

The Relationship Between Perceived Support of Non-SPED Teachers and Academic Engagement of Learners with Special Needs in Inclusive Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the relationship between the perceived support of non-SPED teachers and the academic engagement of learners with special needs in inclusive classrooms in Bacolod City, Philippines. While several studies recognize the importance of teacher support in inclusive education, limited research has explored its relationship with the academic engagement of learners with special needs in the local context. A quantitative design using a descriptive-correlational method was employed to address this gap. A total of 30 grade school learners with special needs were selected through purposive sampling. Adapted standardized questionnaires, namely the Perceived Teacher Support Scale (PTSS) and the Student Engagement in Schools Questionnaire (SESQ), were used to measure perceived teacher support and academic engagement. Findings revealed that teacher support was generally perceived as present and learners demonstrated a high level of academic engagement. The study further found a very strong positive relationship between perceived teacher support and academic engagement ($r = 0.944$, $p < .001$). The results highlight the importance of supportive and inclusive teaching practices in enhancing learner participation, motivation, and engagement in inclusive classrooms. The implications suggest that schools and teachers need to strengthen inclusive instructional practices, emotional support, and responsive classroom environments to further improve the academic engagement of learners with special needs.

Keywords: Inclusive education; teacher support; academic engagement; learners with special needs.

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Introduction

The adoption of inclusive education is founded on the principle that every student, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, deserves equal educational opportunities and experiences (Madhesh, 2023). In inclusive classrooms, teachers play a critical role in fostering meaningful participation and learning among students with disabilities. According to Abrol (2025), the role of teachers is crucial where they help in promoting, participation and reducing under achievement, especially

with children perceived as having difficulties in learning. While this approach offers significant benefits, it also presents substantial challenges for both general and secondary education teachers because many of whom lack specialized training to effectively accommodate students with diverse learning needs. General education (GE) teachers lack training in how to work with students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in their GE classrooms, lack collaboration opportunities with their special education colleagues to better support their

students with ASD, and are not provided sufficient resources by their schools and programs to create an appropriate inclusive environment in their GE classrooms (Jaffal, 2022). Recent studies highlight that teacher support significantly influences the academic participation and outcomes of students with disabilities. Teachers' attitudes, instructional strategies, and level of support can shape students' academic engagement and motivation in inclusive environments (Carter et al., 2023)

Across Asia, many countries have increasingly adopted inclusive education policies to address the educational needs of learners with disabilities (Faragher et al., 2020). Thai education aims to provide education for all, including students with special needs. These students should receive all necessary support, including medical, academic, and media support etc. Schools need to revise their curricula, teaching methods, and learning approaches (Laizans & Dzerviniks, 2025). However, studies across the region indicate that challenges remain in effectively implementing inclusive education. A study of 60 schools implementing inclusive education found that teachers lacked knowledge of how to work with students with different types of disabilities and lacked the skills to prepare lessons in an inclusive classroom (Laizans & Dzerviniks, 2025). According to Hosshan (2022), teaching skills and the availability of appropriate resources in inclusive classrooms were identified as key factors in supporting students with educational needs. Moreover, systematic implementation of differentiated instruction, concrete learning materials, visual aids, and collaborative teaching models significantly enhanced learning interest among students with special needs. Students demonstrated improved attention spans (82% of cases), increased voluntary participation (78%), and more positive learning behaviors (75%) (Yuliana & Sukinah, 2025).

In the Philippine context, inclusive education has been actively promoted through several laws that have already been put in place to ensure that special learners are not denied of their right to education and are able to live fully and with dignity. The Republic Act No. 11650, also known as the Inclusive Education Act, institutionalizes inclusive education by ensuring that learners with disabilities are accommodated in mainstream schools whenever possible. Despite legislative efforts, numerous obstacles hinder effective implementation, including inadequate funding, insufficient teacher training, curriculum inflexibility, social stigma, and infrastructural barriers (Espeño et al., 2024). According to Enriquez et al. (2025) teachers

exhibit a moderate level of knowledge about inclusive education principles, suggesting familiarity but limited mastery of technical strategies. However, they demonstrated a positive attitude and reported highly inclusive practices in their classrooms. This implies that the teachers' foundational knowledge and positive outlook do not automatically translate into consistent or effective application of inclusive strategies, highlighting a gap between willingness and practical competence, likely due to a lack of sustained training or institutional support. As a result, the level of support that students with special needs receive from their general education teachers may differ, which can significantly affect their classroom engagement and participation in learning activities.

