



Influence of Learning Environment on Psychosocial Development of Students with Visual Impairment in Special Schools in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of the learning environment on the psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria, using a descriptive survey design. The Learning Environment and Psychosocial Development Questionnaire (LEPDQ), a researcher-developed tool, was validated by experts and produced reliability coefficients ranging from 0.72 to 0.76. Data were collected using the test-retest method. The population consisted of all 13 students with visual impairment. Study issues were addressed using the mean and standard deviation, and the hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance using the independent sample t-test. The results showed that the psychosocial development of students with visual impairment is strongly influenced by the school atmosphere, the teacher-student connection, and the availability of special needs facilities. However, the mean assessments of these factors by male and female students did not differ statistically significantly. Among other things, it was suggested that school administrators encourage inclusive and supportive classroom environments that foster students' psychosocial growth.

Keywords: Learning Environment, Psychosocial Development, Visual Impairment, School Climate, Teacher-Student Relationship

Introduction

The term "psychosocial" is derived from two words: psychological and social. Psychosocial development is a concept that describes how individuals progress through a series of stages from infancy to old age, each characterised by distinct challenges and developmental tasks. Boxern (2020) notes that psychosocial development is the lifelong process through which individuals navigate a series of psychosocial crises or challenges that shape their psychological and social well-being. In relation to psychosocial development, Thanga (2020) notes that factors that affect one's psychological and social development can be positive, such as happiness, affection, and vitality, or negative, such as fear, perceived stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. According to Wegnar (2020), students deal with a variety of internal and external issues that affect their sense of self, interpersonal connections, and general well-being. Students can achieve a sense of wholeness, personal development, and fulfilment in various facets of their lives by effectively overcoming these obstacles. However, Crazor (2022) found that the quality of the learning environment has a significant impact on the social and psychological development of pupils in conventional or special schools. All of the activities and influences that take place in a school setting are included in the learning environment. According to Mkpugbe (2020), a learning environment is a setting that offers instruction, materials, and technical support to create a conducive, well-behaved, and physically and psychologically safe learning environment. As a result, the learning environment is essential to teaching and learning since it arranges classrooms, administrative spaces, amenities, and equipment needed for efficient teaching and learning procedures. Shala (2018) highlights that, regardless of a student's IQ, the learning environment can have a substantial impact on their academic success.

Additionally, by setting up areas to encourage strong interactions between people of all ages, supporting a variety of activities, and providing opportunities for social and emotional learning, the learning environment plays a critical role in teaching and learning (Bountu, 2023).

The learning environment, which includes school climate, teacher-student relationships, and special facilities, comprises variables that affect students' academic achievement (Adelem, 2019). Adelem's study indicated that school climate relates to the perceived psychological atmosphere of the school and to how safe it is perceived to be for effective teaching and learning. Salamat (2020) noted that students are the most crucial asset in any educational institution, emphasising the importance of teachers maintaining cordial yet professional relationships with their students. Salamat further stated that failure to promote such relationships could hinder the achievement of educational goals. Turner (2018) highlighted the importance of special facilities for the adjustment of people with disabilities in schools, including hearing aids, audiometers, amplifiers, instructional media, audiobooks, braille, slate and stylus, and talking calculators. Among other things, creating a welcoming and encouraging learning atmosphere can help students' psychosocial growth. These facilities have a variety of effects on educators, visually impaired pupils, and the educational process. Inadequate facilities seem to have a direct effect on students' learning, make teaching difficult, and lead to behavioural problems such as hyperactivity and poor focus. The empirical evidence establishing the relationship between learning environments and the psychosocial development of students with visual impairment, especially in special schools, remains limited. This gap in the literature underscores the need to examine the influence of the learning environment on the psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Students with visual impairments' psychosocial development is an important part of their overall development, affecting not only their academic performance but also their mental health, social adjustment, and self-perception. These developmental outcomes are strongly influenced by the quality of the learning environment in special school settings, including the school atmosphere, teacher-student interactions, and the availability of suitable facilities. Preliminary observations in Rivers State's Obio-Akpor Local Government Area suggested that visually impaired children might be learning in settings that do not adequately address their psychosocial needs. Although the learning environment is acknowledged to be important, there are few empirical studies that specifically examine how it affects the psychological development of students with visual impairments in special schools. Because of this knowledge gap, systematic research is required to determine how various elements of the learning environment impact students' psychological outcomes.

The aim of the study was to investigate the influence of the learning environment on the psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the extent to which school climate influences the psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State
2. Ascertain the extent to which the teacher/student relationship influences the psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State
3. Examine the extent to which special needs facilities influence the psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does school climate influence the psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State?
2. To what extent does the teacher-student relationship influence the psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State??
3. To what extent do special needs facilities influence the psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State?

