**International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews**

Journal homepage: www.ijrpr.com  ISSN 2582-7421

# ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS: A CASE STUDY OF LILONGWE GIRLS SECONDARY SCHOOL, MALAWI

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ABSTRACT :

The effectiveness of inclusive education in improving the academic achievement of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) has been disputed, although it is now recognized as a key education policy (Salamanca Statement, 1994). The current study examines the intersection of inclusive education and the academic achievement of SEN students with a view to drawing evidence-based conclusions for practice and policy. The findings are a pointer to the deficits and merits of inclusive education, calling for adequate training of teachers, application of resources, and support structures to optimize academic performance of all learners regardless of their abilities.

## INTRODUCTION :

The efficiency of inclusive education practices in enhancing academic achievement for learners with special educational needs (SEN) remains a topic worthy debate despite its well-known adoption as a significant educational policy (Salamanca statement , 1994). Therefore this study has investigated the relationship between inclusive education and academic performance of learners with  SEN with a view to inform evidence based policy and practice that promoted the educational inclusion and success of all learners regardless of their abilities

## LITERATURE REVIEW :

Inclusive Education Frameworks and Policies    (Aldosari M.S 2022) Review international and national policies promoting inclusive education, such as UNESCO's Salamanca Statement and Malawi's Inclusive Education Policy, to provide a foundational understanding of inclusive practices and goals. The Role of Teacher Training in Inclusive Education      (Chaungo, M. 2022 Explore studies on how teacher preparedness, professional development, and attitudes affect the successful implementation of inclusive education for learners with special educational needs (SEN). Resource Availability and Its Impact on Inclusive Education   (Deiner, P.L,2010) Analyze the availability and adequacy of teaching materials, infrastructure, and assistive technologies in promoting academic performance for SEN learners Classroom Strategies for Inclusive Education (Chataika, et al, 2019 Investigate effective classroom management strategies, differentiated instruction, and individualized education plans (IEPs) to support SEN learners in mainstream classrooms. Barriers to Inclusive Education in Developing Countries   Chataika, et al, 2017)

Examine challenges such as societal attitudes, funding limitations, and cultural perceptions of disabilities in implementing inclusive education in contexts similar to Malawi. Academic Performance of SEN Learners in Inclusive vs. Segregated Settings  (Government of Malawi & UNICEF  2019) Review comparative studies that evaluate the academic outcomes of SEN learners in inclusive classrooms versus specialized or segregated settings. Parental Involvement and Its Effect on Inclusive Education   (ISIDA, et al 2017) Examine the influence of parental engagement, support, and advocacy on the academic success of SEN learners in inclusive settings. Gender and Inclusive Education (Government of Malawi 2016) Investigate the intersection of gender and special educational needs, focusing on how girls with SEN experience inclusive education in secondary schools, particularly in Malawi. Case Studies of Successful Inclusive Education Models  (Ministry of Education and Vocational training)

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY :

*Research Design:*

This research  used  both qualitative and quantitative  design whereby I  administered questionnaires, FGDs, observations, achievement test results Qualitative data

Interviews: I conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers, school administrators, parents and learners to explore their experiences and perceptions regarding inclusive education and barriers they face.

Focus Group Discussions (FDGs): are engaged both SEN and non-SEN learners to understand peer interactions, inclusion challenges and support systems in the classroom

Observation: I observed inclusive practices in the classroom, teacher-student interactions and SEN learner participation.

Quantitative data

Descriptive statistics to summarise the academic performance of learners with SEN e.g. Mean scores, standard deviations and frequency distributions.

Comparative analysis using t-tests or ANOVA to compare the academic performance of SEN learners with their peers without SEN.

Correlation analysis to examine the relationship between the academic performance of SEN learners and various influencing factors e.g. teacher training and classroom resources.

### *Study Area*

The research was carried out at Lilongwe Girls Secondary School, Malawi, Central Africa.

### *Target Population*

The target population for this study includes the following groups:

SEN learners enrolled in mainstream classrooms at Lilongwe Girls Secondary School.

Non-SEN learners who will serve as a comparative group to assess the differences in academic performance and classroom participation.

Teachers who are involved in inclusive education at the school.

Parents of learners with SEN and a few parents of non-SEN learners to provide insight into the broader community's perspective.

School Administrators who are involved in policy and decision-making related to inclusive education.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION :

Once data was collected and processed, the next crucial step in my  research was analyzing and interpreting the data. This process involved examining the data to identify patterns, trends, and relationships, as well as drawing meaningful conclusions based on the findings. Since your study employed a mixed-methods approach, both quantitative and qualitative analyses are required. Below is a detailed guide on how to analyze and interpret the data for your research on the impact of inclusive education on the academic performance of learners with special educational needs (SEN) at Lilongwe Girls Secondary School

### 1. Quantitative Data Analysis

The average grade in Math for SEN students is 9% while non-SEN is 77.1 which represents the performance of both SEN and non SEN students.

