

# Learning Disabilities, Culture and the Nigerian Educational System: The Unseen Link to Mental Health

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**Abstract:** Background: The fact that human beings vary in intellectual capacity is universally accepted all over the world. There are, however, generally accepted intellectual growth markers with which psychologists judge the mental and intellectual development of children and young adults. Children who fall below what is considered the average are considered low on cognitive ability. Objective: This study aims to scrutinise and analyse the Nigerian education system using literature to identify the negative impact of the present structure on the mental health of people with LD. It also explores the possibilities for improvement in the present Nigerian education systems such that it is less harmful to people with LD. Method: This paper is a qualitative literature review concentrating on the results of 3 primary research papers. Their results will be used to explore the conversations surrounding the effect of dysfunction in the Nigerian education system on the experiences of students with learning disabilities. Results: The review of the literature shows that the existing educational structure in Nigeria may worsen the outcome of students with LD as there are sparse social and physical infrastructures to protect and assist them. Conclusion: This paper explores the psychiatry of learning disabilities, not to reveal all work done in the field but to discuss the evidence posed by existing literature concerning the link between learning disabilities, mental health, and the educational system in Nigeria. It concludes that there is room for improvement on the present frameworks for the education and care of students with LD.

**Keywords:** Keywords Mental health, evidence-based practice, education services research, learning disabilities, research.

**Abbreviations:** LD - Learning disability, learning disabled.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of Study

The fact that human beings vary in intellectual capacity is universally accepted all over the world. There are, however generally accepted intellectual growth markers with which psychologists judge the mental and intellectual development of children and young adults. Children who fall below what is considered the average are considered low on cognitive ability (Alhamdu, 2000). Unlike physical disabilities, many people suffering from learning disabilities do not exhibit physical features that can elicit sympathetic responses from people who see them (Lowry, 1990). This is made worse by the fact that a learning disability isn't a condition that children can outgrow. It is a lifetime condition that then impacts all aspects of life. Children with LD will grow up to be adults with LD (Lowry, 1990). This, in addition to a difficulty in defining what exact conditions count as learning disabilities, has stalled progress in research in this field. One thing that is generally accepted as fact amongst scholars like Masha (2000), Lowry (1990), and even the American Psychiatric Association (2013) is the fact that learning disabilities can cause emotional and psychological distress. Some of the issues it can cause include but are not limited to low self-esteem, lag in education and life achievement, socialisation,

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and daily living activities. In a world that is constantly being designed for neurotypical people, many people living with learning disabilities also have to deal with frustration, depression, and anxiety. The topic of learning disability is widely known for not moving at the same pace as many other aspects of psychiatry and psychology. This seeming reluctance to explore the field is known to be a result of reluctance to repeat past unethical practices and mistakes relating to mental health care, interventions, presentations, learning disabilities, and other psychiatric issues. The documented advances in the treatment of learning disabilities and mental disorders have encountered a deadlock due to gatekeeping by carers and professionals. This has restricted wide range clinical trials, interventions, and evaluations. Developmental learning disabilities (LDs) affect about 5% to 15% of people (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

The most common disability is the Reading disability (RD). It is also the most researched subtype of learning disability (Shaywitz, Morris, & Shaywitz, 2008). The other subtypes, such as the math and comorbid disabilities, are significantly less researched (Barbaresi *et al.*, 2005). While learning disabilities often appear first as a developmental issue, it is a problem that often remains well into adulthood (Maughan *et al.*, 2009). Learning disability is an issue that doesn't just affect the ability of a child to learn but extends to other parts of their lives, such as the possibility of getting a good education, a job, or even becoming financially independent. (Hakkarainen *et al.*, 2015) it also affects how high an income a person can make, which in turn affects their health and other aspects of their lives (Raskind *et al.*, 1999). According to Raskind *et al.* (1999), people living with learning disabilities are more likely to have psychological problems than individuals without LDs. despite the effect of LDs on the lives of children in the short and long term, relatively few studies have been conducted on the subject, with most of the sparse existing literature focusing mainly on reading disability (RD). Carroll *et al.*, (2005) and Maughan & Carroll (2006) identify the close relationship between learning disabilities in children and mental health issues that extend into adulthood. Maag & Reid (2006) have also revealed that there are significantly higher incidences of deep depression and cases of anxiety in people who had (or have) learning disabilities as children. Nelson & Harwood (2011) concur with these results but note the scarcity of adult samples and the difficulty in following patients from early childhood into adulthood to get more comprehensive and accurate data on the impact of learning disabilities on mental health.

