



FACTORS THAT PROMOTE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN AT THE BASIC SCHOOL LEVEL IN THE UPPER EAST REGION OF GHANA

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Abstract

This study explores the determinants of academic success among Special Needs Children in Basic Schools in the Upper East Region of Ghana. Rieser's Social Model of Disability is the theoretical framework upon which the study is built. Utilizing Simple Random Sampling and Purposive Sampling, the research focused on parental involvement, teaching methods, and the attitudes of special needs pupils. Questionnaire, interviews, and observation were employed for data collection, and the findings are presented through Tables and graphs. The study highlights significant parental involvement, including financial support, and active monitoring of children's progress. Teachers exhibit openness, employ tailored instructional methods, and create inclusive environments. Special needs pupils actively participate, displaying motivation and a positive attitude towards learning. The study recommends collaborative efforts between school authorities and the District Assembly for funding hearing and visual aids. School management is advised to partner with NGOs for resources supporting Special Needs Education. Parents are also encouraged to increase school visit frequently to foster a motivating and positive learning environment. Further research should look at the training and support provided to teachers who work with special needs children.

Keywords: Special needs children, academic success, basic school.

INTRODUCTION

It is important to emphasize that the primary goal of educating special needs children is to achieve academic success. Education not only fulfills a fundamental human right but also enables individuals with special needs to assume roles that contribute to societal and national development. A lot of factors come to play in special needs children achieving academic success and this include the support of parents, adopted teaching methods, pupils' behavior or attitude, and others. The academic performance of special needs children has always been questionable as concerns have been raised about the qualification, delivery method of teaching, as well as the absence of some equipment needed for



effective facilitation, this therefore calls for an inquiry to explore the factors that contribute to the academic achievements of children with special needs in basic schools.

The Ghana Education Service's Special Education Division (SpED) classifies a diverse spectrum of special needs among children, totaling twenty distinct categories. These encompass individuals with various conditions; this encompasses a range of conditions such as hearing impairment, visual impairment, intellectual disability, physical disability, deaf-blindness, multiple disabilities, speech and communication disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, gifted and talented individuals, specific learning disabilities, autism, emotional and behavioral disorders, as well as children impacted by natural disasters and social conflicts. Moreover, the classification encompasses nomadic youngsters, including shepherd boys, children of fisher-folk, and domestic child laborers, as well as those facing severe social and economic hardships, exploitation for financial gain, orphanhood, separation from biological parents, HIV/AIDS, street life, and other health impairments like asthma (Ministry of Education, 2013).

The Upper East Region of Ghana is home to four specialized schools catering to diverse special needs: Gbeogo School for the Deaf in Tongo, St. John's Special School in Navrongo, St. John's Special School in Bolgatanga, and Balobia Special School in Navrongo. This study focuses on four specific categories of special needs children present in these schools: individuals with hearing impairment, visual impairment, speech and communication disorders, and autism. The researcher embarked on visits to these specialized schools across the region to identify and categorize the different types of special needs children, laying the groundwork for further research endeavors.

To secure the academic achievement of primary-level special needs children, it is essential to address various factors such as teaching methodologies, accessibility to necessary equipment, and additional supportive elements. This study illuminates the primary factors that enable the academic advancement of children with special needs in the Upper East Region of Ghana.

Background

Education is universally acknowledged as a fundamental human right applicable to all children irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, nationality, disability, and other distinguishing factors (United Nations, 2015). These principles are enshrined in significant international agreements and documents. The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights upholds the entitlement to mandatory primary education at no cost for everyone, alongside the phased introduction of complimentary secondary education. The attainment of universal primary education stands as a pivotal objective within the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), collectively endorsed by nations in 2000 (World Health Organization, 2018).

The Ghanaian education system has gone through several Reforms over the years to make its basic level of education one of the best globally (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016). This is done to get children of school going age fully prepared for other higher levels of education. The Ghana Education Service (2008) encapsulates section 2 (1) of the Education Act of 1961, which stipulates that every child who has reached the age suitable for school attendance as determined by the Minister must participate in a prescribed course of instruction at a school approved by the Minister. The Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) policy commenced during the tenure of President Jerry John Rawlings to bolster school enrollment rates among children upon reaching school age (Cover Ghana, 2022).

The evolution of Special Needs education for children with special needs in Ghana mirrors developments observed in other developing nations, particularly those in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ametepee and Dimitris, 2015). While many believe that Special Education in Ghana originated post the 1994 World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain, its roots stretch much further back. The progression of Special Education in Ghana can be delineated into three primary stages.