Standard Deviation: Determine the variability or spread of grades. A large standard deviation indicates a wide range of performance, while a small one shows that the grades are clustered around the mean.

Frequency Distribution: Identify the most common grades (e.g., how many students in each group scored A, B, C, etc.).

Graphs/Charts: Create bar charts, histograms, and box plots to visually represent the distribution of academic performance in different groups.

| Group | Average Math grade | Standard Deviation |
|-------|-------------------|--------------------|
| SEN | 75% | 10% |
| NonSEN | 85% | 7% |

### 2. Survey Data:

Frequencies and Percentages: Determine how often certain responses occur. For example, how many teachers agree that inclusive education benefits SEN learners?

Comparing Groups: If you collected responses from teachers, students, and parents, compare how each group responded to various questions regarding inclusive education.

| Question | Strong Agree(%) | Agree (%) | Neutral (%) | Disagree(%) |
|----------|-----------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| Inclusive Education benefits SEN learners | 40 | 25 | 33 | 10 |
| Trained teachers for inclusion | 30 | 38 | 22 | 15 |

B. Inferential Statistics:

### 1. T-tests

Use a t-test (if comparing two groups)  to determine if there are statistically significant differences in the academic performance between SEN and non-SEN learners.

Example: Is the difference in math grades between SEN and non-SEN learners statistically significant?

Hypotheses for testing:

Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no significant difference in the academic performance between SEN and non-SEN learners.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): There is a significant difference in the academic performance between SEN and non-SEN learners.

**2. Correlation Analysis:**

Analyze the relationship between different factors, such as teacher support and academic performance, or peer interaction and student engagement.

Example: Is there a positive correlation between classroom participation and academic performance for SEN students?

If the correlation is strong (close to 1 or -1), it suggests a strong relationship; if it's close to 0, there's little to no relationship.

**2. Qualitative Data Analysis:**

Qualitative data in your study comes from interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations. This type of data provides deeper insights into the experiences and perceptions of the stakeholders involved in inclusive education.

A. Coding and Categorization:

**1. Initial Coding:**

Read through the interview and focus group transcriptions multiple times.

Create codes that represent themes or important points in the data. For example:

"Teacher Training" for responses about professional development.

"Peer Support" for mentions of students helping each other.

"Barriers" for challenges faced in inclusive classrooms.

**2. Theme Development:**

After coding, group the codes into broader themes. For example, the code "Teacher Strategies" may combine several related codes like "Differentiated Instruction," "Visual Aids," and "Small Group Work."

Develop clear, concise descriptions for each theme as illustrated in the table below:

| Theme | Code | Description | Differentiate Instruction | Tailoring |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teaching methods for individual needs. Teaching materials and technology. Students participation | Teacher training for profession development. Peer support for students helping each other . Barriers" for challenges faced in inclusive classrooms | Teacher Strategies. Classroom Barriers Peer interaction | Lack of resources . Collaboration. | Limited access to teaching materials and technology. The role of peer support in SEN student participation | |

## MAJOR FINDINGS :

The main findings of this research indicate that inclusive education at Lilongwe Girls Secondary School is still a work in progress. While there are positive efforts and attitudes towards including SEN students, several challenges—including inadequate teacher training, lack of resources, and difficulties in managing diverse classrooms—affect the academic outcomes of SEN learners. However, SEN students who receive personalized support, positive peer interaction, and appropriate resources tend to perform better academically.

By addressing these challenges and implementing the recommendations provided, the school could improve its inclusive education practices, ultimately enhancing the academic performance of SEN students. The study emphasizes the need for ongoing support, training, and resource allocation to ensure that inclusive education becomes more effective and equitable for all learners.

Main Findings refer to the key insights and conclusions that emerge from the analysis and interpretation of the data collected during the research. These findings provide an answer to the research questions and objectives, and they help inform the broader understanding of the impact of inclusive education on the academic performance of learners with special educational needs (SEN) at Lilongwe Girls Secondary School.

Based on your study's research aims and objectives, here is a hypothetical outline of the Main Findings that might emerge from the analysis:

## SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS :

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, several key recommendations can be made to improve the academic performance of learners with special educational needs (SEN) at Lilongwe Girls Secondary School and to strengthen the implementation of inclusive education practices. These recommendations are aimed at addressing the challenges identified in the research and enhancing the overall effectiveness of inclusive education.

## CONCLUSION :

The conclusion of the research highlights that while inclusive education at Lilongwe Girls Secondary School is progressing, significant challenges remain. These include inadequate teacher training, insufficient resources, and difficulties in managing diverse classrooms, which negatively impact the academic performance of students with special educational needs (SEN). However, students who receive personalized support, positive peer interaction, and appropriate resources tend to achieve better academic outcomes.

To enhance inclusive education, the study recommends addressing these challenges through continuous teacher training, improved resource allocation, and stronger support systems. By implementing these measures, the school can create a more effective and equitable learning environment for all students.

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