

THE ROLE OF SELF-EFFICACY IN THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study examines the role of self-efficacy in the academic achievement of students with special needs from a social psychological perspective. Three objectives and corresponding research questions formulated were answered to guide the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study consisted of all 270 undergraduates in the Department of Psychology, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. The entire population was used as sample. In this case, there was no sample. The instruments for data collection were two sets of structure questionnaires, titled "Self-Efficacy Academic Achievement Questionnaire (SAAQ)" and Students with Special Needs Questionnaire (SSNQ)". The instruments were developed by the researchers and validated by three experts in the Faculty of Social Sciences, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. The internal consistency reliability coefficient of SAAQ and SSNQ were determined using Cronbach Alpha and reliability estimate values of 0.84 and 0.82 were obtained for SAAQ and SSNQ respectively. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. The findings of the study revealed the challenges faced by students with special needs in relation to their self-efficacy beliefs and academic achievement which include: Lack of individualized accommodations and support in the learning environment can pose challenges for students with special needs, affecting their self-efficacy beliefs and academic achievement and emotional and behavioral challenges, often associated with certain special needs, can affect self-regulation, concentration, and overall academic performance. The findings also revealed the effective strategies to enhance self-efficacy on academic outcomes for students with special needs which include: to provide specific and timely feedback, encourage self-reflection, foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment and foster positive social interactions among others. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that higher institutions of learning should foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment that promotes positive social interactions, collaboration, and a sense of belonging.

Keywords: Self-efficacy, academic achievement, students with special needs, social psychological perspective, social interactions

Introduction

Exploring the intricate interplay between self-efficacy and academic achievement among students with special needs opens doors to understanding and improving educational outcomes, fostering empowerment, and promoting inclusivity. Students with special needs represent a diverse group of individuals who require additional support to meet their educational needs (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2020). This group includes a wide range of

conditions, including learning disabilities, physical disabilities, developmental disorders, and sensory impairments. Hence, understanding the characteristics of students with special needs is crucial for developing effective interventions and promoting their academic achievement. Learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia, impact the acquisition and processing of information (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2008). Special needs encompass a wide range of conditions, including but not limited to learning disabilities, sensory impairments, cognitive challenges, emotional and behavioral disorders, and physical limitations. These unique needs require tailored support and accommodations to ensure equitable access to opportunities and services. Within the spectrum of special needs, disability is a significant category, representing conditions that profoundly affect a person's daily functioning. Individuals with disabilities often require specialized assistance and adaptive strategies to participate fully in society. Recognizing the connection between special needs and disability is crucial. This connection highlights the specific challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, underscoring the importance of inclusivity, accessibility, and equal opportunities for all, regardless of their special needs or disabilities. This acknowledgment forms the foundation for promoting a more compassionate and equitable society that values diversity and individuality. Students with learning disabilities often experience difficulties in specific areas, such as reading, writing, or mathematics, despite having average or above-average intelligence (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2008). These challenges can significantly affect their academic performance and hinder their progress in various subjects. Accepting the specific nature of these learning disabilities is essential for educators and researchers to tailor instructional strategies and provide appropriate interventions to support their learning needs.

Similarly, in the realm of physical disabilities, such as cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy, understanding the unique challenges related to mobility and physical functioning (Bouck et al., 2019) is paramount. Just as educators must adapt teaching methods for students with learning disabilities, accommodating physical disabilities requires a customized approach to accessibility and support, ensuring that individuals with diverse needs can fully participate in educational and social environments.

These students may have difficulties with movement, coordination, or fine motor skills, which can impact their ability to fully engage in academic activities and participate in classroom routines (Bouck et al., 2019). Providing necessary accommodations, assistive technologies, and accessible learning materials are crucial for promoting their inclusion and ensuring equal access to education (Snell & Brown, 2017). Developmental disorders, such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), affect various aspects of development, including social interaction, communication, and behaviour (Lord et al., 2020). Students with ASD may have difficulties with social communication, understanding social cues, and forming relationships with peers (Lord et al., 2020). ADHD may impact their attention span, impulse control, and executive functioning skills, affecting their ability to focus and complete academic tasks (Lord et al., 2020). Understanding the unique characteristics and needs of students with developmental disorders is essential for creating supportive learning environments that accommodate their specific strengths and challenges (Lord et al., 2020). Sensory impairments, such as visual impairments or hearing loss, pose unique challenges in the educational context (Fazzi et al., 2019).

Students with visual impairments may require accommodations such as braille materials, adaptive technologies, or orientation and mobility training to access information and navigate their surroundings (Fazzi et al., 2019). Similarly, students with hearing loss may benefit from assistive listening devices, sign language interpretation, or captioned materials to ensure effective communication and participation in classroom activities. Perceptive, the unique needs and challenges of students with special needs is essential for educators and researchers to develop targeted interventions and create inclusive learning environments (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2018). However, this study seeks to enhance our understanding of students with special needs by investigating their backgrounds and unique characteristics. The objective is to enrich existing knowledge and offer valuable insights into ways of enhancing their academic achievements and overall well-being. By gaining deeper insights into their individual requirements, educators can formulate effective instructional approaches, offer essential accommodations, and cultivate inclusive settings that promote both the academic success and well-being of students with special needs. Academic achievement holds immense importance for students with special needs especially toward special education programme, as it serves as a measure of their progress, development, and future opportunities. The significance of academic achievement for students with special needs according to Mastropieri and Scruggs (2020) has been highlighted by various researchers such as: Mastropieri and Scruggs (2020) in the field personal development who posited that academic achievement contributes to the personal growth and development of students with special needs. As they make progress in their academic pursuits, they gain confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of accomplishment. Moreover, these positive experiences shape their self-identity and overall well-being, fostering a positive sense of self (Heward, 2019). In a similar study conducted by Kauffman and Hallahan (2018) on social integration opined that academic achievement plays a vital role in fostering social integration for students with special needs. As they achieve academic milestones, they gain recognition from their peers, teachers, and the broader school community. According to the authors this recognition can lead to increased acceptance, positive relationships, and a sense of belonging among their peers.