The first stage encompasses Early Special Education Efforts predating Ghana's independence (1936–1956). Avoke (2008) highlights the establishment of the initial special school for children with special



needs in Begoro and Akropong-Akwapim by missionaries, initially catering to blind and deaf pupils. These early schools primarily focused on literacy courses and vocational training, such as basket weaving using local materials.

The second stage marks the establishment of a Public Special Education System during and post-independence (1957-1993). Following partial internal governance in 1951, the Nkrumah-led government assumed responsibility for special education and the broader education system from 1957 onward.

However, the desired outcomes for special education were not fully realized until the passage of the 1961 Education Act (Ametepee and Dimitris, 2015). The third stage marks a shift towards inclusion, spanning from the mid-1990s to the present. Despite the government's considerable focus on the education of special needs children during the second stage, criticisms arose over the isolation of these children from their communities, a practice also prevalent in several other countries during the 1990s (Kenny, 2020). The introduction of inclusive education at the World Conference on Special Needs Education aimed to address this issue and enhance the quality of education for special needs children. Ghana adopted inclusive education to provide equitable educational opportunities for all. At the conference, attended by 92 governments, including the Ghanaian government, and international organizations reaffirmed the importance of education for each person, as articulated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Additionally, member states pledged to uphold the resolutions set forth at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA) (UNESCO, 1994).

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are;

1. To examine the extent to which parents' involvement promote the academic success of special needs children in basic schools.
2. To identify how teaching and learning methods promote the academic success of special needs children in basic schools.
3. To discuss the extent to which the attitudes of special needs pupils promote their academic success in basic schools.

Research Questions

The questions of the study are;

1. How does parents' involvement promote the academic success of special needs children in basic schools?
2. How does teaching and learning methods promote the academic success of special needs children in basic schools?
3. How does the attitude of special needs pupils promote their academic success in basic schools?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of the study is built upon Rieser's (2002) social model of disability, which conceptualizes disability as arising from the interplay between individuals with impairments and a surrounding environment marked by various physical, attitudinal, communication, and social barriers. This perspective contends that societal environments must adapt to facilitate the inclusion of individuals with impairments in communal activities. In contrast, the medical model of disability sees disability purely as a health concern requiring medical intervention (PWDA, 2022), contrasting sharply with this perspective.

This theoretical framework is particularly relevant to the study's focus, as it facilitates the identification of challenges faced by special needs students or those with disabilities, including environmental, attitudinal, institutional, and financial hurdles. According to Rieser (2002), environmental challenges arise from the physical surroundings and infrastructural limitations that impede the mobility of individuals with disabilities, including a subset of special needs children. People in wheelchair for



instance need some special infrastructural facilities to aid their movement in school to help improve their academic performance. School environment can be made easily accessible for disabled pupils by making the environment more wheelchairs friendly. It can also be made easily assessable for visually impaired pupils by improving lighting in the classroom, creating spacious classrooms, and encouraging multi-sensory learning (Godfrey, 2019). It is very essential to note that a school's natural surroundings and infrastructural facilities need to be easily accessible to all pupils regardless of the challenge they face in their day-to-day activities.

The attitudinal challenges as described by Rieser (2002) focuses on the negative attitudes, traits, or behaviors directed towards special needs children by others. Stereotyping, stigmatization, and discrimination are challenges people with disability face every day as they get excluded from numerous activities (Epic, 2021). Some negative attitude towards learners with disabilities includes not being accepted to study with other learners, eat, or play with them. And all these are social activities that help children to learn about the world around them, improve their communication skills, which improve their academic performance in the long run (Save the Children, 2021). According to Johnson (2011), play stands out as a fundamental requirement for children, playing a crucial role in assisting them in navigating their emotions and dealing with life events.

The social model of disability highlights institutional challenges as another significant issue. According to Rieser (2002), these challenges encompass legislative frameworks and associated regulations and policies. For instance, the 1961 Education Act of Ghana supports inclusive education, recognizing education as a fundamental human right irrespective of race, religion, or other factors (Ametepee, 2015). However, the mere existence of such legislation does not guarantee its full implementation, potentially impacting learners with special needs in educational settings.

