



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A QUALITATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education has emerged as a transformative approach aimed at ensuring equal educational opportunities for students with special needs.

This research article explores the psychological dimensions of students with special needs within inclusive educational settings, emphasizing the roles of teachers and parents. The study adopts a qualitative framework to understand cognitive, emotional, and social challenges faced by such learners and the strategies required to support them. It highlights the importance of psychological support, inclusive teaching strategies, and collaborative efforts among stakeholders (Karibaev et al., 2022; Hanurawan, 2017).

The findings reveal that although inclusive education promotes self-esteem, social integration, and academic progress, significant gaps exist in teacher preparedness, parental awareness, and institutional support (Armstrong, 2014; Afolabi, 2014).

The study concludes that strengthening psychological interventions and inclusive practices is essential for holistic development and societal inclusion of students with special needs.

KEYWORDS: Inclusive Education, Special Needs Students, Educational Psychology, Parental Involvement, Teachers Attitude, Psychological Support

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental human right and a key driver of social and economic development. Inclusive education has emerged as an important approach to ensure equal learning opportunities for all learners, regardless of their physical, intellectual, or social differences. It is based on principles of equity, social justice, and respect for diversity (Stankovska et al., 2014).

Students with special needs, including those with autism, intellectual disabilities, ADHD, and sensory impairments, often face challenges in learning, communication, and social interaction, which may lead to academic and social exclusion if not properly supported

(Carroll & Florin, 2003). Educational psychology emphasizes addressing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects to enhance their learning outcomes (Hanurawan, 2017; Kam et al., 2004).

Teachers and parents play crucial roles in inclusive education; however, lack of training, resources, and infrastructure remains a major barrier (Charitaki et al., 2022; Muega, 2016). Therefore, inclusive education requires strong institutional support, policy reforms, and positive societal attitudes for effective implementation (Armstrong, 2014; Kadriu, 2025).

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Studies highlight the importance of psychological support in inclusive education.

For instance, Karibaev et al. (2022) found that psychological assistance enhances confidence and reduces educational barriers among students with disabilities.

Armstrong (2014) emphasized that inclusive classrooms foster belongingness, collaboration, and positive learning environments.

Similarly, Kam et al. (2004) demonstrated that social-emotional learning programs significantly improve behavioral and emotional outcomes.

Hanurawan (2017) and Suchitra (2022) stressed the role of psychology in understanding and solving challenges faced by special needs students through multidisciplinary approaches.

Parental involvement has been identified as a key factor influencing student success.

Afolabi (2014) found a strong relationship between parental engagement and academic achievement.

Similarly, Sylva et al. (2004) highlighted that early parental involvement improves long-term learning outcomes.

However, challenges such as lack of teacher training and inadequate resources persist (Muega, 2016; Kadriu, 2025).

Objectives:

The objectives of the study are:

1. To analyze psychological needs of students with special needs (Hanurawan, 2017).
2. To examine the role of teachers in inclusive education (Armstrong, 2014).
3. To assess the impact of parental involvement (Afolabi, 2014).
4. To evaluate inclusive practices (Zanobini, 2022).
5. To identify implementation challenges (Kadriu, 2025).

Hypotheses:

1. Psychological support positively influences development (Karibaev et al., 2022).
2. Teacher preparedness affects inclusive success (Charitaki et al., 2022).
3. Parental involvement improves outcomes (Afolabi, 2014).
4. Inclusive education enhances self-esteem and integration (Armstrong, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the psychological dimensions of students with special needs in inclusive education. A qualitative design is appropriate as it allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations within real-life educational contexts (Creswell, 2014; Hanurawan, 2017).

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study follows a phenomenological and descriptive qualitative design, aiming to capture the lived experiences of students with special needs, their parents, and teachers within inclusive classroom settings. This design helps in understanding how individuals perceive and interpret inclusion, psychological support, and educational practices (Moustakas, 1994).

(i) Population

The population of the study comprises:

- Students with special needs enrolled in inclusive schools
- General and special education teachers
- Parents/guardians of students with special needs

These groups are considered key stakeholders in inclusive education, as they directly influence and experience the teaching-learning process (Muega, 2016).

