



Title : **Exploring the Psychosocial Well-being of Learners with Special Educational Needs in Inclusive Settings**

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10997770>

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Abstract:

This descriptive correlational study explores the psychosocial well-being of Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs) in inclusive settings, focusing on self-esteem, social connectedness, and emotional regulation. Conducted in four schools in Toledo City, Cebu, the study involved 30 LSENs and their teachers as respondents. Data collection utilized a modified questionnaire adapted from established instruments, addressing various aspects of psychosocial well-being. Statistical analysis was performed using MS Excel, employing descriptive statistics and tests of significance. Results indicate that while LSENs exhibit strengths in social connectedness, they often struggle with self-esteem and emotional regulation, particularly in managing stressful situations. The study underscores the importance of tailored interventions and inclusive teaching strategies to address the diverse needs of LSENs. Furthermore, it highlights the significance of fostering collaboration among educators, parents, and stakeholders to create supportive environments conducive to the holistic development of LSENs. This study contributes to our understanding of the psychosocial well-being of LSENs in inclusive settings, emphasizing the importance of promoting positive self-esteem, enhancing social connectedness, and teaching effective emotional regulation skills. Further research and collaborative efforts are essential in advancing inclusive education practices and supporting the well-being of LSENs.

Keywords: Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs), inclusive settings, psychosocial well-being, self-esteem

Introduction:

Inclusive education, which advocates for the education of all learners, regardless of ability, has received a lot of attention in recent years (Bradshaw & Varsani, 2019). This educational method strives to provide equitable chances for all students to actively engage, succeed, and thrive within a general education environment. Many countries around the world have adopted the Salamanca Statement (2004), which provides the framework for ensuring equal educational opportunities for all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or



other conditions (Lebaco & Verano, 2023). The view that, to the greatest extent possible, all Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEs) should be enrolled in their local schools and given with support services and instruction tailored to their skills and requirements is a crucial component in 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. The basic human right to education is at the heart of the Salamanca framework, which places inclusive education at the forefront of international educational concerns by recognizing and responding to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different learning styles, and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use, and partnerships with their communities.

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. According to Ashman and Elkins (1998) as cited by Lebaco and Verano (2023), integration is the admission of (LSEs) into regular classrooms where they get their education. 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. Inclusive education can promote better academic outcomes for LSEs, such as improved reading and arithmetic performance. However, less studies have research on 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 by undertaking a comprehensive evaluation of mainstreaming SPED learners in regular class. While numerous studies have looked into the influence of inclusive education on academic achievement, few have looked into students' social and emotional well-being (Wolfendale et al., 2020). This research seeks to fill that gap by exploring the psycho-social well-being focusing on the self-esteem, social interactions, and emotional development of LSEs from the perspective of the teachers. This research aims to expand our understanding of inclusive education and its potential advantages for students with a wide range of abilities. It strives to give useful insights that can guide educational policies, practices, and interventions targeted at promoting more inclusive and equitable learning environments by assessing academic, social, and emotional outcomes within a rigorous research framework.

Literature Review:

Inclusive education aims to remove barriers to learning for all students, emphasizing equal participation and treatment. The PERMA theory of well-being by Seligman (2011) underpins this concept, highlighting five elements crucial for well-being: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Positive emotions broaden cognitive and behavioral repertoires (Fredrickson, 2001), while engagement in activities leads to a state of flow and enhances self-esteem (Seligman, 2011). Relationships, including social support and a sense of belonging, promote happiness and buffer against negative life events (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2003). Finding meaning in life fosters psychological well-being (Steger, 2012), and accomplishing goals enhances self-efficacy and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Additionally, Carol Ryff's theory of psychological well-being emphasizes six dimensions contributing to overall well-being, including self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Erikson's psycho-social theory outlines eight stages of human development, highlighting the importance of resolving crises at each stage for healthy development (Erikson, various). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory underscores the dynamic interaction between individuals and their environments, including microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These theories provide frameworks for understanding the multifaceted nature of human development and the importance of environmental factors.