Failure to fully implement curricula tailored to students with physical disabilities, inadequate infrastructural facilities, insufficient qualified teachers to cater to special needs children, and a lack of teaching and learning materials are among the challenges identified. Addressing these factors is crucial for enhancing the academic performance of special needs children. Hanlon (2020) underscores the contemporary educational challenge of a shortage of qualified teachers.

Having financial problems means being unable to settle debts over a short or long period of time (Gingras, 2021). The model makes it clear that financial challenges or inadequate funding to run schools has always been a challenge. Special needs children are always in need of some sort of special treatment which requires more funding to help make life easy for pupils. Making schools wheelchair friendly for disabled pupils will require additional funding, so as making the various classrooms friendly for visually impaired pupils.

METHOD

The research adopted the mixed method approach where data was gathered through semi-structured questionnaires, interviews, and observations. The choice of this approach was influenced by the objectives of the research.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for this study encompassed both primary and secondary sources, supplemented by interviews. Primary data was gathered from all special needs schools in the Upper East Region of Ghana, employing questionnaires as the main tool. These questionnaires comprised a mix of open-ended and close-ended questions, carefully designed to extract relevant information related to the research objectives. In addition to primary data, secondary data was collected from various sources including books, journals, internet resources, and pamphlets pertinent to the study topic. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were utilized to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the academic success of special needs children at the basic school level in the region.

Interviews were conducted with teachers and parents of special needs children, recorded using mobile phones for later analysis. The selection of data gathering techniques was influenced by the overarching



goals of the research initiative, seeking to evaluate the diverse factors that contribute to academic achievement among children with special needs.

The research questionnaire, administered to the selected sample size, addressed key areas such as the background of the respondents, parental involvement in promoting academic success, the efficacy of teaching and learning methods, and the role of attitudes in fostering academic achievement among special needs children.

During visits to the selected schools, observations were made by the researcher to further enrich the data collection process. In some instances, a checklist was employed to gather additional information, or clarifications deemed necessary.

Upon obtaining approval from the participating schools, hard copies of the questionnaire were distributed to all participants. To accommodate school regulations prohibiting the use of electronic devices by pupils, the researcher collaborated with school authorities to ensure the questionnaire reached the intended recipients effectively. The researcher analyzed the data by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) which is a data analysis software.

Sampling Techniques

The study utilized both Simple Random Sampling (SRS) and Purposive Sampling (PS) methods to select samples from the study area. Equal representation of both genders within the strata was guaranteed to uphold fairness and equilibrium in the sampling procedure. This approach facilitated the gathering of diverse perspectives from all respondents regarding the "Factors that promote academic success of special needs children at the basic school level in the Upper East Region of Ghana."

Sample Frame

A sample frame was constructed to guide participant selection, drawing upon the research questions and theoretical framework of the study. This process was particularly pertinent for identifying participants from groups not readily identifiable through official statistics. To facilitate the research, an institutional map was developed, providing a comprehensive overview of the four special needs schools in the Upper East Region. Interviews were then conducted with students from these institutions to gather relevant data for the study.

Table 1. Institutional map.

Respondents	
1.	Gbeogo School for the deaf at Tongo
2.	St John’s Special School in Navrongo
3.	St. Johns Special School in Bolgatanga
4.	Balobia Special School in Navrongo

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of respondents.

	Frequency	Valid Percent	
Category of Respondents	Pupils	50	50.0
	Teachers	20	20.0
	Parents	30	30.0
	Total	100	100.0
Name of School	Gbeogo School for the Deaf - Tongo	25	25.0
	St. John's Special School - Bolgatanga	25	25.0
	St. John's Special School - Navrongo	25	25.0
	Balobia Special School - Navrongo	25	25.0
Sex of Respondents	Male	56	56.0
	Female	44	44.0



Table 2 (Continued). Demographic characteristics of respondents.

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Marital status of teachers and parents	Married	45	90.0
	Single	2	4.0
	Widow/Widower	3	6.0
Child disability status	Physically Challenged	5	10.0
	Intellectual disability	22	44.0
	Multiple disability (Intellectual and physically challenged)	11	22.0
	Deaf	12	24.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Out of a total of 100 people interviewed for the study, 50% were pupils, 30% were parents and 20% were teachers. Many pupils were interviewed in the study, followed by parents and teachers the least. A total of 25% of respondents were interviewed at Gbeogo School for the Deaf - Tongo, an additional 25% were interviewed at St. John - Bolgatanga, another 25% from St. John's - Navrongo and a further 25% from Balobia Special School - Navrongo. This implies that each school has a quarter or 25% of respondents from that school.