Existing literature with samples collected from children and adolescents (e.g., Carroll & Iles, 2006; Davis, Nida, Zlomke, & Nebel Schwalm, 2009; Hoy *et al.*, 1997; Raskind *et al.*, 1999) reveals that children with learning disabilities are more likely to present with symptoms of anxiety and depression. With the focus of studies on young adult mental health focusing on reading disabilities or learning disabilities in general, without niching down on other aspects such as the long-term effects of such disabilities on mental health and general quality of life, a conspicuous gap is left open for many research endeavours. The Nigerian education system is one that barely serves neurotypical students who do not have learning disabilities as it is (Jacob *et al.*, 2022). The question of whether or not there are measures in place to help students with learning disabilities is less crucial than that of recognising, first, all the way that the Nigerian education system worsens the experiences of people learning with learning disabilities. This paper seeks to understand learning disabilities as perceived by the Nigerian public, as well as identify the instances in which the Nigerian education system has been failing people with LD, with the hope of being able to recommend redress and repair within the system.

## 1.2. Statement of Problems

The reality of learning disabilities is one that will be vague to people who do not have the condition, no matter how many elaborate words are used to describe it. It does not help much that sparse literature exists on the subject of how the Nigerian educational system worsens the outcome of children with learning disabilities. Seeing as this condition is influenced by the concept of ripple effect, affecting all parts of the sufferer's life, there is a need to study the education system as it is and find solutions that fit into it, rather than revolutionising the whole system.

## 1.3. Objectives of the Study

This search has the following as its major aims and objectives.

1. To scrutinise and analyse the Nigerian education system using literature to identify the negative impact of the present structure on the mental health of people with LD.
2. To explore the possibilities for improvement in the present Nigerian education systems such that it is less harmful to people with LD.

## 1.4. Significance of the Study

The results of this study will affect the learning outcome of students with LD in future research. It will contribute to sparse literature on the subject of LD in Nigerian schools with respect to how it affects mental health and long-term quality of life. Policymakers, government, and school bodies will be able to use this research as a blueprint for future policymaking and implementation towards a better experience and prognosis for students living with LD. It is expected to bring attention to Parents of young children born with learning disabilities to all the ways they can get early help for their children, thus improving their prognosis significantly.

### 1.5. Research Questions

1. Does the Nigerian educational system support students with LD?
2. What ways does the present system affect the mental health of students living with LD long term?
3. What infrastructure can the school incorporate to improve LD students' outcomes?

### 1.6. Research Hypotheses

**Hypothesis 1:** The Nigerian education system contributes to the mental health issues recorded amongst students with learning disabilities.

**Hypothesis 2:** The Nigerian education system isn't contributive to the mental health issues recorded amongst students with learning disabilities.

### 1.7. Scope and Limitations of Study

This study is a qualitative literature review, relying heavily on existing research and leveraging their results to draw conclusions to answer the research questions and propose solutions to the stated problems. This means that the researcher has to depend only on the results of other researcher's work within contexts that apply to the Nigerian education system. Despite being a literature review, each of the research papers selected represents data from specific demographics within specific contexts. This, unfortunately, is hardly representative of the situation of all people living with learning disabilities in Africa, much less the whole world.

### 1.8. Research Methodology

This paper is a qualitative literature review concentrating on the results of 3 primary research papers. Their results will be used to explore the conversations surrounding the effect of dysfunction in the Nigerian education system on the experiences of students with learning disabilities.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Introduction

The term "learning disabilities" is employed to characterize the experiences of individuals who face challenges in their development, particularly in the domains of language and mathematics. These difficulties can stem from issues related to hearing or the ability to connect information across different areas of the brain. These limitations can manifest in various forms, including specific challenges in spoken and written language, coordination, self-regulation, and attention. These difficulties can also extend to school performance and hinder the learning process. In this chapter, we will focus on several key aspects related to learning disabilities. These include theories surrounding learning disabilities, conceptual considerations concerning the definition and identification of learning disabilities, the neurobiological underpinnings of learning disabilities, the influence of the environment on learning disabilities, environmental risk factors associated with learning disabilities, and relevant research findings in the field of learning disabilities.