In Bacolod City, Philippines, inclusive education has gradually gained attention among public and private schools as the Department of Education (DepEd) strategizes an inclusive program through DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009, which locates learners with a disability, establishes continuous needs assessment, provides program options, modifies curriculum, and involves parents. According to a recent PhilStar report, enrollment has significantly declined among learners with disabilities in mainstream public schools. However, the Division of Bacolod City is actively working to support these students, with 872 learners with disabilities currently enrolled (as of academic year 2025-2026) in the 43 schools that receive funding from the Special Education Support Fund. Division Memo No. 429, s2023 outlines the allocation of Php 1,948,900 to these schools, which will go towards formal assessments and rehabilitation by medical or allied medical specialists and the acquisition of specialized materials, equipment, and devices for instructional purposes. The study of Dela Cruz (2024) found that public schools are adaptable in implementing inclusive education, but only partially in resource room services and educational placement. Issues include teacher competence, resource inadequacy, and assessment of special needs. Adjustments made include modifications to the learning process and collaboration with others. To effectively implement inclusive education, public schools should include teacher training and hiring Special Education teachers in policy recommendations.

While many studies have examined inclusive education and teacher support, there remains a lack of research specifically examining the relationship between the academic engagement of students with special needs in inclusive classrooms and the perceived support of non-SPED teachers, particularly in the local context of

Bacolod City. Most existing studies focus on teacher preparedness, instructional strategies, classroom management, and the implementation of inclusive education policies (Garrote et al., 2020; Febrian & Kurniawati, 2020; Chow et al., 2023). For instance, Garrote et al. (2020) examined how teacher attitudes and classroom management influence social acceptance in inclusive classrooms, while Chow et al. (2023) explored teachers' perceived support needs in implementing inclusive education. Similarly, Febrian and Kurniawati (2020) focused on teacher self-efficacy and instructional support in inclusive primary school settings. Although these studies contributed significantly to understanding teacher-related factors in inclusive education, they gave limited attention to the perspectives of learners with special needs regarding the support they receive from regular classroom teachers. Furthermore, few studies have specifically examined how students' perceptions of teacher support relate to their academic engagement and participation in classroom and school learning activities. This research gap highlights the need to investigate the relationship between students with special needs' perceptions of non-SPED teacher support and their academic engagement in inclusive classrooms. Additionally, previous research suggests that positive teacher-student relationships and supportive classroom interactions can significantly influence the social participation and inclusion of students with special educational needs (Tops et al., 2019).

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the perceived support of non-SPED teachers and the academic engagement of learners with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Specifically, this study aims to determine the level of support provided by non-SPED teachers as perceived by learners with disabilities and to assess the level of their academic engagement in the classroom. Furthermore, the study seeks to identify whether a significant relationship exists between perceived teacher support and the academic engagement of learners with disabilities in regular classroom settings. The findings of this study may provide valuable insights for teachers, school administrators, and policymakers in strengthening inclusive education practices and improving support systems for learners with disabilities. In addition, the study may contribute to the development of teacher training programs and classroom strategies that promote greater student participation, engagement, and inclusion in regular classroom environments.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in the Self-Determination Theory developed by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan

(1985), which posits that individuals are more likely to demonstrate motivation, well-being, and sustained engagement when their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled. The study assumes that the perceived support of non-SPED teachers significantly influences the academic engagement of learners with special needs in inclusive classrooms. When learners perceive their teachers as supportive through providing guidance, constructive feedback, encouragement, meaningful choices, and positive teacher-student relationships, they are more likely to participate actively, persist in academic tasks, pay attention during classroom activities, and exert effort in learning. In the context of this study, the theory explains that non-SPED teachers play an important role in fostering a supportive and inclusive classroom environment where learners with special needs feel valued, capable, and connected, which consequently enhances their academic engagement.