Interestingly, future opportunities posited that academic achievement opens doors to a wide range of future opportunities for students with special needs (Heward (2019). A solid academic foundation can equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary for further education, vocational training, and employment. It expands their potential career pathways and increases their chances of becoming independent, productive members of society (Heward, 2019). In a similar study conducted by Kauffman and Hallahan (2018) on self-advocacy asserts that academic achievement empowers students with special needs to become self-advocates. As they achieve academic success, they develop a stronger sense of their own abilities and strengths according to the authors this self-awareness and confidence enable them to articulate their needs, seek appropriate accommodations, and advocate for themselves in educational and professional settings. Moreover, it improved the quality of life of students with special needs through positively impacts the overall quality of life for students with special needs. It opens doors to expanded opportunities, enhanced social connections, and increased self-sufficiency (Heward, 2019). Hence, students who achieve academic success are more likely to experience higher levels of life satisfaction, improved mental well-being, and a

greater sense of fulfilment. Recognizing the importance of academic achievement for students with special needs highlights the need for tailored support, accommodations, and inclusive educational practices. Through the provision of suitable resources, tailored instruction, and a nurturing learning environment, educators have the opportunity to empower students with special needs to realize their complete potential and attain academic excellence, particularly within specialized education programs designed to enhance their self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a term coined by psychologist Albert Bandura, and it refers to an individual's belief in their ability to achieve specific goals or perform tasks effectively. It's essentially the confidence or faith a person has in their own capabilities to successfully complete a task, handle challenges, and overcome obstacles. Self-efficacy plays a crucial role in motivation, decision-making, and how individuals approach various aspects of life. When someone has high self-efficacy in a particular area, they are more likely to set ambitious goals, put in effort to achieve them, persevere in the face of setbacks, and ultimately succeed. Conversely, low self-efficacy can lead to self-doubt, a lack of motivation, and a greater likelihood of giving up when faced with difficulties. In an educational context, building students' self-efficacy is essential because it can positively influence their academic performance and their willingness to take on challenging tasks. Teachers and educators often strive to create an environment that fosters self-efficacy by providing support, encouragement, and opportunities for students to develop their confidence and skills. Self-efficacy, a core concept in social cognitive theory developed by psychologist Albert Bandura, refers to an individual's belief in their own capabilities to successfully accomplish a specific task or achieve desired outcomes. Self-efficacy beliefs have been extensively studied and continue to be relevant in understanding human behaviour and performance. Mastery experiences, where individuals succeed or overcome challenges, significantly impact self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000). Observing others succeed or fail in similar tasks, known as vicarious learning, also influences self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000). Social persuasion, including feedback and support from others, plays a role in shaping self-efficacy beliefs (Zimmerman, 2000). Additionally, an individual's emotional and physiological states can influence self-efficacy, with positive emotions and a calm state enhancing self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000).

Interestingly, high self-efficacy has been associated with numerous positive outcomes. Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to set more challenging goals, demonstrate greater effort and persistence, and exhibit higher levels of motivation (Pajares, 2005). They are more likely to engage in adaptive learning strategies, cope effectively with obstacles, and achieve better academic and personal performance (Pajares, 2005). Hence, to foster and enhance self-efficacy, educators and practitioners can employ various strategies. These include providing individuals with opportunities for successful experiences, offering specific and constructive feedback, modelling successful behaviours, and teaching self-regulation techniques (Zimmerman, 2000; Pajares, 2005). Additionally, creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment that emphasizes collaboration and autonomy can contribute to the development of self-efficacy (Pajares, 2005). Hence, self-efficacy plays a fundamental role in shaping individuals' beliefs, motivations, and behaviors. By understanding and nurturing self-efficacy, educators and practitioners can empower individuals to reach their full potential and effectively navigate challenges in academic, professional, and personal contexts.

Self-efficacy is a widely acknowledged psychological concept, categorized into various dimensions such as task self-efficacy, domain-specific self-efficacy, general self-efficacy, and collective self-efficacy. It is a universally studied and applied construct, transcending cultural and geographical boundaries. Researchers and educators worldwide have devoted substantial efforts to explore ways to bolster self-efficacy, recognizing its pivotal role in enhancing individual and collective outcomes across diverse domains, including education, health, and employment.