(ii) Sample

A purposive sampling technique is used to select participants who have direct experience with inclusive education. This sampling method ensures that the data collected is rich, relevant, and context-specific (Patton, 2002).

Sample Composition:

- 10–15 students with special needs (different categories such as ADHD, autism, learning disabilities)
- 8–10 teachers (both general and special educators)
- 8–10 parents/guardians
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The sample size is flexible and guided by the principle of data saturation, where no new themes emerge from further data collection (Creswell, 2014).

(iii) Data Collection Methods and Tools

Multiple qualitative data collection techniques are used to ensure depth and validity through triangulation:

1. Semi-Structured Interviews

- Conducted with teachers and parents
- Focus on experiences, challenges, attitudes, and support mechanisms
- Allows flexibility to probe deeper into responses (Karibaev et al., 2022; Kadriu, 2025)

2. Open-Ended Questionnaires

- Administered to participants to gather reflective responses
- Helps capture perceptions regarding inclusive practices and psychological support (Hanurawan, 2017)

3. Classroom Observations

- Non-participant observation of inclusive classrooms
- Focus on teacher-student interaction, peer relationships, and teaching strategies (Armstrong, 2014)

(iv) Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the study, the following strategies are adopted:

- Triangulation: Use of multiple data sources (interviews, observations, documents)
- Member Checking: Participants verify the accuracy of interpretations
- Peer Debriefing: Discussion with experts for validation
- Thick Description: Detailed contextual reporting

These methods enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

(v) Ethical Considerations

The study follows ethical guidelines to protect participants:

- Informed consent obtained from all participants
- Confidentiality and anonymity maintained
- Voluntary participation ensured
- Sensitivity towards students with special needs

(vi) Rationale for Qualitative Approach

A qualitative approach is particularly suitable for this study because it:

- Captures subjective experiences and emotions
- Provides rich, detailed insights into inclusive education
- Allows flexibility in exploring complex psychological phenomena

As noted by Creswell (2014), qualitative research is ideal for studies aiming to understand human experiences in natural settings.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The qualitative findings of the study reveal deeper psychological and systemic dynamics influencing inclusive education:

1. Cognitive and Learning Barriers

Students with special needs often demonstrate deficits in attention span, working memory, and executive functioning. These cognitive challenges affect their ability to process information, follow instructions, and complete academic tasks. Teachers reported that without individualized instruction, such students tend to fall behind (Hanurawan, 2017).

2. Emotional and Behavioral Dimensions

A recurring theme was emotional vulnerability. Many students exhibited anxiety, frustration, and withdrawal due to repeated academic failures and peer comparison. Behavioral issues such as hyperactivity or social withdrawal were often misunderstood as disciplinary problems rather than psychological needs (Kam et al., 2004).

3. Social Interaction and Peer Acceptance

Inclusive settings provided opportunities for peer interaction, yet social inclusion was not always achieved. Some students experienced subtle exclusion or labeling. However, classrooms promoting

cooperative learning and empathy showed improved peer relationships (Armstrong, 2014).

4. Teacher Preparedness and Pedagogical Gaps

Teachers acknowledged a lack of specialized training in handling diverse learners. While they expressed positive attitudes toward inclusion, they struggled with curriculum adaptation, classroom management, and individualized instruction (Charitaki et al., 2022).

5. Parental Involvement and Home Environment

Parents who actively supported their children's learning—through guidance, emotional encouragement, and collaboration with teachers—significantly enhanced student outcomes. Conversely, lack of awareness or socio-economic constraints limited effective parental involvement (Afolabi, 2014).

6. Institutional and Structural Constraints

Schools faced challenges such as large class sizes, insufficient teaching aids, lack of counselors, and absence of individualized education plans (IEPs). These systemic barriers limited the effectiveness of inclusive practices (Kadriu, 2025).

DISCUSSION:

The findings reinforce that inclusive education is not merely about physical placement but requires psychological, pedagogical, and institutional transformation.