Methodology

Research Design

This study followed a quantitative research design using a descriptive-correlational method to describe the variables and examine their relationship. Quantitative research is commonly used to examine relationships among variables through numerical data and statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As cited in recent studies, quantitative designs are appropriate in determining patterns, relationships, and levels of variables within educational research settings. For instance, Harrison et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of rigorous quantitative and mixed methods approaches in examining relationships among research variables. In this study, the descriptive approach was utilized to determine the level of perceived support provided by non-SPED teachers and the level of academic engagement of learners with special needs, while the correlational approach was employed to determine whether a significant relationship exists between these variables.

Respondents

The respondents were the 30 identified grade school learners with special needs enrolled in a private school in Bacolod City, Philippines. These learners represented the target population, as they had been clinically diagnosed with special needs by qualified professionals such as developmental pediatricians, child psychologists, and other licensed specialists. Documents pertaining to their disabilities were secured from the records of the Guidance Office, which were also disseminated to class

advisers and learning area teachers across grade levels. The study employed purposive sampling in selecting the respondents. Specifically, only those learners who met the inclusion criteria of the study, such as being enrolled in an inclusive classroom and having an officially documented disability, were included. Since purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique, no statistical sample size calculator was used. Instead, the study included all qualified learners who met the set criteria, depending on their availability and eligibility during the data collection period.

Research Instrument

This study employed two adapted standardized instruments. To assess the perceived support provided by non-SPED teachers, the study utilized the Perceived Teacher Support Scale (PTSS) developed by Wu et al. (2024). The PTSS is a student-reported questionnaire designed to measure how well students perceive support from their teachers. It consists of items distributed across four dimensions of teacher support, namely instrumental support, emotional support, informational support, and appraisal support. The instrument was developed using a theory-driven approach anchored in the framework of social support and was found to be

a psychometrically sound measure of perceived teacher support. For the purposes of the present study, the instrument was adapted to suit the Philippine context and the comprehension level of grade school learners with disabilities in inclusive classrooms while preserving the original meaning and intent of the items.

The other instrument used in the study was the Student Engagement in Schools Questionnaire (SESQ) developed by Hart et al. (2011). The SESQ is a standardized self-report questionnaire designed to assess student engagement in school. It contains items that measure the major dimensions of engagement, particularly affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement. The instrument uses a Likert-type scale that allows respondents to indicate the extent of their participation, interest, and investment in school-related activities and learning tasks. The SESQ demonstrated good internal consistency and was developed as a multidimensional measure of student engagement in school settings. In this study, the questionnaire was adapted to make the language more appropriate and understandable for grade school learners with disabilities without changing the constructs being measured. The tables below (1.1 and 1.2) show the scales and interpretations of the findings.

Table 1.1. Verbal Interpretation of Perceived Teacher Support

Scale Range (Mean)	Verbal Interpretation	Description
0.50–1.00	Perceived as Present	The respondents generally perceived that teacher support was present and consistently experienced.
0.00–0.49	Perceived as Not Present	The respondents generally perceived that teacher support was lacking or not consistently experienced.

Table 1.2. Verbal Interpretation of Student Engagement

Scale Range (Mean)	Verbal Interpretation	Description
3.25 – 4.00	Always	The behavior or experience is consistently observed among the respondents. It reflects a very high level of student engagement.
2.50 – 3.24	Often	The behavior or experience is frequently observed. It indicates a high level of student engagement.
1.75 – 2.49	Sometimes	The behavior or experience is moderately observed. It reflects an average level of student engagement.
1.00 – 1.74	Never	The behavior or experience is rarely or not observed. It indicates a low level of student engagement.

Data Collection Procedure

The study first sought approval from the school administration of the private school in Bacolod City, Philippines, where the study was conducted. Upon approval, the researchers coordinated with the Guidance Office, class advisers, and learning area teachers to identify the respondents who met the inclusion criteria. Since the participants were minors, parental consent and learner assent were secured prior to the conduct of the

study. The respondents were also oriented regarding the purpose of the study, the data gathering procedures, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of their responses.

