

# **Examining the Influence of Inclusive Classroom Environment on the Social and Emotional Well-Being of Learners with Special Needs**

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## **Abstract:**

This study examined the influence of the inclusive classroom environment on the social and emotional well-being of learners with special needs (LSNs) during the academic year 2023–2024. Specifically, it assessed the level of integration of learners with special needs within inclusive classrooms, determined their social and emotional well-being, and examined the relationship between classroom integration and these dimensions as a basis for developing an adaptive learning plan. The study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design involving 36 teachers handling inclusive classrooms, selected through general sampling. Data were gathered using adopted survey questionnaires and analyzed using frequency count, percentage, weighted mean, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ). The findings revealed that learners with special needs demonstrated a high level of integration within inclusive classrooms, characterized by active participation, positive peer interactions, and supportive teacher practices. Likewise, the learners exhibited high levels of social well-being, indicating positive social experiences, peer relationships, and a strong sense of belonging. Their emotional well-being was also found to be high, reflecting favorable levels of emotional security, self-confidence, and emotional support within the inclusive environment. However, the results showed no statistically significant relationship between the level of integration and the social and emotional well-being of learners with special needs, suggesting that factors beyond classroom integration may contribute to these outcomes. The study concludes that while inclusive classroom environments foster positive social and emotional experiences among learners with special needs, integration alone is insufficient to significantly influence their overall well-being. Therefore, strengthening inclusive practices, enhancing peer support systems, promoting social-emotional learning, and implementing the proposed adaptive learning plan are recommended to further support the holistic development of learners with special needs and improve the quality of inclusive education.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, Learners with Special Needs, Inclusive Classroom Environment, Social Well-Being, Emotional Well-Being, Adaptive Learning Plan, Descriptive-Correlational Research

## INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has emerged as a transformative educational paradigm that seeks to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all learners regardless of their abilities, disabilities, backgrounds, or learning needs. Grounded in the principles of equity, participation, and social justice, inclusive education extends beyond the physical placement of learners with special needs (LSNs) into regular classrooms. It advocates for meaningful participation, access to quality instruction, and the creation of supportive learning environments that promote the holistic development of every learner. Central to this vision is the recognition that educational success encompasses not only academic achievement but also social and emotional well-being, which are essential components of lifelong learning and personal development.

The global movement toward inclusive education has been strongly influenced by international frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which affirms the right of persons with disabilities to access inclusive and quality education without discrimination. These international commitments have encouraged educational systems worldwide to adopt inclusive policies and practices that promote equality, participation, and respect for diversity. Similarly, legislative initiatives such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the No Child Left Behind Act have reinforced the importance of providing learners with disabilities access to the general education curriculum and learning experiences alongside their peers. These developments reflect a significant shift from exclusionary educational models toward learning environments that value diversity and foster social inclusion.

Inclusive classrooms serve as important spaces where learners from diverse backgrounds interact, collaborate, and learn together. Such environments provide opportunities for learners to develop empathy, cooperation, respect for differences, and positive interpersonal relationships. Through meaningful social interactions, learners gain experiences that contribute to their social competence and emotional growth. For learners with special needs, inclusive settings offer opportunities to participate in classroom activities, establish peer relationships, and develop a sense of belonging within the school community. These experiences are particularly significant because feelings of acceptance and connectedness have been associated with positive educational and psychosocial outcomes.

Despite the recognized benefits of inclusive education, learners with special needs continue to encounter challenges that may affect their social and emotional well-being. Many learners experience difficulties in establishing peer relationships, regulating emotions, and coping with the social stigma associated with perceived differences (Kanter, 2017). These challenges may negatively influence their self-esteem, confidence, and overall participation in school activities. Likewise, parents often face difficulties in understanding and responding to their children's social and emotional needs, while educators encounter challenges in managing diverse classroom behaviors and adapting instruction to meet varying learner needs (Hotulainen & Takala, 2014; Goldan et al., 2021). Such challenges highlight the complexity of creating truly inclusive learning environments that support both academic and psychosocial development.

Research has increasingly emphasized the role of inclusive education in promoting social and emotional outcomes among learners with special needs. Inclusive environments have been found to encourage social participation, reduce feelings of isolation, and enhance learners' sense of belonging (Kempf, 2018). Furthermore, supportive classroom environments can foster emotional resilience, self-confidence, and positive self-concept by recognizing and valuing the unique strengths and contributions of every learner (Goldan et al., 2021). When learners with special needs feel accepted and supported by their peers and teachers, they are more likely to demonstrate positive emotional adjustment and active engagement in the learning process.

