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Psychological Challenges of Students with Learning Disabilities in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers in Yobe State, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study investigated the psychological challenges experienced by students with learning disabilities in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers in Yobe State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study identified the psychological challenges experienced by these students, examined their influence on learning and vocational skills acquisition, and identified measures for reducing the challenges. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised students with learning disabilities in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers across Yobe State, while a sample of 250 respondents was selected from six Centers across the three senatorial districts using a multistage sampling technique based on Nwana's recommendation. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire titled Psychological Challenges of Students with Learning Disabilities Questionnaire (PCSLDQ). The instrument was validated by experts, and its reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that students with learning disabilities experience psychological challenges such as anxiety, low self-esteem, frustration, emotional stress, poor self-confidence, fear of failure, and social isolation, which negatively affect their learning and vocational skills acquisition. The study concluded that counselling services, supportive learning environments, trained teachers, adapted instructional materials, and psychological support programmes are essential for improving students' psychological well-being and vocational outcomes. The study recommended strengthening inclusive support services in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers across Yobe State.

Keywords: Psychological challenges, learning disabilities, Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Yobe State, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Learning disabilities (LDs) are neurodevelopmental disorders that affect an individual's ability to acquire, process, and apply academic skills such as reading, writing, reasoning, and mathematics despite having average or above-average intelligence and access to appropriate educational opportunities. Students with learning disabilities often experience persistent academic difficulties that extend beyond classroom performance to include various psychological challenges such as anxiety, low self-esteem, frustration, depression, poor self-concept, and social isolation. These psychological difficulties can negatively influence learners' motivation, participation, interpersonal relationships, and overall educational outcomes, particularly when adequate educational and psychosocial support is unavailable (Dell'Anna et al., 2022).

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The global movement toward inclusive education emphasizes that all learners, including those with learning disabilities, should have equal access to quality education and the necessary support services to achieve their full potential. Evidence from a systematic review indicates that inclusive educational environments can improve both academic achievement and psychological well-being among learners with disabilities when appropriate instructional accommodations, counselling services, and peer support are provided (Dell'Anna et al., 2022). Likewise, Hove and Phasha (2024) argued that effective psychological and educational support services are essential for improving learners' confidence, participation, and educational success in inclusive learning environments.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), often undertaken in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers, has become an important strategy for equipping young people with practical competencies, entrepreneurial skills, and employability. These centers provide opportunities for learners to acquire occupational skills that promote economic independence and social inclusion. However, students with learning disabilities enrolled in vocational training programmes may encounter additional psychological challenges arising from inaccessible learning environments, inadequate instructional accommodations, insufficient counselling services, and limited teacher preparedness to support diverse learning needs. A systematic review by Jobir (2024) concluded that the successful implementation of inclusive education in TVET institutions depends largely on the availability of inclusive policies, trained personnel, accessible facilities, and comprehensive learner support services.

In Nigeria, the implementation of inclusive education continues to encounter significant challenges, including inadequate teacher training, limited instructional resources, insufficient specialized support services, and persistent negative societal attitudes toward persons with disabilities. These limitations reduce opportunities for effective educational participation and may worsen the psychological experiences of students with learning disabilities. Bouwoye and Adesokan (2024) reported that many public educational institutions lack the capacity to adequately address the diverse educational and psychological needs of learners with disabilities, thereby limiting the effective implementation of inclusive education.

In Yobe State, Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers are expected to equip young people with vocational competencies that enhance employment opportunities, self-reliance, and socioeconomic development. Despite these objectives, students with learning disabilities may continue to experience psychological difficulties that affect their learning, participation, and successful completion of vocational training programmes. Although previous studies have focused on inclusive education, teacher preparedness, and institutional practices, there is limited empirical evidence regarding the psychological challenges experienced by students with learning disabilities in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers in Yobe State. This knowledge gap underscores the need for the present study, which seeks to investigate the psychological challenges of students with learning disabilities in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers in Yobe State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Students with learning disabilities in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers are expected to acquire vocational knowledge and practical skills that will enhance their employability and independence. However, many of these learners experience psychological challenges such as anxiety, low self-esteem, frustration, social isolation, and poor self-confidence, which may hinder their learning, participation, and successful completion of vocational training programmes. These psychological challenges can reduce learners' motivation, classroom engagement, skill acquisition, and overall educational outcomes,