### 2.2. Background of study

LDs have a long history dating back to the 17th century. However, the historical definition of LDs lacked precision and functional clarity. Some of the initial recognition of LD as a condition was predicated on the events of a patient who had lost the ability to read after a stroke but maintained their ability to spell correctly. It was, however Broca (1865) that specified the nature of LDs by relating them to malfunction in the left hemisphere of the brain. According to Kirk (1963), in what would be one of the most accurate stands, defines learning disabilities as a cluster of written and speech disabilities, which include reading difficulties—dyslexia, mathematical difficulties —dyscalculia, and writing difficulties—dysgraphia. The environment, whether physical or social, can have a detrimental impact on individuals with learning disabilities, as child development is profoundly influenced by cultural and upbringing factors. The type of household children are born into, the training they receive, the values instilled by their culture, and their formal and informal education all have significant psychological implications for cognitive development (Masha, 2000). As a result, children may exhibit either convergent or divergent thinking styles. Convergent thinkers rely on intuition and imagination to solve problems (Adeloye, 2000) and excel in close-ended tests that require single answers. Getzel and Jackson, (1986) found that children raised by critical, emotionally withdrawn, and distant parents are more likely to become convergent thinkers. On the other hand, divergent thinkers use logic and critical thinking to solve problems and excel in open-ended questions that demand multiple answers. Parents who encourage independent work and in-still confidence in their children tend to raise divergent thinkers (Lytton, 1971). This demonstrates that social and educational background plays a crucial role in shaping children's cognitive styles. Additionally, children can be categorised as field-independent or field-dependent learners. Field independence involves using intelligence and initiative to solve problems, whereas field dependence relies on global approaches and lacks systematically (Adeloye, 2000).

Field-independent children generally display higher intelligence because their inability to follow complex instructions and over-dependence on others hinder certain learning tasks, indicating potential cognitive limitations in field-dependent individuals. The rural and urban environment's effects cannot be underestimated, particularly in terms of

educational outcomes. Children raised in resource-deprived environments, often found in rural areas or low-income urban neighbourhoods, tend to perform poorly in educational settings (Masha, 2000). This is not necessarily due to genetic inferiority but rather results from factors within the home and environment that hinder their ability to utilise their innate abilities. Therefore, it is essential to create stimulating and well-structured environments for children to enhance and improve their intellectual skills, as a rich and stimulating environment positively affects intelligence (Alhamdu, 2000). Research suggests that cognitive abilities can be enhanced through consistent training (Dember and Jenkins, 1970). However, due to financial constraints, many parents are unable to send their children to well-structured and stimulating schools, leading them to opt for more affordable public schools. Consequently, public schools face overcrowded classrooms and stretched facilities, resulting in behaviour problems among students. Although there was once a prevailing belief that boarding schools offered accelerated learning and remediation for behavioural issues (Masha, 2000), recent achievements in some private day schools challenge this notion. While learning disabilities may persist throughout an individual's life, early intervention can help remediate some forms of LD (Okwusogu-Baba, 1994). For instance, handwriting problems can be significantly improved by addressing them at a young age. However, dysgraphia may be more challenging to manage among secondary school students due to its long-standing nature (Okwusogu-Baba, 1994).

### **2.3. Risk Factors for Learning Disabilities**

Risk factors are not direct causes, but they can be associated with the development of learning disabilities (LD). Prenatal factors, exposure to toxins, and anaesthetic exposure are some environmental risk factors linked to LD.

#### **2.3.1. Prenatal Factors**

Maternal smoking, alcoholism, drug use, and delivery complications are environmental risk factors associated with LD. Smoking during pregnancy can lead to low birth weight and premature delivery due to nicotine's effects on fetal heart rate (Kataoka *et al.*, 2018). Maternal and paternal alcoholism can also result in fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), characterised by low birth weight, intellectual impairment, and hyperactivity (McQuire *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, drug use during pregnancy, such as cocaine, may damage brain receptors, affecting the body's response to the physical environment (CHE 2003). Problems during pregnancy or delivery, like the mother's immune response affecting brain cell placement or umbilical cord complications, can also contribute to LD.

