



Title : **Investigating the Inclusion of Learners with Special Educational Needs: A Comprehensive Evaluation of Their Well-Being**

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Abstract:

This study evaluated the psychosocial welfare of learners with special educational needs in inclusive settings during the school year 2023-2024 at Arpili Elementary School, Cebu Province Division. The design used in the study was descriptive evaluative and correlational methods to gather data to determine the impact of mainstreaming LSEs in the regular class on their psychosocial welfare. The study's respondents were thirty learners with special educational needs who were mainstreamed in regular classes and chosen through purposive sampling technique. The study employed the two-part adapted-modified questionnaire. The first part gathered the LSEs profiles, including age, gender, grade level, parent's occupation, and type of children's disability. The second part of the questionnaire was related to students' psychosocial welfare. The collected data were statistically treated using frequency, simple percentage, mean, and Chi-square test of independence. Findings revealed the majority or 43.33% of respondents were 11-12 years old. The majority were male or 60.00% and in grade-level six or 30.00%. Further, the parents' occupations of the learners were drivers or 20.00% with 1-2 siblings at 46.67%. It was also revealed that most of the learner's disability was intellectual disability or 46.67%. Findings further revealed that the psychosocial welfare based on their self-esteem was high with a weighted mean of 2.66, social connectedness was high with a weighted mean of 2.77, and terms of emotional regulation were also high with a weighted mean of 2.60. The integration of LSEs into regular classes has been proven to have a positive impact on their psychosocial welfare.

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

**Introduction:**

Inclusive education, which advocates for every student's education, 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, every student who has special education needs (LSEs) should be registered at the neighborhood schools and given 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 entitlement to fair educational opportunities for all, as promulgated in the Salamanca Statement on Education for Special Needs.

Students with unique requirements may compare themselves to their classmates who are normally developing 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 (2014) found that children with special needs often perceived themselves as less competent, attractive, and socially accepted compared to their generally growing 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 (Woodcock, et al., 2022). 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 (Gruhn & Compas, 2020). 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 (Loreto, et al., 2024).

Integration is the inclusive education strategy implemented in all public schools in the Philippines. Teachers try to help these learners by integrating them into mainstream classes. This approach might have come from within the Special Education Policies and Guidelines (1997), which state that mainstreaming, or the integration of students with exceptional needs into the regular school system, is the ultimate objective of special 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. According to research, inclusive education can promote better academic outcomes for students with disabilities, 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, throughout the course of their emotional growth.

This research attempts in order to support the current body of literature by addressing lots of research gaps by undertaking a comprehensive evaluation of mainstreaming learners with special needs in regular classes. While numerous studies have looked into the influence of inclusive education on academic achievement, few have looked into students' psychosocial well-being (Amholt, et al., 2020). Research findings on self-esteem, social connectedness, and emotional regulation in students with special needs may vary due to the vast array of needs and infirmities 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. This research aims to expand our knowledge of inclusive education and its possible advantages for pupils who possess a variety 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:

The foundation of the current investigation is the PERMA theory of Well-being, Psychosocial Development Theory, and Ecological Theory. Seligman's (2011) PERMA theory of well-being serves as the primary theoretical foundation for this research. Well-being is predicted by five factors: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011). Positive emotions such as joy, appreciation, and happiness are essential components of well-being (Fredrickson, 2001). Flow, defined as total immersion, delight, and a sense of timelessness, emphasizes the effects on self-esteem, personal development, and overall well-being (Seligman, 2011). Relationships, meaning, and accomplishment are also integral components of well-being (Seligman, 2011; Pinquart & Sorensen, 2003; Steger, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Victor Frankl emphasized the importance of finding meaning and direction in life (Steger, 2012). Accomplishment, settling, and achieving goals contribute to overall well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Seligman's theory is supported



by Carol Ryff's theory of psychological well-being, emphasizing six distinct dimensions contributing to overall psychological well-being (Ryff & Singer, 2008).

Erikson's psychosocial theory focuses on the stages and crises individuals go through as they develop and mature, emphasizing the interaction between biological and social factors (Erikson, 1950). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory stresses the dynamic interplay between individuals and their environments, acknowledging the influence of various environmental systems on personal development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The Salamanca Statement of UNESCO (2004) advocates for inclusive education, ensuring equal access to quality education for all students (Lebeco & Verano, 2023). The Philippine Constitution and Republic Act No. 7277 protect and promote the rights and well-being of people with disabilities, emphasizing accessibility, non-discrimination, and support services (Republic Act No. 7277).

Republic Act No. 11650, known as the Inclusive Education Act, promotes equal opportunities for children and youth with disabilities in accessing quality education (Republic Act No. 11650). The DepED's K-12 curriculum ensures equal opportunities for Filipino learners and supports inclusive education (DepEd Order No. 44, 2021). DepEd Order No. 72 s. 2009 promotes and implements inclusive education in the Philippines (DepEd Order No. 72 s. 2009).