However, while substantial research has examined academic outcomes and instructional practices in inclusive settings, comparatively fewer studies have explored the social and emotional dimensions of inclusion. Existing literature suggests that although educational systems have made significant progress in facilitating academic integration, the social and emotional experiences of learners with special needs remain insufficiently understood. Kanter (2017) noted that successful academic inclusion does not automatically guarantee meaningful social participation or emotional well-being, underscoring the need for more comprehensive investigations that examine learners' holistic experiences within inclusive classrooms. This gap in the literature highlights the necessity of examining how inclusive classroom environments influence learners' social relationships, emotional resilience, and overall well-being.

Given the growing emphasis on learner-centered and inclusive educational practices, understanding how classroom integration influences the social and emotional well-being of learners with special needs has become increasingly important. Examining these dimensions can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of inclusive education and inform interventions that strengthen learner support systems. Therefore, this study sought to examine the influence of inclusive classroom environments on the social and emotional well-being of learners with special needs. Specifically, it investigated the level of integration of learners with special needs within inclusive classrooms, assessed their social well-being and emotional well-being, determined whether classroom integration significantly influences these dimensions, and utilized the findings as the basis for the development of an adaptive learning plan for learners with special needs.

Despite the growing implementation of inclusive education across educational systems worldwide, limited research has comprehensively examined its influence on the social and emotional well-being of learners with special needs. Existing studies have primarily focused on academic outcomes and instructional strategies, often overlooking the social relationships, emotional resilience, and sense of belonging that are equally vital to learners' holistic development. Understanding how inclusive classroom integration shapes these dimensions is essential in determining the effectiveness of inclusive practices and ensuring that learners with special needs receive meaningful educational experiences. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on inclusive education by providing empirical evidence on the social and emotional outcomes of inclusive classroom participation. Moreover, the results

may serve as a valuable reference for educators, school leaders, policymakers, and other stakeholders in designing responsive interventions, strengthening inclusive practices, and fostering educational environments where learners with special needs can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **Inclusive Education and Learners with Special Needs**

Inclusive education has become a cornerstone of contemporary educational reform, emphasizing the right of all learners to participate meaningfully in general education settings regardless of disability, learning needs, or background. Rooted in the principles of equity, social justice, and human rights, inclusive education seeks to remove barriers to participation and create learning environments that value diversity and foster belonging. Research suggests that inclusive educational settings provide learners with special needs opportunities to engage in authentic social interactions, access quality instruction, and develop positive relationships with peers and teachers. Such experiences contribute not only to academic development but also to social competence, self-confidence, and emotional well-being (Donohue & Bornman, 2014).

Inclusive classrooms encourage collaboration among learners with varying abilities, allowing meaningful interactions that challenge stereotypes and promote acceptance. According to Jagers et al. (2019), exposure to diverse peers fosters empathy, understanding, and mutual respect, contributing to a more supportive classroom climate. Through shared learning experiences, learners with special needs gain opportunities to develop communication skills, establish friendships, and strengthen their sense of belonging within the school community. These social experiences are particularly important because feelings of acceptance and connectedness have been linked to improved emotional adjustment and psychological well-being.

### **Social Well-Being of Learners with Special Needs in Inclusive Classrooms**

Social well-being refers to the quality of an individual's relationships, sense of belonging, social acceptance, and participation within a community. In educational settings, social well-being is often reflected through positive peer relationships, meaningful interactions, and active engagement in classroom activities. Studies have consistently shown that inclusive education positively influences the social development of learners with special needs by increasing opportunities for interaction with typically developing peers (Lehohla & Hlalele, 2012).

Research indicates that learners with special needs enrolled in inclusive classrooms demonstrate greater social integration and develop stronger friendships than those educated in segregated settings (Holland, 2015). These peer relationships provide emotional support, reduce feelings of isolation, and contribute to the development of important social skills. Furthermore, inclusive environments promote mutual understanding and respect for diversity among all learners, creating classroom cultures characterized by cooperation, acceptance, and social inclusion (Scourbys, 2019).