During the data collection, the researchers administered the adapted questionnaires in printed form to the selected respondents within the school premises. The instruments were written in English and were not translated into the local language because English was the primary

medium of instruction used in the school, and the pupils were well-versed in speaking and understanding the English language. The respondents personally answered the questionnaires with the assistance of the researcher and the learning area teacher, who provided clarification whenever some instructions or items were not clearly understood by the learners. Clear instructions were given prior to the administration, and the respondents were provided sufficient time, approximately 20 to 30 minutes, to complete the instruments. Necessary accommodations appropriate to the needs of the learners with disabilities, such as simplified directions, guided assistance in reading the items, and extended time, were also provided without modifying the substance of the instruments.

The data gathering was conducted in two separate sessions. During the first session, the respondents answered the adapted standardized questionnaire on the perceived support of non-SPED teachers. In the second session, the respondents answered the adapted standardized questionnaire on academic engagement. Both sessions were supervised by the researcher to ensure the proper and uniform administration of the instruments and to prevent any form of influence on the respondents' answers. Throughout the entire process, the anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality of the respondents were strictly maintained.

After the administration, the accomplished questionnaires were checked, coded, and entered into a tabulation sheet. The data were then submitted to the statistician for tabulation and normality testing to determine the appropriate statistical tools for the inferential analysis.

Data Analysis

Analyses were performed on the data using two types of statistics: descriptive and inferential. Descriptive statistics, specifically the mean and standard deviation, were used to summarize the learners' perceived support of non-SPED teachers and their academic engagement levels. Before conducting inferential analysis, the data were tested for normality to determine the appropriate correlation test to be used. If the data were normally distributed, Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was computed to examine the relationship between perceived support and academic engagement. On the other hand, if the data were not normally distributed, the Spearman Rank-Order correlation was used instead. The strength and direction of the correlation were interpreted based on standard statistical guidelines. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS software.

Ethical Consideration

This research study followed all appropriate ethical guidelines and protocols set forth by the institution. Approval to conduct the study was secured from the school administration. Informed consent was obtained from the parents or guardians of all respondents, while assent was obtained from the learners themselves, as required by the institution. All respondents were assured of anonymity, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Data were securely stored and used solely for research purposes. No personal identifiers were associated with the data, and all results were reported in aggregate form to protect the privacy of the participants.

Results and Discussion

The following results and discussion are presented in this section, organized according to the research objectives: (1) perceived support by Non-SPED teachers to learners with special needs in an inclusive classroom, (2) academic engagement of learners with special needs, (3) relationship between perceived support of Non-SPED teachers and the academic engagement of learners with special needs.

Perceived Support by Non-SPED Teachers to Learners with Special Needs

To assess the perceived support provided by non-SPED teachers, the study utilized the Perceived Teacher Support Scale (PTSS) developed by Wu et al. (2024). The instrument measured the extent to which learners with disabilities perceive support from their teachers in inclusive classrooms. Interpretation of scores was based on a dichotomous scale: 1 (Perceived as Present) and 0 (Perceived as Not Present).

The sample obtained an average mean score of 0.839 with a standard deviation of 0.193. This indicates that the responses are relatively consistent and clustered toward the higher end of the scale, suggesting that most learners share a similar perception regarding the presence of teacher support. The minimal variation further reflects a generally uniform experience among the respondents.

Table 2 presents the level of perceived support provided by non-SPED teachers. The findings reveal that the overall result falls under the category "Perceived as Present," indicating that learners commonly experience support within inclusive classroom settings.

It is implied in the findings that non-SPED teachers are able to provide observable and meaningful support to learners with disabilities, contributing to a more

Table 2. *Level of Perceived Teacher Support*

Variable	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Perceived Teacher Support	0.839	0.193	Perceived as Present

inclusive and responsive learning environment. However, while support is generally present, the results may also suggest the need to continuously enhance and sustain these practices to ensure consistent and effective support across diverse learning situations.

The result is consistent with recent literature emphasizing that teacher support is a central component in the successful implementation of inclusive education. Chow et al. (2023) found that teachers play a critical role in inclusive settings but often require adequate support systems to effectively meet the needs of learners with disabilities. The study highlighted that consistent instructional and emotional support contributes to improved inclusion practices, reinforcing the present findings that support is generally experienced by learners. A similar research study by Donath et al. (2023) revealed that professional development significantly enhances teachers’ ability to provide inclusive support, particularly in adapting instruction and responding to diverse learner needs. This suggests that the presence of teacher support observed in the current study may be linked to teachers’ exposure to training and inclusive education initiatives.