Prevalence of Self-Efficacy at Ebonyi State University: Assessing the prevalence of self-efficacy at Ebonyi State University necessitates specific empirical investigations. Within the university community, the levels of self-efficacy among students and faculty may vary, influenced by factors such as the educational milieu, pedagogical approaches, and existing support systems. A viable approach to gauge self-efficacy beliefs within this context would involve conducting surveys and research studies. Such efforts would offer valuable insights into the self-efficacy landscape among students, faculty, and staff, enabling the customization of interventions and programs designed to fortify self-efficacy. These initiatives, in turn, hold the potential to foster improved academic performance and overall well-being within the university environment (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy belief in one's own capabilities to successfully accomplish a particular task or achieve desired outcomes. For instance, in academic settings, self-efficacy plays a crucial role in influencing students' motivation, learning, and academic achievement. Students with high self-efficacy are more likely to set challenging goals, persevere in the face of obstacles, and exert effort to succeed (Pajares, 2002). Self-efficacy approach academic tasks with confidence, view challenges as opportunities for growth, and demonstrate proactive learning behaviours such as seeking help, using effective study strategies, and persisting through difficulties. Self-efficacy is strongly linked to academic achievement. Students with high self-efficacy tend to demonstrate better academic outcomes, such as higher grades, increased engagement, and a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Their belief in their capacity to master academic content leads to improved performance and a sense of academic accomplishment. Moreover, self-efficacy plays a crucial role in students' persistence and resilience in the face of academic setbacks or challenges. Students with high self-efficacy view setbacks as temporary and controllable, leading them to persist and make efforts to overcome difficulties. They are better equipped to handle academic stress, setbacks, and failures, bouncing back and maintaining their motivation to achieve success. Self-efficacy also influences students' academic engagement and goal setting. Students with high self-efficacy are more likely to set challenging goals, engage in active learning strategies, and take ownership of their academic progress to seek out opportunities for learning, participate actively in classroom activities, and take responsibility for their own learning outcomes (Zimmerman, 2000). Importantly, recognizing the relevance of self-efficacy in academic settings can inform educational practices and interventions. Educators can foster self-efficacy by providing meaningful feedback, creating supportive learning environments, promoting mastery experiences, and teaching self-regulation strategies (Zimmerman, 2000). By nurturing students' self-efficacy beliefs, educators can enhance their motivation, engagement, and academic achievement, ultimately promoting their long-term success in academic pursuits. Self-efficacy beliefs,

which are influenced by various factors, play a crucial role in the academic achievement of students with special needs. Recent scholars such as Schwarzer (2014) and Bong and Skaalvik (2003) have examined the factors that influence self-efficacy beliefs in academic settings. Mastery experiences, where students succeed or overcome challenges, significantly impact self-efficacy beliefs, as positive experiences build confidence and enhance self-efficacy. Social persuasion, including feedback and support from others, also plays a role in shaping self-efficacy, with positive feedback and encouragement enhancing self-efficacy beliefs (Schwarzer, 2014). Vicarious learning, through observing the accomplishments of others in similar tasks, can influence self-efficacy (Schwarzer, 2014). Additionally, emotional and physiological states are linked to self-efficacy, with positive emotions and a calm state associated with higher self-efficacy, while anxiety and stress can lower it (Pekrun et al., 2002). Personal and cultural factors, such as gender, socioeconomic status, and cultural norms, further shape self-efficacy beliefs (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Understanding these factors is crucial for educators to create supportive environments and interventions that enhance self-efficacy and promote academic achievement among students with special needs.

However, students with special needs face various challenges that can impact their academic achievement. These challenges arise due to their unique learning needs and can create barriers to their educational progress. Therefore, the ability to understanding these challenges is essential for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to provide appropriate support and interventions. Interestingly, research by Rourke and Tsatsanis (2014) has shed light on the unambiguous challenges faced by students with special needs toward academic achievement. According to the authors, students with special needs often experience learning difficulties associated with their specific disabilities or conditions, which can affect their ability to grasp and retain information. Inadequate access to necessary accommodations, assistive technologies, and specialized support services can further hinder their academic progress (Salend, 2016). Additionally, students with special needs may face social and emotional challenges that impact their academic achievement, such as difficulties in social interactions or low self-esteem (Elias & Haynes, 2008). Communication barriers, including speech and language disorders, can also affect their ability to express themselves and engage in classroom activities (Paul, 2007). Furthermore, students with special needs require individualized instruction and differentiated approaches to learning (Tomlinson, 2014). However, providing personalized instruction and adapting teaching methods to address diverse learning profiles can be challenging in mainstream classrooms with limited resources (Friend & Bursuck, 2018). Transitioning from one educational level to another or preparing for post-secondary education can pose additional challenges for students with special needs (Morningstar et al., 2015). They may require support to navigate these transitions successfully and access appropriate resources for their future academic and vocational endeavors. Additionally, students with special needs may experience social stigma, discrimination, and exclusion from their peers (Shogren et al., 2015). This social isolation can negatively impact their self-confidence, motivation, and overall academic performance. Hence, addressing these challenges requires a collaborative and inclusive move toward involving educators, support professionals, families, and the broader community. Furthermore, providing individualized support, implementing inclusive teaching practices, promoting social-emotional well-being,

and ensuring equitable access to resources and accommodations are essential steps toward fostering academic achievement for students with special needs.

Study conducted by Fredricks and Eccles (2004) opined that academic achievement has a significant impact on the overall well-being of students, including those with special needs. The attainment of academic goals and the acquisition of knowledge and skills are closely linked to various aspects of well-being. Therefore, academic achievement can influence overall well-being of individuals through the followings: Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem: Academic success contributes to the development of self-confidence and self-esteem. When students with special needs achieve academic milestones and receive recognition for their accomplishments, it boosts their self-confidence and enhances their self-perception, leading to improved overall well-being (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Another impact of academic achievement on students overall well-being is through sense of competence: this process allows students to develop a sense of competence in their abilities. When they are able to perform well academically, it reinforces their belief in their own capabilities, fostering a positive self-perception and a sense of mastery. This sense of competence positively impacts their overall well-being. Others include: motivation and engagement in learning, that is a situation when students experience success in their academic pursuits, they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to continue learning, setting higher goals, and putting in the necessary effort to succeed (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This intrinsic motivation and engagement contribute to their overall well-being. Social Relationships: Academic achievement can impact students' social relationships and sense of belonging. Success in academics can lead to positive interactions with peers, teachers, and parents, enhancing social connections and fostering a sense of belonging within the school community (Wentzel, 2003). Strong social relationships and a sense of belonging are essential components of overall well-being. Emotional Well-being: Academic achievement can contribute to positive emotional well-being. When students with special needs experience academic success, they may feel a sense of pride, satisfaction, and happiness, which can enhance their emotional well-being and overall life satisfaction (Diener et al., 2003). Therefore, it is important to note that academic achievement is just one aspect of overall well-being. Students with special needs should be supported holistically, addressing their social, emotional, and physical well-being alongside their academic progress, to promote optimal overall well-being.