1. Psychological Perspective

From a psychological standpoint, the study confirms that emotional security, self-esteem, and motivation are foundational for learning. Without addressing these aspects, academic interventions alone are insufficient (Hanurawan, 2017).

2. Pedagogical Implications

Teachers must adopt differentiated instruction, constructivist approaches, and positive behavioral support strategies. Professional training programs are essential to equip teachers with the necessary skills (Charitaki et al., 2022).

3. Role of Family and Community

The study strongly supports ecological theories of

development, emphasizing that learning is influenced by multiple systems—family, school, and community. Strengthening parent-school partnerships enhances student success (Sylva et al., 2004).

4. Policy and Institutional Reforms for Inclusive Education

Effective implementation of inclusive education requires comprehensive policy-level interventions and institutional reforms. These reforms must address structural, pedagogical, and technological dimensions to ensure equitable learning opportunities for students with special needs. The following components are crucial:

(i) Recruitment of Trained Professionals:

Appointment of trained special educators, psychologists, and counselors is essential. Continuous professional development and inclusion of inclusive education in teacher training programs are necessary (Muega, 2016; Charitaki et al., 2022; Hanurawan, 2017).

(ii) Provision of Assistive Technologies:

Assistive tools such as screen readers, hearing aids, and AAC devices improve accessibility and participation. Proper funding, teacher training, and maintenance are required for effective implementation (Zanobini, 2022).

(iii) Development of Inclusive Curriculum:

Flexible, learner-centered curricula with differentiated instruction and inclusive assessment enhance participation and learning outcomes (Armstrong, 2014; Muega, 2016).

(iv) Systemic Policy Reforms:

Governments should ensure adequate funding, monitoring mechanisms, and inclusive policies. Collaboration among schools, families, and communities is essential for sustainable implementation (Stankovska et al., 2014; Afolabi, 2014).

5. Holistic Development Approach

The study highlights the need for a holistic approach that integrates cognitive, emotional, and social development. Inclusive education should aim at overall well-being rather than only academic

achievement.

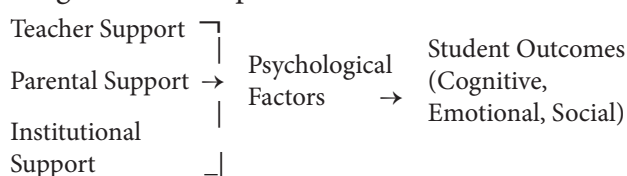
Conceptual Framework:

The conceptual framework of this study is based on a Bio-Psycho-Social and Ecological Model, integrating psychological, educational, and environmental factors.

Framework Flow

Teacher + Parent + Institution → Psychological Development → Educational Outcomes

Diagrammatic Representation



External Factors (Policy, Society, Environment) influence all stages

Major Findings:

1. Psychological support is essential (Hanurawan, 2017).
2. Teacher competence affects outcomes (Charitaki et al., 2022).
3. Parental involvement improves performance (Afolabi, 2014).
4. Inclusive education enhances social integration (Armstrong, 2014).
5. Resource limitations remain a challenge (Kadriu, 2025).

FUTURE PROSPECTS OF RESEARCH:

Future research should focus on:

1. Technology integration in inclusive education (Zanobini, 2022)
2. Comparative studies across educational systems (Muega, 2016)
3. Longitudinal psychological development studies (Hanurawan, 2017)
4. Teacher training effectiveness (Charitaki et al., 2022)

Interdisciplinary approaches can provide deeper insights into inclusive education systems.

CONCLUSION

Inclusive education is a transformative approach

that promotes equality, dignity, and participation for all learners. Its success depends on addressing psychological needs, improving teacher preparedness, and strengthening parental involvement (Kam et al., 2004; Hanurawan, 2017).

Despite challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and limited resources, effective policy reforms and institutional support can ensure successful implementation (Kadriu, 2025). Inclusive education not only benefits students with special needs but also fosters empathy, cooperation, and social integration among all learners (Armstrong, 2014).

Thus, inclusive education is both an educational necessity and a social responsibility, aiming to empower every learner to achieve their full potential (Karibaev et al., 2022; Stankovska et al., 2014).

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