational environments, it is essential to understand and address their emotional needs. Navigating mainstream classrooms can pose various emotional hurdles for these learners, as they grapple with a range of feelings such as anxiety, frustration, social isolation, and insecurity. Acknowledging and supporting their emotional well-being becomes paramount in fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment where they can thrive and reach their full potential.

The table reveals that most respondents have low emotional regulation, as the aggregated weighted mean of 2.41 is within the low range. Though some of them try to reach out or share their sentiments with their classmates or peers when they are irritated or annoyed (2.57) or when they feel more pleasant emotions (2.57), they still communicate their feelings negatively, especially when they are angry or when they are in a stressful situation (2.50).

Mainstreaming can expose students with special needs to more social interactions, which might be challenging for them. Difficulties in understanding social cues, making friends, and managing social relationships can contribute to emotional dysregulation. Mainstream classrooms can be fast-paced and overwhelming for students with special needs. The increased sensory input, noise, and social interactions may lead to difficulty in controlling and regulating emotions.

Regular classrooms can be more stimulating and overwhelming for learners with special needs due to increased noise levels, larger class sizes, and faster pacing of instruction. These environmental stressors can hinder their ability to regulate their emotions effectively. Students with special needs often have sensory sensitivities, making them more susceptible to overload in a mainstream classroom setting. Noise, bright lights, crowded spaces, and other sensory stimuli can provoke emotional responses, making it challenging for these learners to regulate their emotions effectively. In addition, learners with special needs often struggle with understanding and expressing their emotions appropriately. They may have difficulty labeling their emotions or expressing them in socially acceptable ways, contributing to emotional dysregulation in a regular classroom setting. Learners with special needs may have difficulty developing effective coping strategies to regulate their emotions due to their diverse learning profiles. Without adequate support and instruction in specific coping techniques, their emotional regulation skills may remain underdeveloped.

Despite certain issues with emotional management, mainstreaming students into regular classrooms has several benefits. For starters, being part of a traditional classroom setting can help students develop social skills and form relationships with their peers. Furthermore, exposure to different learning styles and skills in a mainstream classroom can help all students develop empathy, understanding, and acceptance. Furthermore, with appropriate help and accommodations, students with impaired emotional control can benefit from the structured routine and academic difficulties found in a typical classroom setting. Overall, mainstreaming kids with impaired emotional



regulation can foster inclusivity and variety, resulting in a more well-rounded educational experience for all students involved.

Conclusion:

This study sheds light on the complex dynamics of mainstreaming learners with special educational needs (LSEs) in inclusive settings. Through the examination of their self-esteem, social connectedness, and emotional regulation, this research provides valuable insights into the psychosocial well-being of these learners in traditional classrooms.

The findings reveal that while LSEs benefit from inclusion in regular classes, they also face significant challenges that impact their overall well-being. Despite efforts to foster inclusivity and acceptance, many LSEs experience low self-esteem, emotional dysregulation, and difficulties in social interactions. These challenges highlight the importance of implementing tailored interventions and support systems to address the diverse needs of these learners.

Furthermore, the study underscores the significance of accurate identification and understanding of the specific disabilities among LSEs. By recognizing the unique strengths and challenges associated with different types of disabilities, educators can develop targeted strategies to promote academic success and emotional well-being.

Inclusive education is not only about providing access to academic opportunities but also about creating a supportive and inclusive environment where all learners feel valued and empowered. As such, it is imperative for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to collaborate in developing comprehensive and holistic approaches to support the diverse needs of LSEs in mainstream classrooms.

Future research should continue to explore the efficacy of inclusive education practices and interventions in promoting the psychosocial well-being and academic achievement of LSEs. By advancing our understanding of the factors that influence the success of inclusive education initiatives, we can work towards building more inclusive and equitable learning environments for all learners, regardless of their abilities or disabilities.

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