Regarding the gender of the respondents interviewed in the study, 56% of the respondents were male and 44% were female. This shows that more men were interviewed in the study than women. Regarding the marital status of the respondents, 90% of teachers and parents are married, 6% of them are widows or widowers, and 4% of them are single and unmarried. Most of the adults interviewed were married parents and teachers.

Regarding the type of disability of the surveyed pupils, there are 44% intellectual disability, 24% hearing impairment (deaf), 22% variety disability in the form of intellectual disability and physical disability and 10% physical disability. Many pupils have intellectual disabilities, followed by pupils with hearing impairments, multiple disabilities, and physical disabilities.

Table 3. Category of respondents and name of school.

		Name of School				
		Gbeogo School for the Deaf – Tongo	St. John's Special School - Bolgatanga	St. John's Special School - Navrongo	Balobia Special School - Navrongo	Total
Category of Respondents	Pupils	12	13	13	12	50
	Teachers	5	5	5	5	20
	Parents	8	7	7	8	30
Total		25	25	25	25	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

In summary, out of 50 pupils interviewed, 12 were from Gbeogo School for the Deaf - Tongo, 13 were from St. John - Bolgatanga, 13 other children from St. John - Navrongo and 12 pupils from the Balobia - Navrongo Special School. Out of 20 teachers, 5 are from each school. Regarding parents, 8 parents from Gbeogo Deaf School - Tongo, 7 parents from St. John - Bolgatanga, 7 others from St. John - Navrongo and 8 people from Balobia Special School - Navrongo.



Table 4. Category of respondents and educational level of teachers and parents.

Category of Respondents	Degree	Educational level of teachers and parents				Total
		Masters	Basic	Secondary	Tertiary	
Teachers	18	2	0	0	0	20
Parents	0	0	11	16	3	30
Total	18	2	11	16	3	50

Source: Field Survey, 2023

RESULTS

Analysis of Research Findings

Findings for Objective 1: The Extent to Which Parents’ Involvement Promotes the Academic Success of Special Needs Children in Primary Schools.

When questioned about parental involvement in children's education, all respondents (100%) affirmed that parents play a role in their children's educational journey. Further probing revealed the extent of parental involvement in various aspects of their wards' education. A significant majority (95%) stated that parents contribute to their wards' education by covering school fees. Additionally, 73% of respondents noted parental involvement through regular visits to the school. A smaller percentage (6%) indicated that parents purchase school materials for their children, while 4% mentioned providing groceries. A minimal proportion (2%) mentioned activities such as assisting with homework, ensuring children are prepared for school, and motivating them to learn.

Table 5. Parents involvement in pupils’ education.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Are parents involved in pupils’ education	100	100.0
Yes		
Check/Assist Pupils Exercises	2	2
Buy Learning materials	6	6
Provide Provisions for children	4	4
How parents are involved in pupils’ education		
Preparing and sending them school	2	2
Words of encouragement/ motivation	2	2
Pay school fees	95	95
Pay visit to the school	73	73

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The interviews conducted and observations brought to light that indeed, these are the extent to which parents involvement promote the academic success of special needs children. Some students confirmed that they only focus on their education in pursuit of academic excellence because they do not worry about financial commitments because of their parents. Teachers also confirmed that these commitments from parents create a sense of responsibility in special needs children as they believe the only way they can pay their parents back is through academic excellence.

On the question of whether parents can provide support to their pupils to reduce their disability and improve their learning, 73% of respondents answered yes, while 27% gave a negative response. In a follow-up, respondents were asked why parents could not provide their wards with supportive means to help them study, 90% said it was due to financial constraints or the challenges parents are facing, that is why they cannot deliver support, 59% of them said it was due to insufficient resources that prevented parents from providing support for their children and 1% said it was because parents were negligent and unable to support their children.