However, while the support is perceived as present the minimal variation further reflects a generally uniform experience rather than a highly differentiated level of experience among learners with special needs as respondents. This aligns with the findings of Woodcock et al. (2022), who emphasized that teacher self-efficacy plays a crucial role in the quality of inclusive practices. Teachers with higher confidence are more likely to implement effective and responsive strategies, whereas those with limited self-efficacy may provide more generalized forms of support. In the context of Philippine education, a meta-synthesis by Alcosero et al. (2023) revealed that although regular or non-SPED teachers demonstrate willingness to support learners with disabilities, they often face challenges such as lack of training, limited resources, and large class sizes. These constraints may affect the depth and quality of support provided in inclusive classrooms, which may explain why support in the present study is perceived as present but not necessarily intensive or highly individualized.

Furthermore, studies on inclusive education highlight that collaboration and systemic support are essential in strengthening teacher effectiveness. For instance, Duncan et al. (2021) emphasized that institutional

support, leadership, and collaboration among educators are key factors in sustaining inclusive practices. Without these, teacher support may remain limited in scope despite being consistently provided.

When considered collectively, the findings from the related research studies suggest that while teacher support is generally present and consistently experienced by learners with disabilities, there remains a need to enhance its quality, differentiation, and responsiveness. The results reinforce the importance of strengthening teacher training, increasing institutional support, and promoting inclusive pedagogical practices to ensure that support goes beyond presence and leads to significant and successful implementation of inclusive education.

Academic Engagement of Learners with Special Needs

Academic engagement was measured using the Student Engagement in Schools Questionnaire (SESQ) developed by Hart et al. (2011). This standardized self-report instrument is designed to assess students’ level of engagement in school across three major dimensions: affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement. The questionnaire consists of multiple items rated on a four-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from Always, Often, Sometimes, to Never. These categories reflect the frequency of students’ engagement in various learning-related behaviors and experiences.

The sample obtained an average mean score of 2.944 with a standard deviation of 0.743. This indicates that the responses are moderately varied but generally concentrated within the higher range of the scale, suggesting that most learners frequently demonstrate engagement in classroom activities. The observed variation implies that while engagement is common, the degree of involvement may differ among learners.

Table 3 presents the level of academic engagement of learners with disabilities. The findings reveal that the overall result falls under the category “Often,” indicating a high level of student engagement in the inclusive classroom setting.

It can be inferred from these findings that the majority of learners with disabilities are generally active and involved in classroom activities, demonstrating consistent participation and interaction in the learning process. However, while engagement is frequently observed, the results may also suggest the need to further

Table 3. Level of Academic Engagement of Learners with Disabilities

Variable	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Academic Engagement	2.944	0.743	Often

enhance instructional strategies and classroom support to promote sustained and higher levels of engagement, moving learners toward more consistent or “always” engagement in academic tasks.

Although not part of the main objectives, a One-Way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in engagement across grade levels. The findings reveal that there is no statistically significant difference in academic

engagement across grade levels, $F(5, 9.26) = 3.07, p = 0.066$. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the result indicates that the differences in mean scores among the grade levels are not statistically significant.

Table 3.1 presents the results of the One-Way ANOVA (Welch’s) conducted to determine whether there are significant differences in academic engagement among learners with special needs across grade levels.

Table 3.1. Significant difference in Academic Engagement Across Grade Levels

Variable	F	df1	df2	p-value
Engagement_Mean	3.07	5	9.26	0.066

However, descriptively, Grade 6 learners showed the highest engagement ($M = 3.44$), suggesting a possible trend worth exploring further.

Table 3.2 presents the group descriptive for academic engagement across grade levels. The results show that

Grade 6 obtained the highest mean score ($M = 3.44, SD = 0.0643$), followed by Grade 2 ($M = 3.30, SD = 0.6006$) and Grade 4 ($M = 3.16, SD = 0.7046$). Meanwhile, Grade 5 obtained the lowest mean score ($M = 2.29, SD = 0.8245$).