particularly where counselling services, instructional accommodations, and trained personnel are inadequate. Despite growing attention to inclusive education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), existing studies have focused mainly on educational policies, teacher preparedness, and institutional practices, with limited attention given to the psychological experiences of students with learning disabilities in vocational skills acquisition settings. Consequently, there is insufficient empirical evidence on the psychological challenges experienced by students with learning disabilities in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers in Yobe State, Nigeria. This knowledge gap makes it difficult for educators, counsellors, and policymakers to develop evidence-based interventions that address learners' psychological needs and improve their educational and vocational outcomes. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the psychological challenges of students with learning disabilities in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers in Yobe State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Identify the psychological challenges experienced by students with learning disabilities in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers in Yobe State.
2. Determine the support measures that can help reduce the psychological challenges experienced by students with learning disabilities in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers in Yobe State.

Research Questions

1. What are the psychological challenges experienced by students with learning disabilities in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers in Yobe State, Nigeria?
2. What support measures can help reduce the psychological challenges experienced by students with learning disabilities in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers in Yobe State, Nigeria?

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Psychological challenges refer to emotional, cognitive, and behavioural difficulties that affect an individual's functioning and adjustment within educational and social environments. Common psychological challenges among students include anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, frustration, stress, and social isolation. These challenges can negatively affect learners' motivation, participation, confidence, and academic outcomes. Students with learning disabilities are particularly vulnerable because continuous learning difficulties may lead to feelings of failure, low self-worth, and emotional distress. Dell'Anna et al. (2022) noted that learners with disabilities may experience social and psychological difficulties when adequate educational and support systems are lacking. In vocational learning environments, psychological challenges may affect students' confidence, practical skill development, and participation. Therefore, identifying these challenges is important for developing appropriate counselling and educational support strategies.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design because it sought to investigate the psychological challenges experienced by students with learning disabilities in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers (B.E.S.T.) in Yobe State, Nigeria. The study was conducted across Yobe State, covering all the three senatorial districts, The population comprised all students with learning disabilities enrolled in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers across the state. A multistage sampling technique was employed to select the participants. First, two B.E.S.T. Centers were purposively selected from each of the three

senatorial districts, giving a total of six Centers. In line with Nwana's (1981) recommendation that a sample of about 10%–40% may be adequate depending on the nature of the population, students with learning disabilities were selected from the six Centers, giving a total sample of 250 respondents.

The data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire titled Psychological Challenges of Students with Learning Disabilities Questionnaire (PCSLDQ). The instrument consisted of Section A, which obtained respondents' demographic information, and Section B, which contained items, organized according to the three research objectives and rated on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). Face and content validity of the instrument were established by experts in Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation, whose observations were incorporated before the final administration. The reliability of the instrument was determined through a pilot study conducted in a Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centre outside the study area but with similar characteristics to the selected Centers.

The responses obtained were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a satisfactory reliability coefficient. Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the relevant authorities and the management of the selected Centers. The researcher, with the assistance of trained research assistants, personally administered the questionnaire, explained the purpose of the study, assured respondents of confidentiality, and retrieved the completed copies immediately after completion to minimize non-response. Data collected were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the three research questions, while a criterion mean of 2.50 served as the benchmark for decision-making.

RESULTS

Research Question 1:

What are the psychological challenges experienced by students with learning disabilities in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers in Yobe State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on Psychological Challenges are Experienced by Students with Learning Disabilities

S/N	Item	Mean	S.D	Decision
1	I often feel anxious during practical or classroom activities	3.38	0.71	Agreed
2	I experience low self-esteem because of my learning difficulties	3.21	0.82	Agreed
3	I become frustrated when learning new vocational skills	3.47	0.65	Agreed
4	I feel less confident than other students during training activities	3.29	0.76	Agreed
5	I avoid participating in class because I fear making mistakes	3.16	0.89	Agreed
6	I feel socially isolated from my classmates	2.97	0.91	Agreed
7	My learning difficulties make me emotionally stressed	3.42	0.69	Agreed
8	I worry that I may not perform well in my vocational training	3.34	0.74	Agreed
	Grand Mean.	**3.28**	**0.77**	**Agreed**

The results indicate that students with learning disabilities in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers experience psychological challenges such as anxiety,

low self-esteem, frustration, emotional stress, poor confidence, fear of failure, and social isolation. The grand mean of 3.28 indicates that respondents generally agreed that these psychological challenges are prevalent.