However, the social benefits of inclusion are not always automatic. Some learners with special needs continue to experience social exclusion, peer rejection, and difficulties forming meaningful relationships, particularly when schools lack adequate support systems and inclusive practices (McClelland, 2020). Such challenges underscore the importance of creating classroom environments that intentionally foster positive peer interactions and social participation.

### **Emotional Well-Being of Learners with Special Needs in Inclusive Settings**

Emotional well-being encompasses learners' feelings of self-worth, emotional security, resilience, confidence, and psychological adjustment. Inclusive education has been associated with positive emotional outcomes because it provides learners with special needs opportunities to participate in meaningful learning experiences alongside their peers. When learners feel accepted and valued within the classroom community, they are more likely to develop positive self-perceptions and emotional resilience (Goldan et al., 2021).

Studies have shown that learners with special needs who participate in inclusive educational environments often report higher levels of self-esteem, school belongingness, and overall life satisfaction compared to those in segregated settings (Dessement et al., 2012). Inclusive environments also provide opportunities for learners to demonstrate competence and experience success, which further strengthens their confidence and emotional well-being. Positive interactions with teachers and classmates serve as protective factors that help learners cope with academic and social challenges.

Nevertheless, emotional difficulties may arise when inclusion is poorly implemented. Learners may experience frustration, anxiety, or diminished self-esteem if they encounter persistent academic difficulties, inadequate accommodations, or negative peer attitudes (Hill, 2014). These findings highlight the need for supportive classroom practices that address both the academic and emotional needs of learners with special needs.

### **Factors Influencing the Success of Inclusive Education**

The effectiveness of inclusive education in promoting social and emotional well-being is influenced by several interconnected factors. Teacher preparedness and attitudes are among the most significant determinants of successful inclusion. Teachers who possess positive attitudes toward inclusion and receive adequate training are better equipped to implement differentiated instruction, foster positive classroom climates, and support diverse learners effectively (Joyner, 2022).

The availability of resources and support services also plays a critical role in ensuring meaningful participation. Inclusive classrooms require appropriate instructional materials, specialized services, and collaborative support systems to address diverse learner needs (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020). In addition, the physical environment of schools influences learners' participation and independence. Accessible

facilities and inclusive learning spaces contribute to improved confidence, engagement, and social interaction among learners with special needs (Lindsay, 2007).

Research further suggests that successful inclusion depends on the quality of implementation rather than placement alone. Simply placing learners with special needs in regular classrooms without adequate support may lead to frustration, isolation, and negative educational experiences. Effective inclusive education requires collaboration among teachers, families, administrators, and support personnel to ensure that learners receive the assistance necessary to thrive socially, emotionally, and academically (Donohue & Bornman, 2014).

### **Theoretical and Legal Foundations of Inclusive Education**

The present study is anchored on several theoretical perspectives that explain the relationship between inclusive education and the social and emotional well-being of learners with special needs. Bandura's Social Learning Theory emphasizes the role of observation, modeling, and social interaction in shaping behavior and emotional development. Within inclusive classrooms, learners learn from one another through observation and interaction, fostering empathy, acceptance, and positive social behaviors (Bandura, 1977).

Self-Determination Theory developed by Deci and Ryan (2012) further explains how inclusive environments support learners' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these needs are satisfied, learners are more likely to experience motivation, engagement, and emotional well-being. Similarly, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory highlights the influence of interconnected environmental systems on learner development, emphasizing the importance of supportive classroom relationships and school contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The study is likewise supported by legal frameworks that promote inclusive education, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). These policies emphasize equal educational opportunities, access to inclusive learning environments, and the provision of appropriate support services for learners with disabilities. Collectively, these theoretical and legal foundations underscore the importance of inclusive educational practices in fostering the social and emotional well-being of learners with special needs.

The reviewed literature demonstrates that inclusive education has significant potential to enhance the social and emotional well-being of learners with special needs through increased opportunities for social interaction, participation, belongingness, and emotional growth. However, the success of inclusive practices depends on several factors, including teacher preparedness, supportive learning environments, adequate resources, and positive peer relationships. While existing studies have documented the benefits and challenges associated with inclusion, limited research has specifically examined how the level of integration within inclusive classrooms influences the social and emotional well-being of learners with

special needs. This gap provides the rationale for the present study and highlights its contribution to the growing body of literature on inclusive education.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. Descriptive-correlational research is a quantitative approach that seeks to describe existing conditions and determine the relationships among variables without manipulating them (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design was deemed appropriate because the study aimed to assess the level of integration of learners with special needs (LSNs) within inclusive classrooms, determine their social and emotional well-being, and examine whether the level of integration significantly influences these dimensions. Through this design, the researcher was able to generate empirical evidence regarding the relationship between inclusive classroom integration and the social and emotional well-being of learners with special needs.