##### **2.3.1.1. Exposure to Toxins**

Exposure to environmental toxins like lead, mercury, cadmium, and PCBs can disrupt brain development, permanently negatively impacting intelligence, learning, attention, memory, comprehension, behaviour, and socialisation (CHE 2003). Pesticides, solvents, and heavy metals may also disrupt brain development in humans, similar to their effects in animal studies (CHE 2003). Furthermore, children treated with chemotherapy or radiation to the skull for cancer treatment may develop learning problems due to the potential damage to DNA molecules (Hewitt *et al.*, 2003).

##### **2.3.1.2 Anaesthetic Exposure**

Prenatal exposure to anaesthetic agents may affect physiological mechanisms and result in low birth weight (Hollenbeck *et al.* 1987 in Pressinger 1997). Studies have indicated potential cognitive effects of prenatal anaesthetic exposure, with differences observed in IQ scores among exposed and unexposed infants at four years (Peabody Picture Vocabulary IQ tests - PPVT) (Pressinger, 1997). This exposure could lead to damage to DNA molecules, affecting the rapid neurological development of the embryo and fetus (Reitz, DesGupta & Braudt 1992 in Pressinger 1997).

### **2.3.2. Neurobiological Basis of Learning Disabilities**

Genetic studies have revealed a neurobiological basis for learning disabilities. Twin studies and family pedigree analyses indicate a high probability of dyslexia in identical twins, suggesting a genetic link (Fiedorowicz *et al.*, 2001). Plomin (2003) also found a strong genetic influence on reading difficulties. Neurological studies have shown under-functioning of the occipital lobes and dysfunction in the left and right hemispheres related to different aspects of learning disabilities.

#### **2.3.2.1. Differentials in Learning Disabilities Among Students**

In Giwa (1996), Research conducted in Oyo Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria, revealed no significant difference in the performance of male and female primary school pupils in arithmetic tests. However, a significant performance gap existed between private and public schools, with private schools showing better results (Giwa 1996). Additionally, a study on the effect of social skill programs on school achievement among children with moderate learning disabilities in Nigerian schools demonstrated a highly significant difference in pre-post test results for children in both experimental and control groups (Olanipekun 1996).

### **2.4. Conclusion**

Learning disabilities remain an understudied field within psychology, primarily due to its complex nature. Researchers hold differing opinions regarding the causes and etiology of learning disabilities, with genetics and

neurological dysfunction being key factors. The findings suggest brain structure and function variations among individuals with learning disabilities.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the methods and methodologies that this research will be performed through. Furthermore, it reveals the structure and design of the methods, including how the information will appear structurally. This is a qualitative literature review making use of secondary data. The approach was selected because it allows the research to be approached not from the results of a personal search but from the perspective of the experts who have already conducted searches on the same topic. This approach allows researchers to analyse existing search results and gather and investigate them for information that addresses research questions and problem-solving related to their research topic. The chosen secondary literature for this search will undergo systematic analysis, focusing on extracting explicit and implied answers from three specific papers. These answers aim to shed light on the role and impact of the Nigerian education system on the long and short-term mental health of students with learning disabilities. The results will be presented and discussed in comparison to other texts to enhance comprehension of the existing work in this field. Additionally, this section delves into the chosen methods and methodologies, including the fundamental hypothesis, expected outcomes, and other aspects of the selected methodology. It also reveals the research design, strategy, and the process employed in identifying and selecting the three specific texts that constitute the secondary data examined in this paper.

#### 3.2. Research Questions

Research questions serve as guiding beacons, steering and anchoring the researcher throughout the data collection and presentation journey. According to Khoo (2005) and Akhtar (2016), research questions are pivotal in pinpointing the core focus and maintaining a clear, concise, and coherent narrative through dialogue or monologue.

Furthermore, research questions aid in the synthesis of existing literature on the subject matter. This synthesis empowers researchers to cultivate their unique insights, thereby paving the way for precision in the revelation of novel facts. It's important to note that research questions may not necessarily elicit binary, one-word responses like "yes" or "no." Rather, this paper aspires to explore the nuanced territory between the affirmative and the negative, striving to uncover the unspoken challenges and advantages inherent in the Nigerian education system's effect on students with LD. This research seeks to answer through a qualitative exploratory search the following questions.