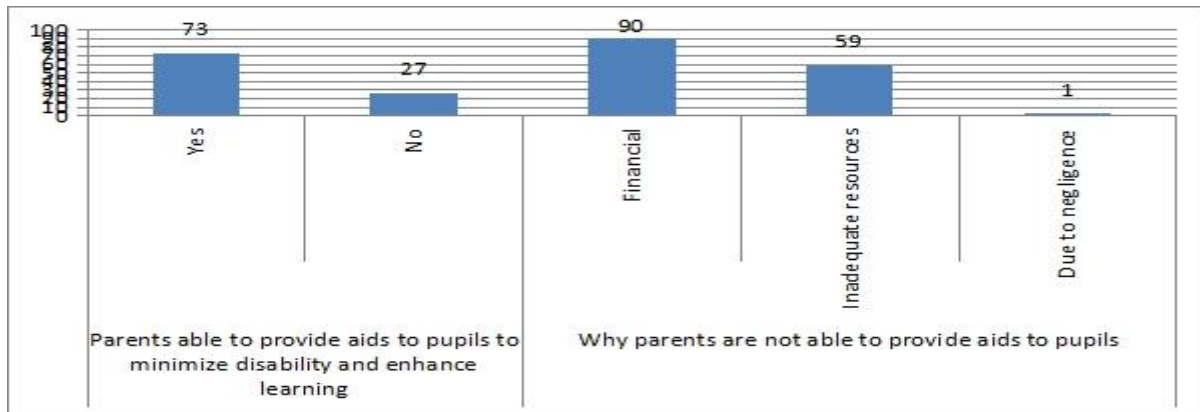


Figure 1. Parents provide support to pupils (Source: Field Survey, 2023)

Clearly, majority of the parents are involved in the academic success of their wards, and the few not fully involved cited financial constraints and inadequate resources as the problem. Parents stated during the interviewing sessions that they sometimes borrow even when they don't have just to make life easy for their children with special needs.

Findings for Objective 2: How Teaching and Learning Methods Promote the Academic Success of Special Needs Children.

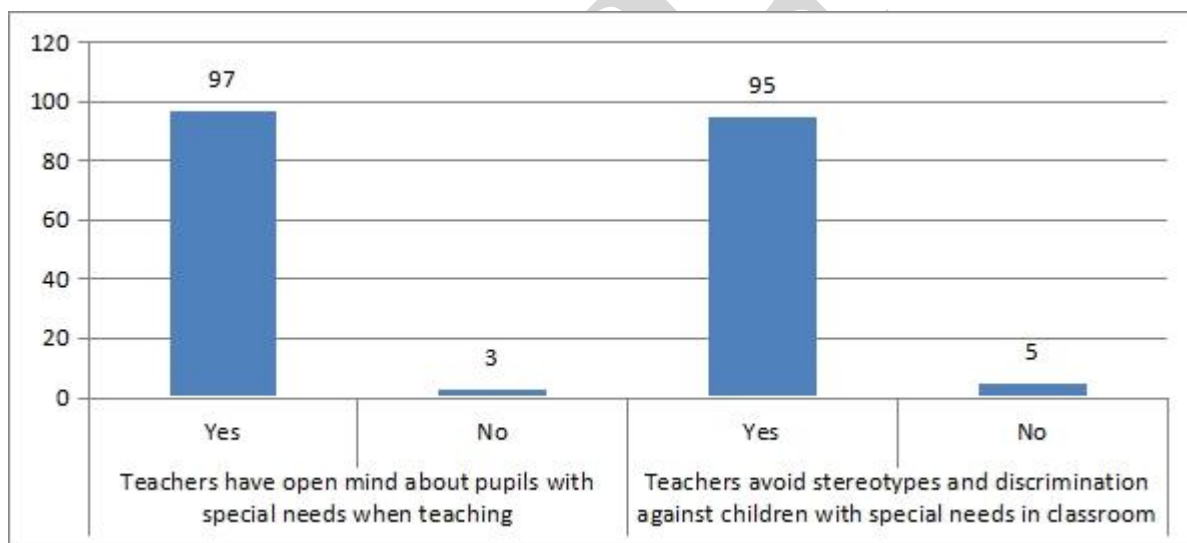


Figure 2. Teachers have open minds and avoid stereotypes and discrimination against children with special needs (Source: Field Survey, 2023).

A total of 97% of respondents answered yes, teachers are open to pupils with special needs when teaching, while 3% answered no, teachers are not open to pupils with special needs when teaching. On the question of whether teachers avoid prejudice and discrimination against children with special needs in the classroom, 95% answered yes and 5% answered no, teachers do not avoid stereotype and discrimination against children with special needs in the classroom. Observations made by the researcher and interviews conducted on the sampled population revealed similar results.

The study brought to light that teachers having an open mind to an extent of not discriminating against children with special needs is a teaching method that promote the academic success of special needs children.