The following null hypotheses were further formulated to guide the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female students regarding the extent of school climate influence psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State

2. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female students regarding the extent to which the teacher/student relationship influences the psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State
3. There is no significant difference in the mean rating between male and female students regarding the extent to which special needs facilities influence the psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey design. According to Nwankwo (2020), a descriptive survey design is one in which the researcher gathers information from a sizable sample selected from a particular population and describes specific characteristics of the sample as they exist at the time of the study and that the researcher finds interesting, without changing any of the study's independent variables. Because the study aims to employ a representative sample of all pupils with visual impairments in the Obio-Akpor local government to enable the researcher to systematically collect, analyse, and interpret data, this design was deemed appropriate for the study. The population of the study consisted of 13 students with visual impairments in special schools in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State (Rivers State Department on Special Needs Education, 2024). The sample size was made up of 13 students with visual impairments in special schools in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. A census sampling technique was used to select the 13 students with visual impairments. The researcher developed the "Learning Environment and Psychosocial Development Questionnaire" (LEPDQ) as a data- gathering tool. The LEPDQ comprised four sections. Section A contained respondents' biographical information; Section B addressed the impact of school climate on psychosocial development; Section C examined the impact of teacher- student relationships on psychosocial development; and Section D assessed the impact of school facilities on psychosocial development. The LEPDQ contained twenty statements. A four- point modified Likert scale was used, with Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. After developing the instrument, to ensure content validity, it was sent to experts in Special Needs Education and Measurement and Evaluation for validation. Following a review of the items, the experts' suggestions were incorporated into the final draft of the instrument. To assess reliability, the researcher used the test- retest method to determine internal consistency. The instrument was administered to 10 respondents outside the study area, and the same instrument was re- administered after a period of 2 weeks to the same respondents. Reliability was computed from their responses using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The "Learning Environment and Psychosocial Development Questionnaire" (LEPDQ) yielded a reliability index of $r = 0.72$ for the influence of school climate on psychosocial development, $r = 0.76$ for the influence of teacher- student relationships on psychosocial development, and $r = 0.75$ for the influence of school facilities on psychosocial development scale. Copies of the questionnaire were given to visually impaired children by the researcher during individual visits to their schools. Over the course of two weeks, two research assistants assisted with distribution and collection. Students with visual impairments were given the instruments during their breaks and free periods on Monday through Friday school days. Students received a brief explanation of the research' s confidentiality. All 13 questionnaires given to students were collected and used in the research. The acquired data were analysed using the independent sample t- test to test the null hypotheses at the 0. 05 level and the mean and standard deviation to address the research objectives.

Results

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Showing the extent School Climate Influence Psychosocial Development of Students with Visual Impairment in Special Schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State

S/N	School Climate	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1	Teachers and other supportive staff cooperate to enhance students' learning	3.18	0.33	High Extent
2	Students who do not feel secured in their learning environment hardly achieve in their academics	3.11	0.25	High Extent
3	High level of principals-teachers cooperation contributes to students' academic success in my school	2.89	0.54	High Extent
4	My school help to promote cultural diversity	3.11	0.40	High Extent
	Grand Mean/SD	3.18	0.33	

Table 1 shows the extent school climate influence psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. Specifically, the result indicates a grand mean of ($\bar{X} = 3.18$; $SD = 0.33$), which is higher than the criterion mean of (>2.50). This further indicates that to a high extent, school climate influence psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Showing the extent Teacher/Student Relationship Influence Psychosocial Development of Students with Visual Impairment in Special Schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

S/N	Teacher-student Relationship			Remark
		$\bar{X}$	SD	
5	My teacher talks enthusiastically to us about taking our studies seriously	2.90	0.85	High Extent
6	My teacher is extremely passionate about seeing us progress in our academics and other sporting activities	2.92	0.76	High Extent
7	My teacher feels heavily concerned when we do not understand in class	2.81	0.89	High Extent
8	If we don't agree with our teacher, we can talk to our teacher about it	3.00	0.85	High Extent
Grand Mean/SD		2.99	0.66	

Table 2 shows the extent to which teacher/student relationship influence psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. Specifically, the result indicates that the grand mean of ($\bar{X} = 2.99$; $SD = 0.66$), which is higher than the criterion mean of (>2.50). This further indicates that to a high extent, teacher/student relationship influence psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation Showing the extent Special Needs Facilities Influence Psychosocial Development of Students with Visual Impairment in Special Schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

S/N	Special Needs Facilities			Remark
		$\bar{X}$	SD	
9	Audio books would improve the learning and academic inclusion of students with visual impairment	3.18	0.33	High Extent
10	The use of Braille materials would enhance learning for students with visual impairment	3.11	0.25	High Extent
11	School library with adapted computers and accessible online resources would promote learning and inclusion for students with visual impairment	2.89	0.54	High Extent
12	The use of educational materials like Braille pictures, charts and maps would enhance students learning	3.11	0.40	High Extent
Grand Mean/SD		2.62	0.45	