##### *Research questions*

**RQ1:** Does the Nigerian educational system support students with LD?

**RQ2:** What ways does the present system affect the mental health of students living with LD long term?

**RQ3:** What infrastructure can the school incorporate to improve LD students' outcomes?

#### 3.3. Research Hypothesis

**Hypothesis 1:** The Nigerian education system is contributive to the mental health issues recorded amongst students with learning disabilities.

**Hypothesis 2:** The Nigerian education system isn't contributive to the mental health issues recorded amongst students with learning disabilities.

#### 3.4. Research Philosophy

A research philosophy can be defined as the fundamental belief system(s), perspectives, and worldview that form the foundation and guiding principles for the methodologies employed in data and information gathering during a research endeavour. Burrell & Morgan (1979) have identified four major philosophical orientations that are commonly recognised among research scholars, which include; Positivism, Realism, Pragmatism, Interpretivism. In their 2019 research, Yoon Soo et al. delved into the positivist perspective, emphasising that research following a positivist approach aims to: "establish explanatory connections or causal relationships that ultimately enable the prediction and control of the phenomena under investigation." This perspective asserts that a positivist research approach is rooted in the belief that comprehending and scrutinising an idea is essential, as it allows researchers to accumulate extensive information about it, enabling them to foresee and potentially influence future outcomes in similar scenarios. Consequently, positivist-oriented research necessitates a commitment to structured, precise, and quantifiable data. It is concerned with precision and concrete facts, such as numerical data, leaving no room for ambiguity as it demands meticulous data collection and information. On the other hand, the philosophy of realism approaches research from a distinct standpoint.

It is grounded in the belief that reality is not contingent upon the researcher's personal opinions or perspectives and acknowledges the existence of contrasting research findings. Realism guards against making sweeping generalisations and encourages considering exceptions to established norms (Rana & Chad, 2006). Interpretivism, as another research philosophy, asserts that the concept of what is real and true is subject to human interpretation. It underscores that reality is



subjective, manifold, and dynamic, with no single research outcome being universally representative of objective truth. Even in quantitative research, room exists for interpreting findings and their implications across various social contexts and perspectives (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Interpretivism heavily relies on interpreting data within specific contexts, taking into account social constructs and individual viewpoints. Pragmatism, as a research philosophy, posits that multiple truths can coexist simultaneously. It advocates for an open-minded approach to empirical investigation (Creswell & Clark, 2011). This philosophy believes that our understanding of truth is shaped by our actions, suggesting that truths are true because our actions have made them so (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

### 3.5. Research Design

In Creswell & Plano-Clark's work from 2011, research design is defined as the framework and procedures employed by a researcher during data collection, analysis, and presentation. Moreover, it encompasses all the methodological choices made by the researcher throughout the data gathering, analysis, and synthesis processes, all aimed at addressing the research questions accurately. The current study delves into pertinent literature concerning the impact of the present Nigerian education system on the prognosis of a student with LD for their academic and personal life and mental health. An exploratory approach is essential due to the extensive nature of the existing literature. A thorough examination of this literature is necessary to extract information, objectives, methodologies, and research outcomes. This research will scrutinise relevant literature to assess the impact of the present Nigerian education system on the prognosis of a student with LD for their academic and personal life and mental health, particularly in terms of their impact on the learning curve, student engagement, student experience, and overall learning and life outcomes. As a systematic literature review, this paper impartially and objectively analyses existing literature on the impact of the present Nigerian education system on the prognosis of a student with LD for their academic and personal life and mental health.