Table 3.2. Group Descriptive for Academic Engagement Across Grade Levels

Grade Level	N	Mean	SD	SE
1	6	2.57	0.6217	0.2538
2	8	3.30	0.6006	0.2123
3	6	2.83	0.9294	0.3794
4	5	3.16	0.7046	0.3151
5	3	2.29	0.8245	0.4760
6	2	3.44	0.0643	0.0455

It is implied in the findings that although there are observable differences in mean scores across grade levels, these differences are not statistically significant. This suggests that academic engagement among learners with disabilities is relatively comparable regardless of grade level. However, the higher mean scores observed in certain grade levels, particularly Grade 6, may indicate slightly stronger engagement patterns that could be influenced by developmental level, classroom dynamics, or teacher practices.

This pattern aligns with contemporary research emphasizing the importance of academic engagement in inclusive education. For instance, Huyer et al. (2020) discovered that inclusive and inquiry-based learning environments significantly enhance student engagement and academic performance. Their study demonstrated that structured and participatory learning activities promote sustained student involvement, which supports the present finding that learners are frequently engaged in classroom tasks.

Moreover, engagement among learners with special needs is strongly influenced by interpersonal and environmental factors. A correlational study by Pérez-Salas et al. (2021) revealed that teacher–student relationships, peer support, and opportunities for participation significantly affect both engagement and disengagement among students with special educational needs. This supports the variability observed in the current study, suggesting that differences in classroom interactions and support systems may account for fluctuations in engagement levels among learners. In addition, classroom practices that support students’ psychological and instructional needs play a crucial role in sustaining engagement. Molinari et al. (2021) found that need-supportive teaching characterized by autonomy support, structure, and teacher involvement has a significant effect on students’ behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. This indicates that engagement is not driven by a single factor but by the combined effect of supportive teaching practices, which

may explain the generally high but varied engagement levels observed in this study.

Furthermore, inclusive classroom environments contribute to fostering engagement. Garrote et al. (2020) underscored that positive classroom management and inclusive teacher attitudes enhance social participation and acceptance among students with special needs, which are closely linked to engagement in learning activities. When students feel accepted and supported, they are more likely to participate actively in classroom tasks.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while learners with disabilities are generally engaged in classroom activities, engagement is influenced by multiple interconnected factors, including teaching practices, classroom environment, and social relationships. The results underscore the importance of maintaining inclusive, supportive, and interactive learning environments to sustain and further enhance student engagement. Strengthening teacher strategies that

promote participation, collaboration, and responsiveness to diverse needs may help reduce variability and improve overall engagement levels among learners with special needs.

Relationship Between the Perceived Support of Non-SPED Teachers and the Academic Engagement of Learners with Special Needs.

The relationship between perceived teacher support and academic engagement was examined using Pearson’s correlation coefficient. The analysis yielded an r-value of 0.944 with a p-value less than .001, indicating a very strong and statistically significant positive relationship between the two variables.

Table 4 presents the relationship between perceived teacher support and academic engagement of learners with special needs. The results show that the correlation between teacher support and academic engagement is strong and positive, with a Pearson’s r of 0.944 and a p-value of less than .001. This indicates that the relationship is statistically significant.

Table 4. Relationship Between Perceived Teacher Support and Academic Engagement of Learners with Special Needs

Variables	Pearson’s r	p-value	Interpretation
Teacher Support & Academic Engagement	0.944	< .001	Significant

These findings imply a consistent pattern in which learners who perceive higher levels of support from their teachers also tend to demonstrate higher levels of engagement in classroom activities. The strength of the relationship indicates that teacher support is closely linked with how actively learners participate in the learning process.

It can be supported by recent studies emphasizing the influence of teacher-related factors on student engagement. For instance, Liu et al. (2020) found that perceived teacher autonomy support has a significant positive effect on students’ behavioral and cognitive engagement, both directly and through mediating variables such as academic self-concept and emotions. This suggests that when teachers provide guidance, encouragement, and structured support, students are more likely to become actively involved in learning tasks.