Table 3 shows the extent special needs facilities influence psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. Specifically, the result indicates a grand mean of ($\bar{X} = 2.62$; $SD = 0.45$), which is higher than the criterion mean of (>2.50). This further indicates that to a high extent, special needs facilities influence psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Test of Hypotheses

Table 4: T-Test analysis showing significant difference in the mean rating of students on the extent school climate influence psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	p-value	Sig.	Remark
Male	5	10.13	0.52	11	.078	.080	0.05	Retained H0
Female	8	12.62	0.45					

From the results in table 4, it can be observed that at 0.05 level of significance and 11 degrees of freedom, t-cal = .078 and p-value = .080 > 0.05 level of significance. Since the p-value = .080 > 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of students on the extent school climate influence psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State is accepted.

Table 5: T-Test analysis showing significant difference in the mean rating of male and female students on the extent teacher/student relationship influence psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-test	Sig.	Remark
Male	05	15.00	0.73	11	.059	.080	Retained H0
Female	08	10.01	0.61				

From the results in table 5, it can be observed that at 0.05 level of significance and 11 degrees of freedom, t-value = .059 and p-value = .080 > 0.05. Since the p-value = .080 > 0.05 the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female students on the extent teacher/student relationship influence psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State is accepted.

Table 6: T-Test analysis showing significant difference in the mean rating of male and female students on the extent special needs facilities influence psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-test	Sig.	Remark
Male	5	12.08	0.65	11	.091	.060	Retained H0
Female	8	14.12	0.44				

From the results in table 6, it can be observed that at 0.05 level of significance and 11 degrees of freedom, t-value = .091 and p-value = .060 > 0.05. Since the p-value = .060 > 0.05 the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female students on the extent special needs facilities influence psychosocial development of students with visual impairment in special schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State is accepted”.

Discussion

The results of research question one and hypothesis one (tables 1 and 4) showed that school climate had a statistically significant impact on the psychosocial development of visually impaired pupils in special schools in Rivers State's

Obio/Akpor Local Government Area. The results align with Fullon's (2019) study, which found that class sizes and student performance in both regular and special schools are affected by population growth. Additionally, this study's findings align with Malinowski (2022), who found a positive association between secondary school students' academic achievement and classroom accommodations, which led to greater psychosocial development.

The results for research question two and hypothesis two (Tables 2 & 5) showed that teacher-student relationships significantly affect the psychosocial development of visually impaired students in special schools in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The study found that children with positive relationships with their teachers outperformed their peers in academic performance and adjustment. The null hypothesis was rejected because the p-value was below the selected significance level. As a result, the academic adjustment of students with visual impairments in special schools in the research area was significantly correlated with teacher-student interaction. These results align with Cullen's (2019) study, which found that students and teachers influence one another. When a student feels accepted and valued in the classroom, they are more likely to be engaged and motivated, whereas a poor teacher-student relationship demotivates students from learning. The results also support Barasa's (2017) findings that the teacher's role in the classroom influences how students perceive the learning environment. This, in turn, influences students' learning outcomes, as students who believe their teachers are more supportive perform better on standardised maths tests and English language grades.

The results of research question three and hypothesis three (Tables 3 and 6) showed that special needs facilities have a statistically significant impact on the psychosocial development of students with visual impairments in special schools in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The results are consistent with Dabon's (2019) study, which found that assistive technologies and educational media are electronic tools used in special education, including prosthetics (for mobility), hearing aids, lenses, electronic typewriters, bipedal, audiology equipment, audio books, braille machines, and computers that support students' learning and psychosocial development. Bran (2020) found in an affirmative study that special facilities and instructional materials were highly important for teachers and special needs students, as both groups need them. Such materials improve the learning outcomes of students in special and regular schools and also aid their psychosocial development.

Conclusion

Based on the study's findings, the researcher came to the conclusion that special needs facilities, teacher-student relationships, and school climate all have a significant impact on the psychological development of visually impaired pupils attending special schools in Rivers State's Obio/Akpor Local Government Area. Students mean ratings regarding the impact of special needs facilities, teacher-student relationships, and school climate on the psychosocial development of visually impaired pupils did not differ significantly.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the researcher made the following recommendations:

1. School administrators should promote inclusive and supportive school climates that fosters students' psychosocial development;
2. Parents, teachers and students should be encouraged to make improvised special instructional materials in order to boost students' psychosocial development;
3. Teachers should develop caring, supportive and encouraging attitude in the classroom, so that they can maximize students' learning outcome and psychosocial development".

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