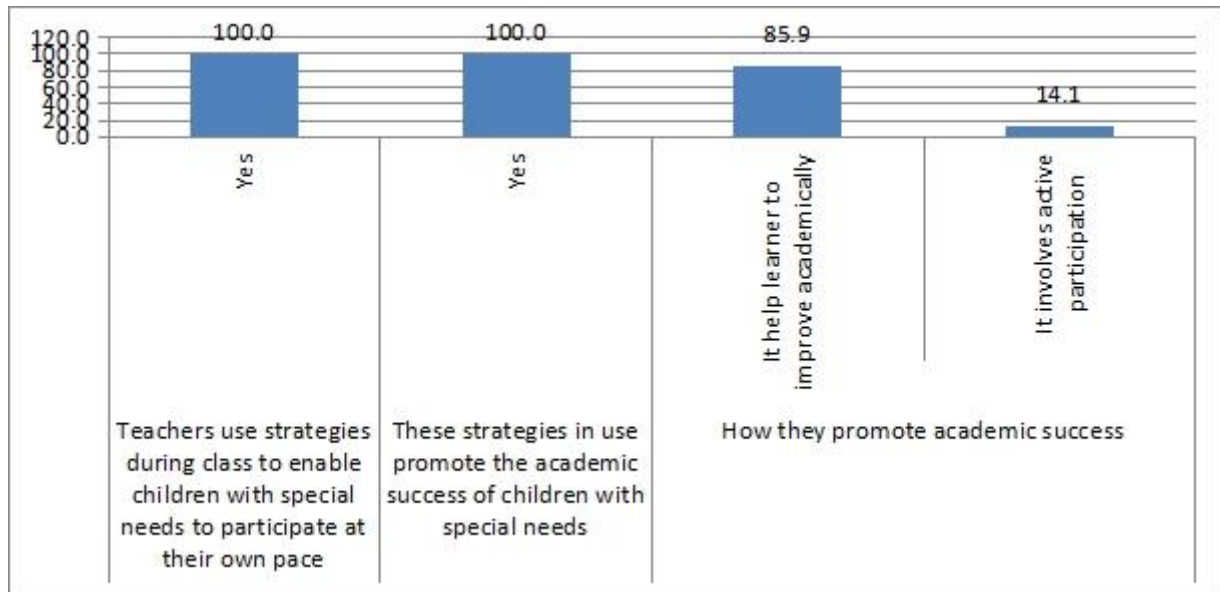


Figure 3. Teachers use strategies to aid pupils to promote academic success (Source: Field Survey, 2023).

In the questionnaire administered, all respondents said yes, teachers use strategies in lessons to allow children with special needs to participate at their own pace. All respondents again answered yes when asked if these strategies used help with the academic success of children with special needs. In the next question, respondents were asked about how these strategies support student academic success, 61% said it helps pupils improve their learning and 10% said these strategies encourage active student participation. In an interview session, the teacher respondents confirmed they use a student-centered approach to involve students fully.

Findings for Objective 3: The Extent to Which the Attitudes of Special Needs Pupils Promote their Academic Success.

Table 6. Behaviors of children with special needs.

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Children with special needs participate actively in class	Yes	69	98.6
	No	1	1.4
Children with special needs are aware of their disability status	Yes	100	100.0
	No	0	0.0
children with special needs tried not to limit their abilities to learn because of their disability status	Yes	37	37.0
	No	63	63.0
Disability status affect the ability of pupils with special needs to learn	Yes	37	37.0
	No	63	63.0
Children with special needs become isolated when other children try to play with them	Yes	24	24.0
	No	76	76.0
Children with special needs are motivated and interested in learning on their own	Yes	87	87.0
	No	13	13.0
Behaviors of pupils with special needs indicates their willingness to learn in the classroom	Yes	99	99.0
	No	1	1.0
Children with special needs apply what they learn in their daily lives	Yes	100	100.0
	No	0	0.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023