### Participants

The participants of the study were teachers handling inclusive education classrooms in selected elementary schools. Teachers were chosen as respondents because they directly observe and facilitate the daily academic, social, and emotional experiences of learners with special needs within inclusive learning environments. Their professional insights and observations provide valuable information regarding the extent of learner integration and its influence on learners' well-being. A total of 36 teachers participated in the study and were selected through purposive sampling. This sampling technique was employed because the respondents possessed the specific characteristics and experiences necessary to provide relevant information concerning inclusive education practices. Only teachers currently handling learners with special needs in inclusive classrooms were included in the study.

### Data Collection Tools

Data were gathered using an adopted survey questionnaire composed of four parts.

**Part I** assessed the level of integration of learners with special needs within the inclusive education classroom. This section was adapted from Dixon (2005) and measured learners' participation, interaction, engagement, and inclusion in classroom activities.

**Part II** measured the social well-being of learners with special needs in inclusive classrooms. The indicators were adapted from de Verdier (2016) and focused on peer relationships, social participation, belongingness, and social acceptance.

**Part III** assessed the emotional well-being of learners with special needs. This section was adapted from Meschko et al. (2021) and examined indicators such as self-esteem, emotional security, confidence, resilience, and emotional adjustment.

**Part IV** determined the influence of the level of integration on the social and emotional well-being of learners with special needs by examining the relationship among the variables investigated in the study.

Prior to data collection, the instrument underwent content validation by experts in inclusive education and educational research to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the items. Necessary revisions were incorporated based on the recommendations provided by the validators.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

The conduct of the study followed three phases: the preliminary phase, data gathering phase, and post-data gathering phase. During the preliminary phase, the researcher secured the necessary permissions from the appropriate educational authorities and school administrators through formal letters requesting approval to conduct the study. Upon approval, coordination with school heads and teacher respondents was undertaken to explain the purpose, significance, and procedures of the research. During the data gathering phase, the adopted survey questionnaire was administered to the teacher respondents. The participants were informed of the objectives of the study and were assured that their participation was voluntary and that all information gathered would be treated with strict confidentiality. They were instructed to answer the questionnaire honestly based on their observations and experiences in handling learners with special needs within inclusive classrooms. After the completion of the questionnaires, the responses were collected, checked for completeness, and prepared for data processing. In the post-data gathering phase, the accomplished questionnaires were organized, encoded, tabulated, and subjected to statistical analysis. The results were interpreted according to the objectives of the study and were presented following the sequence of the research questions. Throughout the entire process, ethical considerations, including informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality of responses, were strictly observed.

### **Data Analysis**

The data gathered in this study were analyzed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Frequency count and percentage were utilized to describe the distribution of the respondents and summarize relevant demographic information. Weighted mean was employed to determine the level of integration of learners with special needs within inclusive classrooms, as well as their social and emotional well-being as perceived by the teacher respondents. This statistical measure provided an overall assessment of each variable based on the respondents' ratings. To determine whether a significant relationship existed between the level of integration of learners with special needs and their social and emotional well-being, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson  $r$ ) was used. This inferential statistical tool measured the degree and direction of the relationship between the variables and tested its significance at the 0.05 level of significance. The results of the statistical analyses served as the basis for the interpretation of findings and the formulation of conclusions and recommendations.

