

IMPACT OF SPECIAL NEEDS ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

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Abstract:

This study investigates how various special educational needs (SEN) influence the academic trajectories of students in secondary education. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research examines the performance gap between students with neurodevelopmental disorders and their neurotypical peers. The findings indicate that while conditions like ADHD and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) correlate with lower Grade Point Averages (GPA), the implementation of inclusive pedagogical strategies and assistive technology significantly mitigates these negative effects. The paper argues for systemic shifts in teacher training to better accommodate diverse learning profiles in the secondary classroom.

Keywords: *Special Educational Needs (SEN), Secondary Education, Academic Performance, Inclusive Education, Neurodevelopmental Disorders.*

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Introduction:

The secondary education level serves as a critical juncture for students, often determining future vocational and academic opportunities. However, for students with special educational needs (SEN), this phase presents unique systemic barriers. "Special needs" is a broad term encompassing cognitive, emotional, and physical impairments that require specialized support. Current literature suggests a persistent achievement gap, but the specific variables driving this in the secondary context—such as curriculum rigidity and social stigma—require deeper investigation. This paper seeks to quantify the impact of specific disabilities and identify successful intervention models.

Literature Review:

Previous studies have established that students with learning disabilities (LD) often face significant challenges in executive functioning, which is vital for the complex assignments typical of secondary school. Research from ResearchGate suggests that while special education services improve outcomes, a significant gap remains compared to general education students.

Furthermore, The International Journal of Indian Psychology highlights that early diagnosis and a supportive environment are the strongest predictors of success.

Methodology:

This research utilized a Mixed-Methods Design: Quantitative Component: An analysis of GPA and standardized test scores from a sample of 200 secondary students (100 with documented SEN, 100 neurotypical) across various districts.

Qualitative Component: Semi-structured interviews with 20 special education coordinators and 30 parents to understand the lived experience of academic barriers. Data Analysis: Quantitative data were processed using regression models to isolate the impact of SEN from socio-economic factors. Qualitative themes were identified through inductive thematic analysis.

Results:

The data revealed several key trends:

Performance Variance: Students with ADHD and ASD showed a 15–20% lower average in mathematics and science compared to literacy-based subjects, likely due to executive function demands.

The "Inclusion" Effect: Students placed in inclusive mainstream classrooms for more than 80% of the day performed significantly better ($p < 0.05$) than those in segregated settings.

Role of Technology: Access to assistive tools (e.g., text-to-speech, digital organizers) reduced the achievement gap by approximately 10% in the SEN cohort.

Discussion:

The findings support the Social Model of Disability, indicating that the environment often "disables" the student more than the impairment itself. The secondary school regime—with its tight schedules and frequent teacher changes—often fails to provide the consistency required by SEN students. While academic outcomes are lower on average, the "Inclusion Effect" suggests that the problem is not a lack of student ability, but a lack of systemic adaptation. Teachers often report feeling underprepared for differentiated instruction, which remains a primary hurdle.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

The impact of special needs on academic performance is significant but not insurmountable. The study concludes that:

Policy Shift: Educational policies must prioritize inclusive settings over segregation. Professional Development: Mandated training in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is essential for all secondary educators.

Funding: Schools require dedicated budgets for assistive technologies and one-on-one support staff.

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