The researcher searched Google Scholar and Research Gates for articles containing pre-selected keywords closely aligned with the research objectives. These predetermined keywords, often referred to as search strings, encompassed the following terms: Mental health, Education, Learning disabilities, Education system, Nigeria. The initial search yielded a substantial 12,547 independent articles containing these keywords or deemed relevant by the search engine. To refine the results, the first filter focused on articles specifically related to the research topic based on the keywords, leaving 7,871 papers. After narrowing the search to papers composed entirely in English, 4,823 papers remained. Out of these, 1,921 were either direct duplicates or closely resembled each other in terms of topic and findings. Consequently, 2,902 papers were retained after the duplicate screening. At this stage, a thorough analysis of the full text of each paper was conducted to assess their relevance to the research topic and argument, resulting in 463 texts meeting the criteria. Additionally, a filter was applied to select papers published within the past 10 years. This refinement returned 22 papers, which underwent systematic evaluation. Following the review process, 5 articles were deemed pertinent, with 3 ultimately selected for inclusion in the study. The selection of the papers to be used in this research was governed by previously decided research questions (See Figure 2).

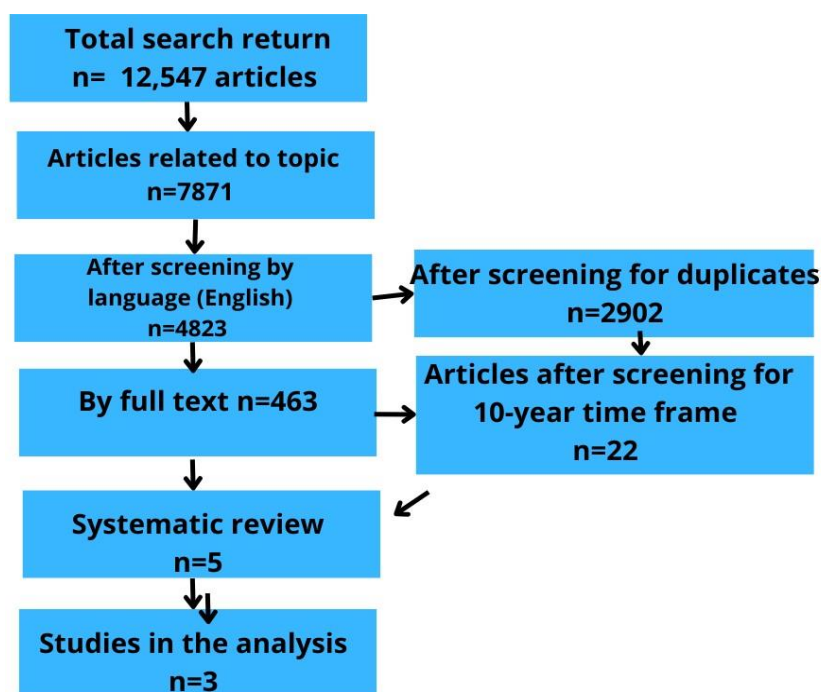


Figure 1: Literature selection

### The research strategy for qualitative research

In this investigation, we utilise the systematic literature review approach to delve into and scrutinise the outcomes of prior searches. This endeavour aims to better understand the research problem and provide solutions to the research queries. Qualitative research, on the other hand, encompasses a methodological process that endeavours to tackle specific inquiries of interest by analysing the contributions of fellow researchers pertaining to various facets of the issue.