Positive teacher-student relationships, inclusive school environments, and social inclusion significantly impact the psychosocial well-being of learners with special educational needs (Fauth et al., 2014; Avramidis & Kalyva, 2017; Lindsay, 2015). Collaboration among stakeholders in inclusive education and special education enhances student outcomes and fosters inclusive environments (Friend & Cook, 2021; Wang et al., 2016; McCoy, 2020; Hallam & Rimm-Kaufman, 2019).

Methodology:

Design

This study utilized descriptive evaluative and correlational methods to investigate the impact of mainstreaming Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEs) in regular classrooms on their psychosocial well-being. The descriptive survey design employed for the quantitative approach aimed to ascertain the extent and distribution of social characteristics and explore potential relationships with specific attitudes or behaviors.

The study focused on examining the association between two variables: the profile and psychosocial well-being of the learners. The procedure involved data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Prior to assessing the association, a survey was conducted to assess the learners' self-esteem, social connectedness, and emotional regulation from the perspective of their teachers. Adapted questionnaires were administered to the respondents, and the data were analyzed to evaluate the students' well-being status.

Respondents

The respondents comprised Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEs) as evaluated by their regular receiving teachers. In Arpili Elementary School, learners with intellectual disability, orthopedic impairment, autism, physical disability, and visual impairment were selected. Regular receiving teachers of the LSEs, who had undergone formal training in psychosocial well-being assessment, were purposively chosen to complete questionnaires assessing the profile and psychosocial well-being status of the learner-respondents.

The table below shows the distribution of respondents.

**Table 1
Distribution of Respondents**

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Arpili Elementary School	30	100
Total	30	100

Instruments

This study utilized a two-part adapted-modified questionnaire. The first part collected profiles of Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEs), including age, gender, grade level, parent occupation, number of siblings, and type of disability. The second part focused on students' psychosocial well-being, categorized into self-esteem, social connectedness, and emotional regulation. Questions for each category were adapted and modified from reputable sources such as Heatherton and Polivy (1991), Lee and Robins (1995), and Gross and John (2003). The questionnaires underwent intellectual development through extensive review, brainstorming, and validation of content from various sources including online platforms, literature, and conceptual analyses.

Data Gathering Procedure

This section outlines the process of acquiring data and the ethical measures taken before the study. Approval was sought from relevant authorities through transmittal letters, including the Dean of the Graduate School of



Education and the Principal of Arpili Elementary School. Prior to data collection, respondents received a consent form and orientation either online or face-to-face. Ethical considerations were addressed through consultation with a panel of experts, adherence to ethical checklists, and compliance with the Data Privacy Act.

Data Gathering Stage

Data collection was conducted either face-to-face or through Google Forms, ensuring convenience for both respondents and the researcher. Measures were taken to ensure voluntary participation and avoid coercion. Post data gathering, questionnaires were checked for completeness, and statistical analysis was performed following recommended procedures. Privacy and confidentiality were maintained in accordance with the Data Privacy Act.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from respondents, ensuring privacy and confidentiality, and preserving the dignity and safety of participants. The study adhered to ethical standards and procedures, including approval from the Ethics Review Committee of the University of Visayas. Respondents, who were teachers of LSEs, were chosen through purposive sampling, ensuring accuracy in survey responses. Participants were informed about the study's implementation and had the freedom to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Data were encoded, tabulated, and statistically analyzed using various tools. Frequency and simple percentage were used to analyze profiles of LSEs, while weighted mean and standard deviation were employed to assess the status of their psychosocial well-being. The Chi-square Test of Independence was utilized to determine significant associations between the profiles of LSEs and their well-being status.

Scoring Procedures

The responses of the teachers on the status of the learners were rated according to their level. The study used the following scale:

A. Self-Esteem

Rate	Mean Range	Verbal Description	Interpretation
4	3.25 - 4.00	Strongly Agree	Very High Self-Esteem
3	2.50 - 3.24	Agree	High Self-Esteem
2	1.75 - 2.49	Disagree	Low Self-Esteem
1	1.00 - 1.74	Strongly Disagree	Very Low Self-Esteem

B. Social Connectedness

Rate	Mean Range	Verbal Description	Interpretation
4	3.25 - 4.00	Strongly Agree	Very High Social Engagement
3	2.50 - 3.24	Agree	High Social Engagement
2	1.75 - 2.49	Disagree	Low Social Engagement
1	1.00 - 1.74	Strongly Disagree	Very Low Social Engagement

C. Emotional Regulation

Rate	Mean Range	Verbal Description	Interpretation
4	3.25 - 4.00	Strongly Agree	Exerted Very High Control of his/her emotions
3	2.50 - 3.24	Agree	Exerted High Control of his/emotions
2	1.75 - 2.49	Disagree	Display Low Control of his/her



1	1.00 - 1.74	Strongly Disagree	emotions Display Very Low Control of his/her emotions
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Results and Discussion:

Understanding the diverse types of disabilities among students is paramount for fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment that addresses their individual needs, strengths, and abilities. By embracing diversity in disability, we can promote equity, accessibility, and empowerment for all learners, creating an environment where every individual can excel academically, socially, and emotionally.