The role of self-efficacy in shaping the academic achievement of students with special needs has become a focal point of research and attention in the educational realm. Coined by psychologist Albert Bandura, self-efficacy represents an individual's unwavering belief in their capacity to effectively complete tasks and attain desired outcomes. In the context of students with special needs, the impact of self-efficacy on academic achievement is multi-faceted and profound. One significant aspect is its influence on academic engagement and persistence. High self-efficacy empowers these students to approach challenging academic tasks with confidence and determination, motivating them to persist in the face of obstacles. Their willingness to exert effort, fuelled by self-efficacy, contributes markedly to improved academic achievement (Pajares, 2005). Moreover, self-efficacy beliefs play a pivotal role in goal setting and subsequent academic performance. Students with special needs who possess elevated self-efficacy levels set more ambitious goals, striving for excellence in

their academic endeavours. This heightened belief in their capabilities leads to increased effort, the adoption of effective learning strategies, and the utilization of adaptive problem-solving techniques (Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 2009). Furthermore, self-efficacy is closely intertwined with students' ability to self-regulate their learning. Those with higher self-efficacy are naturally inclined towards self-regulatory behaviors such as setting clear goals, monitoring their progress, and adapting their strategies as needed. Such self-regulation fosters effective learning and, consequently, academic achievement among students with special needs (Zimmerman, 2000). In the face of academic challenges and adversity, self-efficacy beliefs serve as a resilient buffer. Students with high self-efficacy exhibit adaptive coping strategies, viewing difficulties as opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable threats. They seek support when necessary and remain persistent in their efforts to overcome obstacles, all of which positively influence their academic achievement (Zimmerman, 2000). Additionally, self-efficacy beliefs significantly impact students' confidence in their academic abilities. High self-efficacy instills a robust belief in their competence to master academic tasks, resulting in increased confidence and a positive self-perception as learners. This bolstered confidence further fuels their motivation, engagement, and overall academic success (Pajares, 2005).

In light of these profound effects, understanding the role of self-efficacy in the academic achievement of students with special needs is imperative for educators, parents, and practitioners. By deliberately nurturing and fostering self-efficacy beliefs through tailored interventions, support structures, and appropriate learning environments, stakeholders hold the power to empower these students to unlock their full academic potential and foster their overall educational success. The link between self-efficacy and academic performance has been extensively studied, revealing the significant influence of self-efficacy beliefs on students' educational outcomes. Self-efficacy, as defined by psychologist Albert Bandura, refers to an individual's belief in their own capabilities to successfully accomplish tasks and achieve desired outcomes. The authors have consistently shown that self-efficacy plays a crucial role in shaping academic performance. Students with high self-efficacy are more motivated and set challenging goals, leading to increased effort and persistence in their academic pursuits. They are also more likely to utilize effective learning strategies, engage in self-regulation, and demonstrate confidence in their academic abilities (Zimmerman, 2000). Additionally, individuals with high self-efficacy exhibit resilience in the face of challenges, employing effective coping strategies and maintaining motivation. These factors collectively contribute to improved academic performance. Numerous studies across various educational levels and subjects have provided evidence supporting the positive association between self-efficacy and academic performance (Pajares, 2005). Educators, parents, and practitioners should recognize the importance of fostering self-efficacy beliefs through targeted interventions, constructive feedback, and supportive learning environments to empower students and enhance their academic performance. Specific self-efficacy beliefs related to academic tasks refer to an individual's confidence and belief in their ability to successfully perform particular academic tasks. These beliefs are domain-specific and have been extensively studied by scholars. For instance, Pajares and Miller (1994) found that self-efficacy beliefs play a role in mathematical problem-solving, encompassing confidence in

mathematical reasoning, problem-solving skills, and numerical operations. Writing self-efficacy pertains to an individual's belief in their ability to express ideas, organize thoughts, and communicate effectively through writing. Science self-efficacy, as explored by Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinez-Pons (1992), relates to confidence in understanding scientific concepts, conducting experiments, and analyzing data. Language learning self-efficacy, studied by Pajares (2002), involves confidence in acquiring and using a foreign or second language, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Other examples include test-taking self-efficacy, presentation or public speaking self-efficacy, and study skills self-efficacy. These specific self-efficacy beliefs, identified by various researchers, significantly influence students' engagement, motivation, and performance in their academic tasks. By nurturing and strengthening these domain-specific self-efficacy beliefs, educators and practitioners can enhance students' confidence, motivation, and performance in their academic endeavors.