Furthermore, UNESCO's Salamanca Statement (2004) promotes inclusive education as a fundamental right, ensuring equal opportunities for all students. Legal foundations such as the Philippine Constitution and Republic Acts No. 7277 and 11650 reinforce inclusive education by prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities and promoting their integration into society (Philippine Constitution, various; Republic Acts, various). DepEd policies, including DepEd Order No. 44 and No. 72, emphasize the implementation of inclusive education in schools, providing guidelines for creating supportive and inclusive learning environments (DepEd Orders, various).

Positive teacher-student relationships, inclusive school environments, and social inclusion are crucial for the psycho-social well-being of students with special educational needs (Fauth et al., 2014; Avramidis & Kalyva, 2017; Lindsay, 2015). Collaboration among educators, administrators, therapists, and support staff is essential for designing individualized educational plans and promoting inclusive practices (Friend & Cook, 2021). Collaboration



fosters inclusive environments, supports professional growth, and improves student outcomes (Wang et al., 2016; McCoy, 2020; Hallam & Rimm-Kaufman, 2019).

Inclusive education aims to ensure equal opportunities for all students by removing barriers to learning. Theoretical frameworks and legal foundations support this concept, emphasizing the importance of well-being, human development, and collaborative efforts in creating inclusive environments that promote the holistic development of all learners.

Methodology:

Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive correlational design to assess the psychosocial well-being of Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEs) in inclusive settings at Luray II National High School, Toledo City, Cebu during the school year 2023-2024, aiming to inform action plans for promoting their well-being.

Research Environment

The study took place across four schools within Toledo City Division, including Luray II National High School, Bato Elementary School, Magdugo Elementary School, and Consolacion Central Elementary School. Each school caters to diverse populations of students with various special educational needs, ranging from speech delay to intellectual disabilities.

Respondents

The research respondents were teachers-in-charge of LSEs, selected purposively based on their roles in supporting these learners. These teachers evaluated the psychosocial well-being of LSEs from their perspectives. A total of 30 LSEs were observed across the four schools, with distribution detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Distribution of Observed LSEs (n=30)

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Luray II National High School	10	33.33
Bato Elementary School	4	13.33
Arpili Elementary School	6	20.00
Consolacion Central Elementary School	10	33.33
Total	30	100

Research Instrument

A modified adaptation of three different instruments was used to observe LSEs' psychosocial well-being, covering self-esteem, social connectedness, and emotional regulation. The questionnaire included demographic profiles and questions related to well-being, drawn from established works.

Data Collection Procedures

Approval was obtained from the Research Technical Committee, and data collection commenced after approval. Teachers-in-charge were oriented on survey instrument usage, and observations were conducted without disrupting learners' activities.

Statistical Treatment

Data were manually encoded in MS Excel and analyzed using the Data Analysis Toolpak. Categorical data were summarized as frequency and percentage, while continuous data were presented as weighted mean and standard deviation. Chi-square test and independent t-test were employed for comparison.

Scoring Procedure

Responses were rated according to a scale representing different levels of self-esteem, emotional control, and social engagement, allowing for comprehensive evaluation of learners' well-being.



Rating	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

Rating	Self-Esteem	Emotional Control
4	Very High	Very High
3	High	High
2	Low	Low
1	Very Low	Very Low

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki and National Ethical Guideline for Health and Health-related Research (2022). Participant anonymity and data confidentiality were ensured throughout the study process.

This research provides valuable insights into the psychosocial well-being of LSENs in inclusive settings, informing future interventions and support strategies.

Results:

Table 1 Level of Psychosocial Well-being of LSENs in Inclusive Settings in terms of their Self-esteem

S/N	Indicators	WM	Verbal Description
1	Confident about his/her abilities	2.53	High
2	Satisfied with the way his/her body looks right now	2.50	High
3	Confident about his/her performance	2.10	Low
4	Feels that he/she understands things that he/she has read	2.37	Low
5	Feels that others respect and admire him/her	2.43	Low
6	Does not feel self-conscious about his/her performance	2.27	Low
7	Feels as smart as others	2.23	Low
8	Feels good about himself/herself	2.60	High
9	Confident that he/she understands things	2.43	Low
10	Feels like he/she is doing well in class	2.47	Low
	Aggregate Weighted Mean	2.39	Low

Legend:

3.25-4.00: Very High

2.50-3.24: High

1.75-2.49: Low

1.00-1.74: Very Low

These children will gain self-esteem when they do something well. Helping them focus on what they are really good at and encouraging them to use those skills as much as possible can help them increase their self-esteem. Everyone has things they cannot do and things they can do. Not all students will excel in academic skills, and this may feel demoralizing to the child, but when a parent pays attention to and celebrates their positive traits, this will remind them that they have other reasons to be confident even if academics are not their biggest strength. Helping kids discover and rejoice in their unique strengths will set them up for confidence and success. LSENs may be extra-sensitive to their slower rate of learning and feel discouraged when their efforts do not result in immediate



success. It helps to remind them that everyone struggles when learning something new. As a teacher, you can break difficult tasks into smaller tasks. Then celebrate the accomplishment of each step, no matter how small. Give them responsibilities, no matter how small, as long as they can finish it, it is already a celebration for them, boosting their self-esteem. Giving them appropriate positive reinforcement methods like praise, stickers, hugs, a special toy, or extra time for favorite activities. In contrast, while negative reinforcement can initially seem to dissuade bad behavior, over time, it can have a damaging effect on self-esteem. Negative reinforcement leads to anxiety, insecurity, depression, and anger.

Table 2: Level of Psychosocial Well-being of LSEs in Inclusive Settings in terms of their Social Connectedness

S/N	Indicators	WM	Verbal Description
1	Not disconnected from his/her classmates or peers	2.67	High
2	Even around people, he/she knows that he/she belongs	2.60	High
3	Not distant from his/her classmates/peers	2.50	High
4	Has a sense of togetherness with his/her peers	2.67	High
5	Relates to anyone	2.50	High
6	Not losing all sense of connectedness with his/her classmate	2.53	High
7	Has a sense of brotherhood/sisterhood among his/her friends	2.67	High
8	Participates with anyone or with any group	2.63	High
9	Cooperative with his/her classmates during activity	2.43	Low
10	Participates during class discussion or during group activity	2.33	Low
	Aggregate Weighted Mean	2.55	High

Wanting to belong in a group or that sense of belonging is natural for children to want to be accepted and included by their peers, but students with special needs often report feeling left out or isolated. Their disabilities can prevent them from participating fully in activities. Their physical limitations may keep them from playground games, speech issues can hinder communication, and developmental delays can impact connecting with classmates. Even well-meaning students may intentionally or unintentionally exclude special needs kids from groups and social events. This constant outsider status can damage kids' self-esteem.

Table 3: Level of Psychosocial Well-being of LSEs in Inclusive Settings in terms of their Emotional Regulation

S/N	Indicators	WM	Verbal Description
1	When feeling happy, he/she will try to express it positively	2.83	High
2	Keeps emotions to himself/herself especially when annoyed	2.67	High
3	When sad or angry, he/she makes sure that it will be expressed	2.57	High
4	When feels positive emotions, he/she is careful to express them	2.57	High
5	When faced with a stressful situation, thinks about it to stay calm	2.43	Low
6	Controls emotions by not expressing them	2.27	Low



7	When feels positive emotion, tries to reach out or share with peers	2.43	Low
8	Controls emotions by changing the way he/she thinks	2.37	Low
9	When having negative emotions, makes sure not to express them	2.27	Low
10	When feels negative emotion, changes the way of thinking about it	2.43	Low
Aggregate Weighted Mean		2.48	Low

Learning how to regulate emotions can help children interact with their environment in a more adaptive way. Children are better able to cope with stressful situations when they have the skills to help bring themselves to a calm state. Not only the teacher in the classroom can help children with this need but also the parents because they can support their children in developing and practicing positive regulating skills by assisting them to increase their level of self-awareness and strategy use. Parents can help their children understand, recognize, verbalize, and regulate their emotions by providing guidance and modeling emotional regulation.

Table 5: Summary on the Level of Psychosocial Well-being of LSEs in Inclusive Settings

Components	WM	Verbal Description
Self-esteem	2.39	Low
Social Connectedness	2.55	High
Emotional Regulation	2.48	Low
Grand Mean	2.47	Low

There was not a single demographic variable that is associated with the psychological well-being of the LSEs (see p-value on Table 11). But this does show that in reality there was really no association. This implies that the data collected may not be sufficient enough to find association or show association.