## RESULTS

**Table 1**

### Level of Integration of the Learners with Special Needs within the Inclusive Education Classroom

| S/N                            | Indicators                                                                                                   | WM          | Verbal Description |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 1                              | Students with special needs are actively encouraged to participate in classroom discussions.                 | 4.42        | Strongly Agree     |
| 2                              | Students without special needs willingly engage in group activities with their peers who have special needs. | 3.94        | Agree              |
| 3                              | Collaborative projects often involve students from diverse backgrounds, including those with special needs.  | 3.97        | Agree              |
| 4                              | The classroom environment promotes positive interactions among all students, regardless of their abilities.  | 4.42        | Strongly Agree     |
| 5                              | Students with special needs are included in extracurricular activities and social events.                    | 4.39        | Strongly Agree     |
| 6                              | Teachers actively facilitate social interactions between students with and without special needs.            | 4.42        | Strongly Agree     |
| 7                              | Students without special needs demonstrate empathy and support for their peers with special needs.           | 3.83        | Agree              |
| 8                              | There is a sense of inclusivity and belonging among all students in the classroom.                           | 4.08        | Agree              |
| 9                              | Students with special needs are encouraged to take on leadership roles in group activities.                  | 3.94        | Agree              |
| 10                             | The classroom environment promotes friendships and positive relationships among all students.                | 3.99        | Agree              |
| <b>Aggregate Weighted Mean</b> |                                                                                                              | <b>4.14</b> | <b>Agree</b>       |

**Legend:** 4.21–5.00 = Strongly Agree (Very High Integration); 3.41–4.20 = Agree (High Integration); 2.61–3.40 = Neutral (Moderate Integration); 1.81–2.60 = Disagree (Low Integration); 1.00–1.80 = Strongly Disagree (Very Low Integration)

Table 2 presents the level of integration of learners with special needs within the inclusive education classroom. The findings revealed an aggregate weighted mean of 4.14, verbally interpreted as **Agree**, indicating a high level of integration of learners with special needs in inclusive classroom settings. Among the indicators, the highest mean scores were obtained by students with special needs being actively encouraged to participate in classroom discussions (WM = 4.42), the classroom environment promoting positive interactions among all students regardless of ability (WM = 4.42), and teachers actively

facilitating social interactions between students with and without special needs (WM = 4.42). These indicators were all interpreted as **Strongly Agree**, reflecting very high levels of inclusion and participation. Likewise, the inclusion of students with special needs in extracurricular activities and social events (WM = 4.39) received a highly favorable rating. Conversely, the lowest-rated indicators were students without special needs demonstrating empathy and support for their peers with special needs (WM = 3.83), students without special needs willingly engaging in group activities with their peers who have special needs (WM = 3.94), and students with special needs being encouraged to take on leadership roles in group activities (WM = 3.94). Although these indicators were still rated as **Agree**, they obtained comparatively lower ratings than the other aspects of classroom integration. The findings indicate that learners with special needs are highly integrated into inclusive classroom environments through active participation, supportive teacher practices, and involvement in social and extracurricular activities.

**Table 2**

**Status of the Learners with Special Needs' Social Well-Being in an Inclusive Education Classroom**

| S/N | Indicators                                                                                                                   | WM   | Verbal Description |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------------|
| 1   | The inclusive classroom environment positively impacts the social well-being of learners with special needs.                 | 4.56 | Strongly Agree     |
| 2   | Learners with special needs feel socially included and valued by their peers in the inclusive classroom.                     | 3.86 | Agree              |
| 3   | The inclusive education setting promotes positive peer interactions and friendships among all students.                      | 4.50 | Strongly Agree     |
| 4   | Students with special needs actively participate in group activities and collaborative projects.                             | 3.92 | Agree              |
| 5   | The inclusive classroom environment encourages empathy and understanding among students, including those with special needs. | 4.44 | Strongly Agree     |
| 6   | Teachers actively facilitate social interactions between students with and without special needs.                            | 4.36 | Strongly Agree     |
| 7   | Students without special needs demonstrate support and inclusion toward their peers with special needs.                      | 3.78 | Agree              |
| 8   | There is a strong sense of belonging and acceptance among all students in the inclusive classroom.                           | 4.00 | Agree              |
| 9   | Students with special needs are encouraged to take on leadership roles and actively engage with their peers.                 | 3.83 | Agree              |
| 10  | The inclusive classroom promotes the social well-being of students with special needs.                                       | 4.44 | Strongly Agree     |

| S/N                                                                                                                                             | Indicators | WM          | Verbal Description |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|--------------------|
| <b>Aggregate Weighted Mean</b>                                                                                                                  |            | <b>4.17</b> | <b>Agree</b>       |
| <b>Legend:</b> 4.21–5.00 = Strongly Agree; 3.41–4.20 = Agree; 2.61–3.40 = Moderately Agree; 1.81–2.60 = Disagree; 1.00–1.80 = Strongly Disagree |            |             |                    |