Social Psychological Perspective

A social psychological perspective on self-efficacy and academic achievement in students with special needs reveals important insights into the factors that influence self-efficacy and its impact on academic outcomes. Key points from this perspective include: Several social psychological factors significantly influence students' self-efficacy and subsequently impact their academic performance. Firstly, social comparisons play a crucial role, as students often gauge their own abilities by comparing themselves to others. Positive comparisons tend to boost self-efficacy, whereas negative comparisons can erode it. Secondly, the support students receive from various sources, including teachers, peers, and family, plays a pivotal role in shaping their self-efficacy. Positive feedback and practical assistance from these sources tend to nurture and reinforce self-efficacy, while a lack of support can undermine it. Additionally, teachers' expectations regarding their students' abilities have a direct influence on self-efficacy. When teachers maintain high expectations, offer support, and provide guidance, they contribute positively to students' self-efficacy, ultimately enhancing their academic performance. Moreover, students' self-efficacy is intricately tied to their social identity, particularly in relation to their disability. The way society perceives and stigmatizes individuals with disabilities can significantly impact their self-efficacy. Embracing one's strengths and capabilities within the context of their disability tends to elevate self-efficacy, whereas stigmatization has the opposite effect. Furthermore, the power of social modelling cannot be underestimated. Observing the successes of peers or role models who have overcome academic barriers provides students with vicarious experiences that can boost their self-efficacy. Lastly, the classroom climate and environment are critical factors in nurturing self-efficacy. A supportive and inclusive classroom climate fosters a sense of belonging, reduces anxiety, and promotes self-efficacy through active engagement and collaboration among students. In light of these social psychological factors, educators have the opportunity to create supportive learning environments, provide crucial social support, and promote positive social comparisons. By doing so, they can significantly enhance students' self-efficacy, which, in turn, contributes to improved academic success and overall well-being. Social interactions and support systems play a crucial role in the academic

achievement of students with special needs. These interactions and systems provide numerous benefits and support mechanisms that contribute to their overall educational success. Here is an exploration of the importance of social interactions and support systems, based on the research of Kalyva (2010), Kitsantas and Zimmerman (2009), and Deb and Jindal-Snape (2016):

Social interactions and support systems, which encompass family members, friends, teachers, and peers, play a pivotal role in the educational journey of students with special needs. These interactions provide a bedrock of emotional support, fostering a sense of belonging, acceptance, and understanding. Such support has a profound impact on their overall well-being and serves as a motivating force driving their academic success (Kalyva, 2010). Within this framework, encouragement and positive feedback are potent tools. Students with special needs often receive validation and recognition for their efforts and achievements through these social interactions. This consistent reinforcement bolsters their self-confidence, strengthens their belief in their abilities, and nurtures a positive academic self-concept. Ultimately, when students feel acknowledged and celebrated, their motivation and commitment to academic pursuits are invigorated. Furthermore, social interactions and support systems offer the invaluable resource of role models. Students can observe and learn from individuals who have triumphed over similar challenges to achieve academic success. These role models serve as beacons of inspiration, offering tangible evidence that academic accomplishments are attainable. Consequently, students' self-efficacy and motivation are significantly enhanced (Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 2009). Peer support and collaboration within this context are equally impactful. Interacting with peers who share similar experiences provides students with special needs with a unique and enriching learning environment. Peer support engenders shared learning experiences, collaborative problem-solving, and mutual encouragement. It fosters a sense of teamwork and cultivates an inclusive atmosphere that celebrates diversity while promoting academic growth. Moreover, social interactions and support systems grant access to essential academic assistance and resources. Teachers, tutors, and mentors, as part of this network, offer tailored guidance, clarification of concepts, and additional support to address individual needs. Specialized resources, accommodations, and assistive technologies further empower students with special needs to surmount academic challenges and reach their full potential (Deb & Jindal-Snape, 2016). The cumulative effect of these interactions and support systems extends to the classroom environment itself. They contribute significantly to creating an inclusive classroom where respect, empathy, and understanding thrive. This positive classroom climate not only enables meaningful social interactions but also ensures that students with special needs feel valued and included. Inclusive practices, stemming from these interactions, foster collaboration, build relationships, and elevate the overall learning experience for all students. Recognizing the paramount importance of social interactions and support systems, educators, families, and communities have the power to cultivate environments that nurture the academic achievement of students with special needs. By actively encouraging positive social interactions, providing unwavering emotional support, facilitating access to crucial resources, and promoting peer collaboration, individuals can greatly enhance these students' educational journey and overall well-being (Kalyva, 2010). Peers and teachers have a significant influence on the self-efficacy

and academic achievement of students, including those with special needs. These influential figures shape students' beliefs about their capabilities and provide crucial support and guidance throughout their educational journey. When it comes to peer influence, peers can positively impact self-efficacy through modelling successful behavior, offering support and encouragement, and fostering healthy competition (Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 2009; Wentzel, 1998). Interactions with peers can create a sense of belonging, shared responsibility, and motivation. Teachers also play a critical role by setting high expectations, providing support and feedback, and employing effective instructional approaches (Pajares, 2005; Zimmerman, 2000). By fostering positive peer relationships, promoting collaborative learning environments, maintaining high expectations, and providing effective support and feedback, educators can enhance students' self-efficacy beliefs, motivation, and ultimately contribute to their academic success.