Table 6: Test of significant relationship between the profile and the psychological well-being of the learners

Variables	-value	df	p-value	Decision	Remarks
Age and Psychological Well-being	0.524	1	0.469	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Gender and Psychological Wellbeing	0.621	1	0.431	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Grade Level and Psychological Wellbeing	1.833	1	0.176	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Parent's Occupation and Psychological Well-being	0.335	2	0.846	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Number of Siblings and Psychological Wellbeing	0.068	1	0.794	Accept Ho	Not Significant

Discussion:

The findings of this study shed light on the psychosocial well-being of Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEs) in inclusive settings, particularly focusing on self-esteem, social connectedness, and emotional regulation. The results highlight both areas of strength and areas that require attention in supporting the holistic development of these learners.



Self-esteem, Social Connectedness, and Emotional Regulation

The study reveals that LSENs exhibit varying levels of self-esteem. While some children demonstrate high self-esteem, others struggle with feelings of inadequacy, particularly in academic settings. This underscores the importance of recognizing and celebrating the unique strengths of each child, regardless of their academic performance. Teachers and parents play a crucial role in fostering a positive self-image by providing encouragement, celebrating achievements, and offering support tailored to individual needs.

LSENs generally exhibit a high sense of social connectedness with their peers, as evidenced by the findings. However, despite feeling a sense of belonging, many face challenges in fully participating in formal classroom activities. This highlights the need for inclusive strategies that promote active engagement and cooperation among all students, regardless of their abilities. Creating a supportive and inclusive environment where LSENs feel valued and included is essential for their social development and overall well-being.

The study findings indicate that LSENs exhibit varying levels of emotional regulation. While some children demonstrate high levels of emotional control and expression, others struggle to manage their emotions, particularly in stressful situations. Teaching emotional regulation skills is vital for helping LSENs navigate challenges effectively and develop resilience. Both educators and parents can play a role in supporting children in identifying and coping with their emotions in healthy ways.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have several implications for practice in inclusive education settings. First, it emphasizes the importance of adopting inclusive teaching strategies that celebrate diversity and accommodate the needs of all learners. Teachers should strive to create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment where every child feels valued and included.

Additionally, there is a need for targeted interventions aimed at enhancing self-esteem, social connectedness, and emotional regulation skills among LSENs. This may involve implementing social-emotional learning programs, providing individualized support, and fostering positive relationships between peers.

Furthermore, collaboration between educators, parents, and other stakeholders is essential in addressing the psychosocial needs of LSENs. By working together, we can create a supportive network that promotes the holistic development and well-being of all learners.

Limitations and Future Research

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, including its focus on a specific geographical area and school setting. Future research could explore the psychosocial well-being of LSENs across different contexts and examine the effectiveness of specific interventions in promoting positive outcomes.

Additionally, further investigation is needed to understand the impact of demographic factors such as age, gender, and parental occupation on the psychosocial well-being of LSENs. Longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into the developmental trajectories of these children and identify factors that contribute to their overall well-being over time.

This study highlights the importance of addressing the psychosocial needs of LSENs in inclusive education settings. By fostering positive self-esteem, social connectedness, and emotional regulation skills, we can create a more inclusive and supportive environment where all learners can thrive.

Conclusion:

This study provides valuable insights into the psychosocial well-being of Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs) in inclusive settings, focusing on self-esteem, social connectedness, and emotional regulation. The findings underscore the importance of addressing the unique needs of these learners to promote their holistic development and well-being.

The results reveal that while many LSENs demonstrate strengths in social connectedness and some aspects of emotional regulation, there are areas where support is needed, particularly in enhancing self-esteem and improving emotional regulation skills, especially in stressful situations. These findings highlight the importance of adopting inclusive teaching strategies, providing targeted interventions, and fostering collaboration between educators, parents, and other stakeholders to support the psychosocial development of LSENs.

This study emphasizes the need for a holistic approach to inclusive education that recognizes and celebrates the diverse strengths and challenges of LSENs. By promoting positive self-esteem, facilitating social connectedness,



and teaching effective emotional regulation skills, we can create an inclusive environment where all learners feel valued, supported, and empowered to reach their full potential. Further research and continued collaboration are essential in advancing our understanding and practice in supporting the psychosocial well-being of LSEs in inclusive settings.

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