Table 2 presents the status of the social well-being of learners with special needs in an inclusive education classroom. The findings revealed an aggregate weighted mean of 4.17, verbally interpreted as **Agree**, indicating a high level of social well-being among learners with special needs in inclusive classroom settings. Among the indicators, the highest-rated item was the positive impact of the inclusive classroom environment on the social well-being of learners with special needs (WM = 4.56), followed by the promotion of positive peer interactions and friendships among all students (WM = 4.50). Likewise, the indicators pertaining to the promotion of empathy and understanding among students (WM = 4.44) and the role of the inclusive classroom in promoting social well-being (WM = 4.44) were rated as **Strongly Agree**. Teacher facilitation of social interactions between students with and without special needs also received a favorable rating (WM = 4.36). On the other hand, the lowest-rated indicators were students without special needs demonstrating support and inclusion toward their peers with special needs (WM = 3.78), students with special needs being encouraged to take on leadership roles and actively engage with their peers (WM = 3.83), and learners with special needs feeling socially included and valued by their peers (WM = 3.86). Although these indicators remained within the **Agree** category, they received relatively lower ratings compared to the other dimensions of social well-being. The findings suggest that learners with special needs generally experience positive social well-being in inclusive classrooms, characterized by supportive learning environments, meaningful peer interactions, and opportunities for social participation.

**Table 3**  
**State of Emotional Well-Being of the Learners with Special Needs in an Inclusive Education Classroom**

| S/N | Indicators                                                                                                      | WM   | Verbal Description |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------------|
| 1   | The inclusive classroom environment positively impacts the emotional well-being of learners with special needs. | 4.69 | Strongly Agree     |
| 2   | Learners with special needs feel emotionally supported and accepted by their peers in the inclusive classroom.  | 3.72 | Agree              |
| 3   | The inclusive education setting promotes a sense of emotional security for learners with special needs.         | 4.25 | Strongly Agree     |

| S/N                            | Indicators                                                                                                              | WM          | Verbal Description |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 4                              | Students with special needs experience increased self-esteem and confidence in the inclusive classroom.                 | 3.92        | Agree              |
| 5                              | The inclusive education environment fosters emotional expression and self-regulation among learners with special needs. | 4.44        | Strongly Agree     |
| 6                              | Teachers actively nurture the emotional well-being of students with special needs in the inclusive classroom.           | 4.33        | Strongly Agree     |
| 7                              | Learners with special needs are encouraged to develop emotional resilience and coping skills.                           | 3.78        | Agree              |
| 8                              | The classroom atmosphere supports a positive emotional experience for all students, regardless of their abilities.      | 3.97        | Agree              |
| 9                              | Inclusive education contributes to improved emotional well-being for learners with special needs.                       | 3.94        | Agree              |
| 10                             | The inclusive classroom promotes the emotional well-being of students with special needs.                               | 4.53        | Strongly Agree     |
| <b>Aggregate Weighted Mean</b> |                                                                                                                         | <b>4.16</b> | <b>Agree</b>       |

**Legend:** 4.21–5.00 = Strongly Agree; 3.41–4.20 = Agree; 2.61–3.40 = Moderately Agree; 1.81–2.60 = Disagree; 1.00–1.80 = Strongly Disagree

Table 3 presents the state of emotional well-being of learners with special needs in an inclusive education classroom. The findings yielded an aggregate weighted mean of 4.16, verbally interpreted as **Agree**, indicating a high level of emotional well-being among learners with special needs in inclusive classroom settings. Among the indicators, the highest-rated item was the positive impact of the inclusive classroom environment on the emotional well-being of learners with special needs (WM = 4.69), followed by the promotion of emotional well-being in the inclusive classroom (WM = 4.53) and the fostering of emotional expression and self-regulation among learners with special needs (WM = 4.44). Likewise, the role of teachers in nurturing the emotional well-being of learners with special needs (WM = 4.33) and the promotion of emotional security within the inclusive education setting (WM = 4.25) were all rated as **Strongly Agree**. Conversely, the lowest-rated indicators were learners with special needs feeling emotionally supported and accepted by their peers (WM = 3.72), the encouragement of emotional resilience and coping skills (WM = 3.78), and increased self-esteem and confidence among learners with special needs (WM = 3.92). Although these indicators remained within the **Agree** category, they obtained relatively lower ratings compared to the other aspects of emotional well-being. The findings indicate that learners with special needs generally experience positive emotional well-being in inclusive classrooms,

characterized by supportive environments, emotional security, teacher support, and opportunities for emotional growth and self-expression.