Types of Disability of Learners

Types of Disability	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)	Types of Disability	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)	Types of Disability
Autism	7	23.33	Autism	7	23.33	Autism
Intellectual Disability	14	46.67	Intellectual Disability	14	46.67	Intellectual Disability

Students with special educational needs (SEN) represent a diverse group requiring tailored instruction due to various disabilities, ranging from physical and sensory impairments to intellectual, developmental, emotional, and behavioral challenges. Each learner possesses unique strengths and challenges, necessitating an individualized approach to maximize their learning potential. The majority of respondents in this study have intellectual disabilities (46.67%), followed by visual impairment (23.33%) and autism (23.33%). Only a small percentage have orthopedic or physical impairments, highlighting the diverse nature of disabilities among mainstreamed students.

Mainstreaming students with diverse disabilities fosters inclusivity and acceptance among peers, promoting empathy, tolerance, and understanding. This approach allows for targeted interventions and support tailored to each student's specific needs, enhancing intervention effectiveness and ensuring appropriate support is provided.

Proper identification of a student's disability enables educators to implement targeted interventions and accommodations. Understanding the underlying causes and manifestations of each disability aids in providing necessary strategies and interventions to address academic and behavioral challenges. Different disabilities require distinct accommodations, and individualized adaptations in instructional methods, materials, and assessments can facilitate meaningful engagement in learning.

Level of Psychosocial Well-Being

Psychosocial well-being, encompassing self-esteem, social connectedness, and emotional regulation, is crucial for students' overall development and success in inclusive settings. Tables 7 to 9 present the results of data analysis for each component.

Self-esteem plays a pivotal role in students' confidence, resilience, and academic performance. High self-esteem indicates a positive self-perception, confidence in abilities, and satisfaction with performance. The majority of respondents exhibited high self-esteem, indicating that mainstreaming promotes a sense of belonging, recognition, and acceptance, positively impacting students' self-esteem.

Social connectedness is essential for fostering a supportive and inclusive educational environment. High social connectedness indicates a sense of belonging, acceptance, and meaningful relationships within the school community. Mainstreaming facilitates positive social interactions and friendships, contributing to students' sense of belonging and social connectedness.

Emotional regulation refers to the ability to manage and control emotions effectively. High emotional regulation indicates adaptive coping strategies and resilience in navigating challenges. Mainstreaming promotes emotional regulation through increased social interaction, observation of positive peer models, and access to supportive resources.

The overall psychosocial well-being of students with special educational needs in inclusive settings is high, as evidenced by high levels of self-esteem, social connectedness, and emotional regulation. Mainstreaming promotes inclusivity, diversity, and acceptance, fostering a supportive learning environment where all students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

By prioritizing inclusive practices and addressing the diverse needs of students with disabilities, schools can create environments that promote positive psychosocial development for all learners. Mainstreaming enables students



with special needs to interact with peers, develop social skills, and access support resources, contributing to their overall well-being and success in the classroom. Through inclusive education, schools can cultivate a culture of acceptance, empathy, and respect, ensuring that every student feels valued, supported, and empowered to reach their full potential.

Conclusion:

This study delved into the psychosocial well-being of learners with special educational needs (LSEs) in inclusive settings, focusing on self-esteem, social connectedness, and emotional regulation. Through an analysis of data gathered from respondents, it is evident that mainstreaming LSEs into regular classrooms positively impacts their overall well-being.

The findings revealed that the majority of mainstreamed students exhibited high levels of self-esteem, indicating a positive self-perception, confidence in abilities, and satisfaction with performance. This suggests that inclusion in regular classrooms fosters a sense of belonging, recognition, and acceptance, contributing to students' positive self-esteem.

Additionally, high levels of social connectedness were observed among mainstreamed LSEs, reflecting a sense of belonging, acceptance, and meaningful relationships within the school community. Mainstreaming facilitates positive social interactions and friendships, promoting inclusivity and acceptance among peers.

Furthermore, the study highlighted the importance of emotional regulation for students with special needs in mainstream settings. The findings showed that mainstreamed students demonstrated adaptive coping strategies and resilience in managing emotions, indicating the effectiveness of inclusive practices in supporting their emotional well-being.

The overall psychosocial well-being of mainstreamed LSEs in inclusive settings is high, as evidenced by their positive self-esteem, social connectedness, and emotional regulation. Mainstreaming promotes inclusivity, diversity, and acceptance, fostering a supportive learning environment where all students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Thus, it is imperative for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to continue prioritizing inclusive practices and addressing the diverse needs of students with disabilities. By promoting inclusive education, schools can create environments that nurture positive psychosocial development for all learners, ensuring that every student feels valued, supported, and empowered to reach their full potential.

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