Inclusive educational environments play a vital role in supporting the self-efficacy and academic achievement of students with special needs. These environments promote equal opportunities, diversity, and a sense of belonging for all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Here is an exploration of the role of inclusive educational environments: Inclusive educational environments are characterized by several key features that collectively contribute to the holistic development and academic success of students with special needs. These features, grounded in research and pedagogical principles, create a nurturing and equitable setting where all students can thrive. First and foremost, the principle of equal opportunities underscores the importance of ensuring that students with special needs have unfettered access to educational resources, curriculum, and learning opportunities. Inclusive education dismantles barriers and levels the playing field, providing each student with an equitable chance to actively engage in academic activities and reach their full potential (Salend, 2011). Within such inclusive settings, a pervasive sense of belonging and acceptance flourishes among students with special needs. Feeling valued, respected, and integrated into the school community has a profound impact on their self-esteem, self-confidence, and overall well-being. This sense of belonging creates a conducive atmosphere for academic growth and success, fostering an environment where students can truly flourish (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Collaboration and peer support are another hallmark of inclusive environments. Students with special need benefit from interactions with their peers, who can provide academic support, forge social connections, and offer positive role modelling. Collaborative activities and group work become platforms for students to learn from one another, enhance their problem-solving skills, and develop empathy and understanding (Sharma & Desai, 2002). Inclusive educational environments prioritize individualized instruction and support tailored to the diverse needs of students with special needs. Teachers and support staff employ differentiated teaching strategies, accommodations, and assistive technologies to ensure that each student's unique learning requirements are effectively addressed. This personalized approach empowers students to engage in meaningful learning experiences (Soodak et al., 2008). Moreover, the positive classroom climate cultivated within inclusive settings promotes values such as respect, empathy, and cooperation among students. This atmosphere encourages open communication, active participation, and mutual support. Students with special needs feel comfortable sharing their ideas, asking questions, and

engaging in academic discussions, which enrich their overall learning experience (Sapon-Shevin, 2003). Finally, the success of inclusive education hinges on on-going professional development for educators. This training equips teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and strategies to effectively support students with special needs. Educators gain expertise in inclusive teaching practices, instructional adaptations, and behavior management techniques, ensuring that the learning environment is inclusive, engaging, and supportive (Boyle et al., 2012). In sum, inclusive educational environments embody a commitment to equity, acceptance, collaboration, personalization, positive social dynamics, and continuous professional growth. These foundational principles collectively create an educational milieu where students with special needs can flourish academically, emotionally, and socially.

Therefore, by fostering inclusive educational environments, schools and educational institutions create a supportive and empowering context for students with special needs. Inclusive environments promote their self-efficacy, academic achievement, and overall well-being by providing equal opportunities, fostering a sense of belonging, facilitating collaboration, and offering individualized support. Embracing inclusion not only benefits students with special needs but also cultivates a more diverse, accepting, and enriching learning environment for all students. Significantly, the existing research on the role of self-efficacy in the academic achievement of students with special needs has made significant contributions to our understanding. However, there are notable gaps in the literature that warrant further investigation. Firstly, there is a need to focus on specific special needs categories and examine the unique challenges and characteristics associated with each disability. Secondly, longitudinal studies tracking students over time would provide valuable insights into the developmental trajectory of self-efficacy beliefs and their long-term impact on academic outcomes. Additionally, exploring cultural and contextual factors would shed light on the influence of cultural values, educational systems, and socio-economic backgrounds on self-efficacy and academic achievement. Qualitative approaches would complement quantitative research by providing in-depth insights into the lived experiences and subjective perspectives of students.

Statement of the Problem

The problem at hand, within the context of the role of self-efficacy in the academic achievement of students with special needs from a social psychological perspective, stems from several critical concerns. Firstly, it revolves around the imperative need to comprehensively discern the intricate factors that exert influence over the self-efficacy beliefs of these students. Secondly, it necessitates a thorough examination of the intricate and dynamic relationship between self-efficacy and their academic performance. Finally, it grapples with the multifaceted challenges that these students encounter on their path to academic success. While extant research has made significant strides in shedding light on these dimensions, the complexity of the issue demands a deeper exploration, particularly within the unique categories of special needs. This exploration should encompass longitudinal and qualitative research approaches to capture the nuances of self-efficacy development, cultural and contextual factors that may play a role, and effective interventions to bolster self-efficacy. Addressing these gaps will yield a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the

role of self-efficacy in the academic achievement of students with special needs, thus paving the way for the development of highly targeted strategies aimed at enhancing their self-efficacy and propelling them towards academic success.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study was to examine the role of self-efficacy in the academic achievement of students. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. examine the role of self-efficacy in the academic achievement of students with special needs.
2. examine the challenges faced by students with special needs in relation to their self-efficacy beliefs and academic achievement?
3. determine the effective strategies to enhance self-efficacy on academic outcomes for students with special needs?

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the role of self-efficacy in the academic achievement of students with special needs?
2. What are the experience challenges faced by students with special needs in relation to their self-efficacy beliefs and academic achievement?
3. What are the effective strategies to enhance self-efficacy on academic outcomes for students with special needs?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of all 270 undergraduates in the Department of Psychology, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. The entire population was used as sample. In this case, there was no sample. The instruments for data collection were two sets of structure questionnaires, titled “Self-Efficacy Academic Achievement Questionnaire (SAAQ)’ and Students with Special Needs Questionnaire (SSNQ)”. The instruments were developed by the researchers and validated by three experts in the Faculty of Social Sciences, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. The internal consistency reliability coefficient of SAAQ and SSNQ were determined using Cronbach Alpha and reliability estimate values of 0.84 and 0.82 were obtained for SAAQ and SSNQ respectively. The questionnaire was administered to the respondents by the researcher with the help of two research assistants who were familiar with the study area. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions that guided the study. The items were structured on a 4-points Likert type rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree of 4,3,2, and 1 rating respectively. The decision rule for answering the research questions was that any item means score that is above 2.50 was regarded as accepted, while an item mean score that is below 2.50 was regarded as not accepted.