Similarly, broader classroom dynamics also highlight the role of teacher influence on engagement. According to Mendoza and King (2020) student engagement is shaped by social and instructional contexts, particularly teacher interactions and classroom climate. Their findings suggest that engagement is not solely an individual trait but is significantly influenced by the learning environment created by teachers. In the context of

inclusive education, teacher support becomes even more critical. Garrote et al. (2020) argued that positive teacher attitudes and effective classroom management contribute to improved social acceptance and participation among students with special needs. These factors are closely linked to engagement, as students who feel supported and included are more likely to participate actively in learning activities. Additionally, research grounded in self-determination theory highlights that autonomy-supportive teaching enhances students’ motivation and engagement. Reeve et al. (2020) showed that when teachers create supportive learning environments that promote autonomy and responsiveness, students demonstrate higher levels of engagement and initiative in classroom activities.

Overall, these findings from the related studies suggest that the strong positive relationship observed in this study reflects a consistent trend in the literature: teacher support is a key determinant of student engagement. For learners with special needs, who often require both academic and emotional assistance, the presence of supportive teachers plays a crucial role in facilitating active involvement in learning. The results underscore the importance of strengthening teacher support mechanisms such as providing clear guidance, emotional encouragement, and meaningful feedback to further enhance academic engagement in inclusive classrooms.

Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan's Self-Determination Theory is supported by the very strong positive correlation between perceived teacher support and academic engagement ($r = 0.944$). The theory posits that learners are more likely to demonstrate sustained motivation and engagement when their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In this study, learners who perceived higher levels of support from non-SPED teachers through guidance, feedback, and positive relationships also exhibited higher levels of engagement, supporting the theory's claim that supportive environments enhance motivation and active participation. The strong association observed suggests that teacher practices that foster autonomy, competence, and relatedness contribute significantly to learners' willingness to participate and persist in academic tasks. Furthermore, the consistency of this relationship across respondents reinforces the idea that engagement is not merely an individual trait but is shaped by contextual and interpersonal factors within the classroom. Therefore, the findings validate the applicability of Self-Determination Theory in inclusive education contexts and confirm that teacher support plays a critical role in enhancing the academic engagement of learners with special needs.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the understanding of how perceived teacher support relates to the academic engagement of learners with special needs in inclusive classroom settings. It highlights that engagement in learning is closely linked to how students interpret guidance, clarity, and responsiveness within classroom interactions, particularly in environments that require heightened sensitivity to diverse learning needs. The findings also emphasize the interplay between the social-emotional dimensions of teaching and students' active participation in academic tasks, suggesting that engagement is not solely a cognitive outcome but is also shaped by relational and motivational factors embedded in instructional practices. Moreover, the results extend the application of Self-Determination Theory in inclusive education by reinforcing the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as underlying drivers of meaningful learning participation among learners with special needs.

Limitations of the Findings

The study was limited to selected learners with special needs in inclusive classroom settings and may not fully represent the broader population of learners in other educational contexts. Additionally, the reliance

on self-report measures for perceived teacher support and academic engagement introduces the possibility of subjective bias.

Practical Application of the Paper

The findings of this study may benefit school administrators, teachers, students, and future researchers. School administrators may use the results as a basis for strengthening policies and programs that promote supportive and inclusive learning environments. Teachers may benefit from the study by gaining insights into the importance of providing consistent guidance, clarity, and emotional support to enhance the academic engagement of learners with special needs. Students with special needs may benefit indirectly through improved instructional practices that foster greater participation, motivation, and sense of belonging in the classroom. Future researchers may use the findings as a reference for further studies exploring other variables that influence academic engagement or for conducting similar research in different educational settings or populations.

Direction for Future Research

Future research could employ a longitudinal design to examine changes in perceived teacher support and academic engagement over time, allowing for a deeper understanding of how these variables develop and interact in inclusive classroom settings. Including qualitative methods such as interviews or classroom observations could also provide richer insights into the lived experiences of learners with special needs and the specific teaching practices that influence their engagement. Additionally, future studies may consider incorporating other contextual variables such as parental involvement, peer relationships, and classroom environment to provide a more comprehensive understanding of factors affecting academic engagement of learners with special needs.

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