**Table 4**

**Test of Relationship between the Level of Integration of the LSN and Their Social and Emotional Well-Being**

| Variables                                     | r-value | Strength of Correlation | p-value | Decision            | Remarks         |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------|-------------------------|---------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Level of Integration and Social Well-Being    | 0.476   | Weak Positive           | 0.164   | Do not Reject $H_0$ | Not Significant |
| Level of Integration and Emotional Well-Being | 0.538   | Weak Positive           | 0.108   | Do not Reject $H_0$ | Not Significant |

*Significant at  $p < 0.05$  (two-tailed)*

Table 4 presents the test of relationship between the level of integration of learners with special needs and their social and emotional well-being. The findings revealed a weak positive correlation between the level of integration and social well-being ( $r = 0.476$ ). However, the computed p-value of 0.164 exceeded the 0.05 level of significance, leading to the decision to do not reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, there is no significant relationship between the level of integration of learners with special needs and their social well-being. Similarly, the relationship between the level of integration and emotional well-being yielded a weak positive correlation ( $r = 0.538$ ). Despite the positive direction of the relationship, the computed p-value of 0.108 was greater than the 0.05 significance level. Consequently, the null hypothesis was not rejected, indicating that there is no significant relationship between the level of integration of learners with special needs and their emotional well-being. The findings indicate that although higher levels of integration tend to be associated with slightly higher levels of social and emotional well-being, these relationships were not statistically significant. Thus, the level of integration alone does not appear to significantly influence the social and emotional well-being of learners with special needs within the inclusive classroom setting.

## DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that inclusive education practices are successfully fostering meaningful participation and engagement among learners with special needs. The high ratings in classroom participation, positive peer interactions, and teacher-facilitated social engagement indicate that inclusive classrooms provide opportunities for learners with special needs to become active members of the learning community. These experiences are essential in developing a sense of belonging, acceptance, and social connectedness, which are critical components of successful inclusion. The strong rating for teacher facilitation of social interactions underscores the important role teachers play in creating inclusive learning environments. Effective teachers promote collaborative learning experiences, encourage participation, and establish

classroom norms that value diversity and mutual respect. Such practices contribute significantly to the successful integration of learners with special needs and help cultivate a classroom culture that supports equity and inclusion. Despite the generally positive findings, the comparatively lower ratings for peer empathy, willingness to collaborate, and leadership opportunities suggest that challenges remain in achieving deeper levels of social inclusion. These results imply that while learners with special needs are physically and academically integrated, opportunities to strengthen authentic peer relationships and leadership participation should be further enhanced. Schools may benefit from implementing structured peer-support programs, cooperative learning activities, and leadership opportunities that promote meaningful interactions among all learners. The findings support the study of Crispel and Kasperski (2021), who found that learners with special needs experience greater classroom integration and acceptance when inclusive practices are consistently implemented. Similarly, the results align with the principles of inclusive education, which emphasize participation, collaboration, and equal opportunities for all learners. However, the findings also corroborate Wang (2019), who argued that physical placement alone does not guarantee complete social inclusion. Learners with special needs may still encounter subtle forms of social isolation despite being present in mainstream classrooms. This highlights the importance of strengthening peer relationships and fostering a genuine sense of belonging within inclusive settings. The findings affirm that inclusive classrooms provide favorable conditions for the integration of learners with special needs. Nevertheless, continuous efforts are necessary to strengthen empathy, peer support, and leadership opportunities to ensure that inclusion extends beyond physical placement and results in meaningful participation and holistic development for all learners.