| LITERATURE  | CONCLUSION   |
|---|--|
| HASSIOTIS, ANGELA. (2009). RESEARCH IN MENTAL HEALTH LEARNING DISABILITIES: PRESENT CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DRIVERS. PSYCHIATRY. 8. 457-460. 10.1016/J.MPPSY.2009.07.004.   | ILLUSTRATES INNOVATIVE RESEARCH THAT HAS LED TO CHANGES IN PRACTICE AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE ETIOLOGY AND IMPLICATIONS OF MENTAL DISORDERS IN OUR POPULATION. FINALLY, I DELINEATE THE CHALLENGES FACED BY RESEARCHERS BOTH IN TERMS OF ACADEMIC ENDEAVOUR AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING DISABILITIES   |
| SYLVESTER O. OKENYI (2019), THE ENIGMA OF SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY AND THE AFRICAN SCHOOL CHILD: CASE FOR PROGRAMME OF COUNSELLING INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT  | HIGHLIGHTS TWO BASIC APPROACHES TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE PHENOMENON OF SLD NEUROLOGICAL AND BEHAVIOURAL. SUGGESTIONS WERE MADE ON THE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES THAT CAN BE ADAPTED TO SUIT CONTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN AFRICA.   |
| ARO, T., EKLUND, K., ELORANTA, A.-K., NÄRHI, V., KORHONEN, E., & AHONEN, T. (2019). ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN CHILDHOOD LEARNING DISABILITIES AND ADULT-AGE MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS, LACK OF EDUCATION, AND UNEMPLOYMENT. JOURNAL OF LEARNING DISABILITIES, 52(1), 71-83. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219418775118">HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.1177/0022219418775118</a> | THE FINDINGS SUGGEST THAT STRATEGIES AND PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES AIMED AT CIRCUMVENTING DIFFICULTIES SHOULD BE A PRIORITY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION EARLY ON, AND THEY SHOULD BE GIVEN AT LEAST EQUAL ATTENTION AS EFFORTS TO ENHANCE ACADEMIC SKILLS. EARLIER RESEARCH SUGGESTS THAT CERTAIN INTERPERSONAL FACTORS, SUCH AS COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SUPPORT AND INTRAPERSONAL FACTORS—SUCH AS SELF-AWARENESS, PROACTIVITY, SELF-ESTEEM, PERSEVERANCE, AND EFFECTIVE COPING STRATEGIES ARE RELEVANT PREDICTORS OF COPING WITH LD, AND THEY PREDICT SUCCESS BETTER THAN VARIABLES LIKE IQ, ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, LIFE STRESSORS, AGE, GENDER, SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, AND ETHNICITY |

Figure 2: Selected literature and their results

### 3.6. Limitation of the Methodology

No single research methodology can stand without any form of limitation. In fact, some of the major differentiating factors in research methodologies are the limitations of each approach. Because this is a qualitative literature review, the methodology may not quite cover directly the statistical implication of the impact of the present Nigerian education system on the prognosis of a student with LD for their academic life and mental health. It only accounts for the research that other researchers have carried out in the past. The exploration involves three major works of literature in the search, thus limiting the sample size and leaving much to be researched.

### 3.7. Conclusions

The methodology of a study reveals and involves the objectives of the research in terms of the problems it tries to solve, the questions it tries to answer, and how the data will be gathered and presented while following the rules of the specific methodology.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Learning disability and culture

Learning disabilities have been construed differently by diverse societies, with variance arising from the degree to which a society prioritises specific skills in determining whether a child is considered to have a learning disability. When a child struggles to meet the societal expectations, they may face rejection or be relegated to the status of an outcast (Alhamdu, 2000). What determines whether or not a child has a learning disability can be cultural. A good instance is seen in the difference between the value that Eskimos place on the ability to detect subtle differences in snow and ice surfaces versus the high regard that some communities hold for literacy (Maiwada, 2002). For the Ijaw people of Nigeria, swimming proficiency is crucial, Hausa people of the same country, however, value the ability of the child to memorize Quranic verses more (Alhamdu, 2000). With the emergence of Western education, mastery of fundamental academic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic has become essential for success in both educational and employment settings. Consequently, children who struggle in the classroom may be marginalized and disadvantaged (Alhamdu, 2000).

### 4.2. Learning Disabilities and Mental Health

Children who are unable to meet their culture’s expectations and milestones may experience embarrassment and frustration (Learner, 1997). Studies by Peak, Farbelow, and Litman (1985) indicate that individuals with learning disabilities constitute a significant proportion of adolescent suicides compared to the general adolescent population in the

United States. This is a tremendous statement on the mental health aspect of LD that remains little explored to date. Similar phenomena are observed in Nigeria and particularly in Kano State, where behavioural issues stemming from negative experiences of youngsters with learning disabilities are on the rise (Mba, 1986 in Adima, 1989). Despite concerted efforts by stakeholders and educational administrators to address the issue of learning disabilities, it persists. This may be attributed, in part, to the limited local literature on the subject and the resulting misconceptions regarding causality and ethology (Obani, 1995). Additionally, fragmentation within the field of learning disabilities has hindered progress, with experts such as Kirk (1962), NAHC (1968), and USOE (1977) often diverging in their perspectives. This lack of consensus hampers a comprehensive understanding of the causes of learning disabilities (Olanipekun, 1996). Moreover, government policies often fall short of the aims and objectives outlined in the Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004). While these policies are well-articulated, their practical implementation remains challenging, posing a threat to the educational future of the growing population of youngsters with learning disabilities. In summary, the concept of learning disabilities has been shaped by varying societal priorities and perspectives, leading to challenges in understanding, addressing, and supporting individuals with these disabilities. Efforts to tackle this issue must involve a more unified and informed approach.