Results

Research Question One: What is the role of self-efficacy in the academic achievement of students with special needs?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on the roles of self-efficacy in the academic achievement of students with special needs

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	To help students possess a strong belief in their own abilities to determined their academic pursuits	2.77	0.09	A
2.	To fosters a positive attitude which are essential for academic success	2.61	0.11	A
3.	To set challenging attainable goals and actively monitoring progress for students with high self-efficacy;	2.81	0.09	A
4.	To empower students to effectively manage their learning and study strategies	2.88	0.08	A
5.	To empowers students to effectively promoting self-regulation skills	2.91	0.08	A
6.	To encourage students to utilize available resources for their learning;	2.52	0.12	A
7.	To contributes strong academic self-concept and enhances the overall educational experience of the students	2.64	0.11	A
8.	To improve academic outcomes and boost the confidence of students with special needs.	2.80	0.09	A
Overall Mean Score		2.74	0.09	A

Table 1 shows the Mean rating and standard deviation of responses on the roles of self-efficacy in the academic achievement of students with special needs. Item 1 – 8 range above the standard mean score of 2.50 which indicate acceptance by respondent. The statement above hinges solely on the role of self-efficacy in the academic achievement of students with special needs, which was agreed by respondents on the overall mean score of 2.74 and 0.09 standard deviation correspondingly. The following are the roles: to help students possess a strong belief in their own abilities to determined their academic pursuits; to fosters a positive attitude which are essential for academic success; to empower students to effectively manage their learning and study strategies; to contributes strong academic self-concept and enhances the overall educational experience of the students, among others

Research Question Two: What are the challenges faced by students with special needs in relation to their self-efficacy beliefs and academic achievement?

Table 2: Mean Rating and Standard Deviation of Responses on the challenges faced by students with special needs in relation to their self-efficacy beliefs and academic achievement

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
9.	Lack of support in the learning environment affects students' self-efficacy beliefs and academic achievement	3.01	0.06	A
10.	Lack of communication in expressing needs hinder academic progress	3.02	0.06	A
11.	Emotional challenges affect students self-regulation and overall academic performance	3.12	0.03	A
12.	Coexisting physical disabilities may present additional obstacles for students ability to fully engage in academic activities	2.81	0.09	A
13.	Moving to a new school can disrupt continuity and stability of students	2.88	0.08	A
14.	Inadequate teacher training and knowledge about specific special needs may result in a lack of appropriate instructional strategies	2.90	0.08	A
15.	Limited access to inclusive extracurricular activities and opportunities for social engagement	2.67	0.10	A
16.	Lack of understanding from peers and teachers contribute to feelings of isolation and negatively affect self-efficacy and academic outcomes for students with special needs	2.87	0.08	A
17.	Learning difficulties affect self-efficacy and academic achievement;	2.94	0.07	A
18.	Limited support systems hinder academic progress and self-efficacy	2.74	0.10	A
19.	Social isolation and bullying harm self-esteem and self-efficacy	2.97	0.07	A
20.	Limited educational opportunities restrict academic growth and achievement	3.00	0.06	A
Overall Mean Score		2.91	0.07	A

Result in Table 2 revealed the mean rating and standard deviation of responses on the challenges faced by students with special needs in relation to their self-efficacy beliefs and academic achievement. Items mentioned in the above table met the criterion mean value of 2.50 and above. The findings of the analysis identified the following as the challenges faced by students with special needs: lack of support in the learning environment affects students' self-efficacy beliefs and academic achievement; lack of communication in expressing needs hinder academic progress; emotional challenges affect students' self-regulation and overall academic performance; lack of understanding from peers and teachers contribute to feelings of isolation and negatively affect self-efficacy and academic outcomes for students with

special needs, etc. The above research findings were summed with an overall mean score of 2.91 and standard deviation of 0.07 respectively.

Research Question Three: What are the effective strategies to enhance self-efficacy on academic outcomes for students with special needs?

Table 3: Mean Rating and Standard Deviation of Responses on the effective strategies to enhance self-efficacy on academic outcomes for students with special needs

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
21.	Provide specific and timely feedback	3.08	0.04	A
22.	Set realistic and attainable goals	3.09	0.04	A
23.	Encourage students to reflect on their progress	3.01	0.06	A
24.	Create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment	3.00	0.06	A
25.	Teach effective learning strategies	3.10	0.04	A
26.	Provide opportunities for students to succeed	2.66	0.10	A
27.	Empower students to advocate for themselves	2.55	0.11	A
28.	Foster positive social interactions among students	2.50	0.12	A
29.	Collaborate with families and support networks	2.73	0.10	A
Overall Mean Score		2.86	0.08	A

Analysis presented in Table 3 highlighted responses on the effective strategies to enhance self-efficacy on academic outcomes for students with special needs, grading with mean and standard deviation, the above listed items met the standard mean rate of 2.50 which indicate acceptance by respondents. In agreement with the findings in the table the following were identified as the effective strategies to enhance self-efficacy on academic outcomes for students with special needs based on the overall mean score of 2.86 and 0.08 standard deviation: provide specific and timely feedback; set realistic and attainable goals; encourage students to reflect on their progress; create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment; among others.