This session analyzes the extent to which the attitude of special needs children promotes their academic success. A total of 98.6% of respondents when answering the question of whether children with special needs actively participate in class or not answered yes, while 1.4% answered no, they are not actively participating. All (100%) respondents agree that children with special needs are aware of their disability. In a follow-up, respondents were asked whether children with special needs tried not to limit their learning capacity due to their disability, 63% of respondents answered no, while 37% answered yes. A total of 63% of respondents answered no, the disability does not affect the learning ability of pupils with special needs, while 37% answered yes their disability affects the ability of pupils with special needs. For children with special needs who isolate themselves when other children try to play with them, 76% of respondents said no, children with special needs do not isolate themselves when other children try to play with them, while 24% answered yes, they try isolating themselves when other children try to play with them. A total of 87% of the respondents answered yes, Children with special needs are motivated and interested in independent-study, while 13% answered no, and children with special needs are not motivated and interested in independent-study. A total of 99% of the respondents said yes, the behavior of pupils with special needs indicates that they are ready to learn in class, while 1% said no; the behavior of pupils with special needs does not indicate that they are ready to learn in class. All (100%) respondents answered yes when the question Children with special needs apply what they learn to everyday life. In a nutshell, the attitude and behavior of special needs pupil promote their academic success. Per the data gathered from the table above, the behavior of special need pupils that promote their academic success include active participation in class irrespective of being aware of their disability status. Not limiting their ability to learn because of their disability status, not becoming isolated in playing with others, capability of learning on their own, and willingness to learn at any appropriate time.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, and RECOMMENDATIONS

Investigation revealed that parental involvement influences the academic achievements of special needs children in basic education. Despite facing challenges in involvement, a noteworthy percentage of parents are actively engaged, both financially and in providing crucial support such as regular school visits, academic progress monitoring, and providing learning materials. This finding is consistent with research by Logsdon (2022), who argued that parents play a very important role in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) because they provide essential information about strengths and weaknesses, key background information, and other details of their children. Goldsmith, (2011), Hanushek (2016) and Lucas (2016) also found that parental education level or parental income level plays an important role in the success of student learning, and this is consistent with the finding of the study.

An investigation into how teaching and learning methods promote the academic success of special needs children brought to light that teachers adopt a method of being open-minded and avoiding discrimination against children with special needs. This finding contradicts research by Rieser (2002), who found that behavioral challenges focus on negative attitudes, traits, or behaviors directed by others toward children with special needs. It also contradicts the work of Epic (2021) that prejudice, stigma, and discrimination are challenges that people with disabilities face daily when excluded from many activities. During the follow-up question, 85.9% of respondents said strategies have helped learners improve academic achievement and 14.1% said these strategies involved active child participation. This is in line with Positive Action (2021) that suggested some strategies for teaching pupils with special needs are as follows; discuss and set learning expectations, discuss, and set behavioral expectations, provide a schedule and be very clear about the materials needed for the lesson. This finding further supports the conclusion of Resilient Educator (2020), who proposed six strategies for teaching special education classes and they include; form small groups, create class centers, combine the "basics" with more specialized instruction, alternate lessons, try themed instruction, and offer different levels of books and materials together

Regarding the extent to which the attitude of special need pupils promotes the academic success, the study revealed that the result contradicts research by Nidirect (2022), who found that a child has special educational needs when there is a learning problem or disability that prevents the child from learning



like his or her peers. This finding is further contradicted by research by Gutman and Vorhaus (2012), who found that pupils with special needs sometimes exhibit certain behaviors that threaten their academic success, but they are not always at fault because they are forced to do so throughout the school. Pupils with average disabilities expressed concerns about physical barriers in the school setting. This result confirms the work of Johnson (2011) who found that play is one of the most important needs of children because it helps children manage emotions and cope with things that happen in life. This finding contradicts Save the Children (2021) which reported that some negative attitudes towards learners with disabilities include not being accepted to study with other learners, eat or play with them. And all these social activities help children explore the world around them; improve their communication skills, which in turn improve learning outcomes in the long run.

Recommendations

Drawing upon the primary findings and conclusions, the study formulated the subsequent recommendations:

- To further enhance the academic success of special needs children, it is recommended that schools establish formal channels of communication and collaboration between parents and teachers. This can include the implementation of regular meetings, workshops, and interactive sessions where parents can be informed about specific ways to support their children's education.
- To enhance the positive impact of teaching and learning methods on the academic success of special needs children, it is recommended that educational institutions invest in continuous professional development programs for teachers. These programs should focus on inclusive teaching strategies, resource optimization, and adapting instructional methods to cater to diverse learning needs.
- To further foster the positive impact of special needs pupils' attitudes on their academic success; it is recommended that schools implement initiatives to promote peer support and inclusive activities. Creating inclusive environments where students without special needs actively engage and collaborate with their peers with special needs can enhance social integration and further boost the positive attitudes of all students.

Ethics and Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the work is written with due consideration of ethical standards. The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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