#### **4.3. The reality of students with LD in Nigerian schools**

#### **4.4. Does the Nigerian educational system support students with LD?**

Eskay (2012) highlights the cultural differences in Nigeria as one of the major problems facing the possibility of a standard and uniform policy framework for the handling and long-term assistance of students with LD in Nigeria. The study posited that:

*“Because of political and cultural issues mitigating special education programming, there seems to be a continuous stagnancy of special education programming since the enactment of Section 8 of the NPE more than three decades ago. Below are three important sub-sections demonstrating Nigeria's special education programming state”.*

In a country with over 250 ethnic groups, it is difficult for them to arrive at a consensus as to what should be done for students with learning disabilities, seeing that there is already a significant discrepancy in how education-oriented each region is. It is safe to say, therefore, that despite the seeming adherence and agreement to SDG 11 on education, the diversity in the country continues to hamper how policies are implemented across the board.

#### **4.5. What ways does the present system affect the mental health of students living with LD long term?**

From school bullying (Asiyai, 2015) from both students and teachers who do not understand why students with LD are different to personal issues of inferiority, inadequacy, failure, frustration, depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem (Tanis *et al.*, 2011), students with LD have a lot of mental health issues to navigate, and the Nigerian educational system is just not equipped to handle that much load, especially with counsellors rarely having the space, tools, or sometimes interest in being active in the welfare of struggling students. The culture of severe punishment in response to academic failure is also a problematic one as it further subjects students with LD to abuse and ridicule, which could further affect their self-esteem and willingness to try.

#### **4.5. What infrastructure can the school incorporate to improve LD students' outcomes?**

Many Nigerian public primary and secondary schools already have counsellors employed, or at least the government recognises the school counsellor's office. Policies can be made mandating that every Nigerian school has at least one counsellor and that every student passes through at least 1 hour with the counsellor either in groups or individually. That way, early diagnosis can be made. The culture of school spankings, specifically in relation to poor performance, can also be addressed with laws and policies prohibiting hitting children for academic failure.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the conclusion derived from data analysis and information from the three listed literature and many others. It offers insights into the implications of the presented data and offers recommendations for strategies for improving the overall school experience and learning curve of students with LD.

### **5.2. Conclusion**

Learning disabilities are yet to be recognised enough in the Nigerian public school system to incite action. However, there is undeniable evidence that there are students living with this condition, which negatively impacts their physical, mental, and psychological health in the short and long run. There are ways that the Nigerian government can help students living with LD, but first, major changes need to be made in the public school system. From teaching aids to staff components, all the way to school policies that prohibit bullying to protect the further decline of LD students. The present school policies, which adhere to such legislation as 295(4) of the Criminal Code (South), will only worsen the situation for



children with LD. While the exact causes of LD are unknown, none of the identified risk factors indicate a fault on the part of the student. It is imperative to find ways to help students living with LD rather than increasing their discomfort. Below are some recommendations that are worthy of consideration in the efforts to assist students living with LD.

## 5.2. Recommendations

1. Individualised Student Support: Students should be assessed at the point of admission, and the ones found with possible LD should be immediately referred for further study so they can receive a tailored learning experience that is designed for their condition.
2. Many Nigerian schools have resident counsellor's, but few actually use them. The counsellors' offices can be converted to Counselling Centres and furnished to cater to the needs of neurodivergent and LD students and their parents.
3. Parents are also often impacted by their children's LD, as feelings of inadequacy and failure are common. An awareness campaign that helps them understand their children better will better equip them to help their children in the short and long run.
4. Incorporation of audiovisual aids during classes as well as #committing to encouraging the students may help them develop essential attributes such as self-awareness, proactivity, perseverance, and goal setting for their education.
5. Training and Professional Development: Implement training and continuous professional development programs for school principals, guidance and counselling professionals, as well as subject teachers. These programs should focus on equipping them with effective strategies for managing students with learning disabilities in day and boarding schools."

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