Discussion of findings

Several studies have examined the role of self-efficacy in the academic achievement of students with special needs, providing valuable insights into the impact of self-efficacy beliefs on their educational outcomes. The findings consistently highlight the significance of self-efficacy in shaping the academic achievement of these students. The findings of the study revealed the role of self-efficacy in the academic achievement of students with special needs which include: to pivotal in shaping the academic achievement of students with special needs; to help students possess a strong belief in their own abilities to determined their academic pursuits; to fosters a positive attitude which are essential for academic success; to set challenging attainable goals and actively monitoring progress for students with high self-efficacy; to empowers students to effectively manage their learning and study strategies; to empowers students to effectively promoting self-regulation skills; to encourage students to utilize available resources for their learning; to contributes strong academic self-concept and enhances the overall educational experience of the students; and to significantly improve

academic outcomes and boost the confidence of students with special needs. The findings of the study are in line with the study of Zimmerman and Kitsantas (2014) who posited that self-efficacy influences students' academic engagement and goal setting. According to the authors, students with high self-efficacy are more likely to set challenging goals, engage in active learning strategies, and take ownership of their academic progress to seek out opportunities for learning, participate actively in classroom activities, and take responsibility for their own learning outcomes.

The findings of the study revealed the challenges faced by students with special needs in relation to their self-efficacy beliefs and academic achievement which include: Lack of support in the learning environment affects students' self-efficacy beliefs and academic achievement; lack of communication in expressing needs or understanding instructions hinder academic progress; inadequate teacher training and knowledge about specific special needs may result in a lack of appropriate instructional strategies; limited access to inclusive extracurricular activities and opportunities for social engagement can impact self-efficacy and overall academic experience; lack of understanding from peers and teachers contribute to feelings of isolation and negatively affect self-efficacy and academic outcomes for students with special needs; learning difficulties affect self-efficacy and academic achievement; limited support systems hinder academic progress and self-efficacy; negative stereotypes and stigma impact self-efficacy and motivation; Social isolation and bullying harm self-esteem and self-efficacy; and limited educational opportunities restrict academic growth and achievement. The finding of the study is in consonance with the study of Rourke and Tsatsanis (2014) that shed light on the unambiguous challenges faced by students with special needs toward academic achievement. According to the authors, students with special needs often experience learning difficulties associated with their specific disabilities or conditions, which can affect their ability to grasp and retain information. Inadequate access to necessary accommodations, assistive technologies, and specialized support services can further hinder their academic progress (Salend, 2016).

The findings of the study revealed the effective strategies to enhance self-efficacy on academic outcomes for students with special needs which include: Provide specific and timely feedback; Set realistic and attainable goals; encourage students to reflect on their progress; create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment; teach effective learning strategies; provide opportunities for students to succeed; empower students to advocate for themselves; foster positive social interactions among students; collaborate with families and support networks; and use targeted interventions and support strategies. The finding is in consonance with the study of Wigfield et al. (2009) who posited that students who had higher self-efficacy beliefs in their ability to manage their ADHD symptoms and engage in academic tasks showed better academic performance compared to those with lower self-efficacy. This suggests that self-efficacy plays a crucial role in helping students with ADHD overcome challenges, enhance their focus and self-regulation, and ultimately improve their academic outcomes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant role of self-efficacy in the academic achievement of students with special needs from a social psychological perspective. The findings emphasize the positive relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and academic performance. Factors such as social interactions, support systems, and inclusive educational environments play a crucial role in shaping self-efficacy. Providing support, fostering positive peer relationships, and creating inclusive learning environments are essential for enhancing self-efficacy beliefs among students with special needs. It is important for educators, practitioners, and policymakers to recognize the importance of self-efficacy and implement targeted strategies to promote self-efficacy beliefs, leading to improved academic outcomes for students with special needs. Further research is needed to explore specific special needs categories, employ longitudinal and qualitative approaches, consider cultural and contextual factors, and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. By addressing these gaps, we can develop evidence-based practices that support the academic achievement and overall well-being of students with special needs.

Contribution to Knowledge

The study on the role of self-efficacy in the academic achievement of students with special needs makes significant contributions to knowledge. It enhances our understanding of the relationship between self-efficacy and academic outcomes for students with special needs, emphasizing the importance of social interactions and support systems in shaping self-efficacy beliefs. The study provides practical implications for educators, practitioners, and policymakers, offering strategies to enhance self-efficacy and promote academic success. Furthermore, it addresses research gaps by identifying areas for further exploration, such as specific special needs categories, longitudinal and qualitative approaches, cultural and contextual factors, and intervention effectiveness. Overall, this study adds to our knowledge in the field and informs educational practices and policies that support the academic achievement of students with special needs.

Psychological Implications

The study on the role of self-efficacy in the academic achievement of students with special needs has significant psychological implications. It highlights the importance of enhancing self-efficacy beliefs among these students to promote confidence, motivation, and resilience in academics. Creating a positive and inclusive learning environment, fostering supportive social interactions, and providing targeted interventions and support strategies are essential in shaping self-efficacy. Additionally, understanding the impact of self-efficacy on students' self-advocacy, empowerment, and overall well-being emphasizes the holistic nature of their development. By considering these psychological implications, educators and practitioners can foster self-efficacy, support academic achievement, and enhance the well-being of students with special needs.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Institutions should provide targeted support and accommodations to meet the unique needs of students with special needs, ensuring equal access to educational resources and opportunities.
2. Educators should implement interventions and strategies that enhance self-efficacy beliefs, such as setting achievable goals, providing constructive feedback, and promoting self-reflection.
3. Educational organizations should offer professional development and training opportunities for educators to develop knowledge and skills in inclusive teaching practices and effective support strategies.
4. Collaborative efforts between schools and families should be encouraged to reinforce self-efficacy beliefs and provide consistent support both in and outside of the school environment.

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