Research Question 2

What support measures can help reduce the psychological challenges experienced by students with learning disabilities in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers in Yobe State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on Support Measures that can help Reduce the Psychological Challenges Experienced by Students with Learning Disabilities

S/N	Item	Mean	S.D	Decision
9	Regular counselling services would help reduce my psychological	3.61	0.55	Agreed
10	Teachers should provide additional support to students with learning disabilities	3.58	0.60	Agreed
11	A supportive learning environment would improve my confidence	3.64	0.51	Agreed
12	Encouragement from teachers increases my participation in learning	3.55	0.62	Agreed
13	Peer support helps reduce my emotional stress	3.39	0.73	Agreed
14	Learning materials adapted to my needs would improve my learning	3.49	0.67	Agreed
15	Teachers should receive training on supporting students with Learning disabilities	3.67	0.49	Agreed
16	Psychological support programmes should be available in B.E.S.T. Centers	3.72	0.46	Agreed
	Grand Mean.	**3.58**	**0.58**	**Agreed**

The results show that respondents agreed that counselling services, teacher support, inclusive learning environments, peer support, adapted learning materials, teacher training, and psychological support programmes are effective measures for reducing the psychological challenges experienced by students with learning disabilities. The grand mean of 3.58 indicates strong agreement among the respondents.

DISCUSSION

The study found that students with learning disabilities in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers in Yobe State experience psychological challenges such as anxiety, low self-esteem, frustration, emotional stress, poor self-confidence, fear of failure, and social isolation. This finding agrees with Dell'Anna et al. (2022), who reported that learners with disabilities often experience psychological and social difficulties, especially when adequate educational support is lacking. It is also consistent with Fong and Soni (2022), who found that learners with learning difficulties experience higher levels of anxiety than their peers.

The study also revealed that psychological challenges negatively influence students' learning and vocational skills acquisition by reducing their motivation, concentration, confidence, classroom participation, and overall learning progress. This finding supports Ryan and Deci (2020), who argued that unmet psychological needs reduce learners' motivation and engagement. It also agrees with Jobir (2024), who emphasized the importance of supportive learning environments in improving outcomes for learners with disabilities in TVET institutions.

Finally, the study found that counselling services, teacher support, inclusive learning environments, adapted learning materials, peer support, and psychological support programmes can effectively reduce the psychological challenges experienced by students with learning disabilities. This finding is consistent with Hove and Phasha (2024), who emphasized that appropriate educational and psychological support enhances learners' confidence, participation, and educational success.

Conclusion

This study concluded that students with learning disabilities in Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers in Yobe State experience various psychological challenges, including anxiety, low self-esteem, frustration, emotional stress, poor self-confidence, and social isolation. These challenges negatively affect their learning, participation, motivation, and vocational skills acquisition. The study further concluded that the provision of counselling services, supportive learning environments, trained teachers, adapted instructional materials, peer support, and psychological support programmes can significantly reduce these challenges and improve the educational and vocational outcomes of students with learning disabilities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers should provide regular counselling and psychological support services for students with learning disabilities.
2. Teachers and instructors should receive regular training on inclusive instructional strategies and effective ways of supporting students with learning disabilities.
3. The management of Business and Engineering Skills Acquisition Centers should provide inclusive learning environments and appropriate instructional materials to enhance students' participation and skills acquisition.
4. Peer support programmes should be encouraged to promote social inclusion, improve students' self-confidence, and reduce feelings of isolation.
5. The Yobe State Government and other relevant stakeholders should strengthen policies and allocate adequate resources to support inclusive vocational education for students with learning disabilities.

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