The findings demonstrate that inclusive classrooms contribute positively to the social well-being of learners with special needs. The very high ratings on the positive impact of inclusive classroom environments and the promotion of peer interactions and friendships suggest that inclusive education provides learners with meaningful opportunities to establish social connections and develop interpersonal relationships. These findings affirm that inclusive settings serve not only as academic environments but also as important social spaces where learners can develop a sense of belonging, acceptance, and social competence. The strong ratings for empathy, understanding, and teacher-facilitated social interactions further highlight the importance of creating supportive classroom climates. Teachers play a critical role in fostering positive peer relationships by encouraging collaboration, promoting respect for diversity, and facilitating interactions among learners. Such practices help create environments where learners with special needs feel accepted and valued as members of the classroom community. According to Heyder et al. (2020), inclusive classrooms that promote positive social interactions contribute significantly to learners' social adjustment, peer acceptance, and overall well-being. Similarly, Goldan et al. (2021) emphasized that supportive educational environments enhance learners' opportunities for social participation and strengthen their sense of belonging within the school community. The findings also reveal that learners with special needs actively participate in group activities and collaborative projects, suggesting that inclusive education provides opportunities for meaningful engagement with peers. Active participation in collaborative learning experiences allows learners to develop communication skills,

teamwork, and social confidence. This finding supports the principles of Social Learning Theory, which posits that social development occurs through observation, interaction, and engagement with others (Bandura, 1977). Through inclusive classroom experiences, learners with special needs are exposed to positive social models that contribute to their interpersonal growth and social competence. Despite the generally positive findings, the relatively lower ratings for peer support, social validation, and leadership opportunities indicate that certain aspects of social inclusion require further strengthening. While learners with special needs appear to be socially integrated within the classroom, the findings suggest that deeper levels of peer acceptance and meaningful participation can still be enhanced. The lower ratings may indicate that some learners continue to encounter subtle barriers to full social inclusion, particularly in peer-initiated interactions and leadership participation. These findings underscore the importance of implementing structured peer-support programs, cooperative learning activities, and leadership opportunities that encourage more meaningful engagement among learners. The results corroborate the findings of Heyder et al. (2020), who reported that inclusive educational settings positively influence the social well-being of learners with special needs by fostering peer relationships, social participation, and classroom acceptance. Likewise, Lehohla and Hlalele (2012) found that inclusive classrooms promote social integration by providing opportunities for interaction and collaboration between learners with and without disabilities. However, the findings also align with Juvonen et al. (2019), who noted that despite being physically included in mainstream settings, some learners with special needs may still experience social isolation and difficulties establishing meaningful peer relationships. This contrasting perspective highlights the complexity of social inclusion and suggests that physical integration alone does not automatically guarantee complete social acceptance. The findings affirm that inclusive education positively influences the social well-being of learners with special needs by promoting participation, friendships, empathy, and a sense of belonging. Nevertheless, schools and educators must continue to strengthen initiatives that foster authentic peer support, meaningful social engagement, and leadership opportunities to ensure that inclusion results in genuine social integration and holistic learner development.

The findings demonstrate that inclusive classrooms positively influence the emotional well-being of learners with special needs. The very high rating for the positive impact of inclusive classroom environments on emotional well-being suggests that learners benefit emotionally when they are educated in supportive and accepting educational settings. Inclusive classrooms provide opportunities for learners to feel valued, respected, and recognized as important members of the school community. Such experiences contribute significantly to their emotional adjustment, psychological comfort, and overall sense of well-being. The strong ratings for emotional security, emotional expression, and self-regulation indicate that inclusive environments provide conditions that support healthy emotional development. Learners who feel safe and accepted are more likely to express their thoughts and emotions openly, develop positive coping mechanisms, and build confidence in their abilities. These findings align with Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes that environments fostering relatedness, competence, and autonomy contribute to greater psychological well-being and emotional growth (Ryan & Deci, 2012).

When learners with special needs experience acceptance and support within the classroom, they are more likely to develop positive self-perceptions and emotional resilience. Another significant finding is the strong agreement regarding the role of teachers in nurturing learners' emotional well-being. Teachers serve as essential sources of emotional support, guidance, and encouragement, particularly for learners who may face challenges related to their disabilities. Through positive teacher-student relationships, differentiated support, and inclusive classroom practices, educators help create emotionally safe environments that promote confidence and self-worth. Consistent with Pastore and Luder (2021), the findings suggest that supportive teacher-student interactions are among the most influential factors contributing to positive emotional outcomes among learners with special needs in inclusive settings. Despite the generally positive findings, the relatively lower ratings associated with peer emotional support, emotional resilience, and self-confidence suggest that some emotional challenges remain. While learners with special needs appear to benefit from inclusive educational practices, the findings indicate that emotional acceptance and peer-based support may not always be fully experienced by all learners. The lower rating for peer support suggests that some learners may still encounter difficulties in establishing emotionally meaningful relationships with their classmates. Similarly, the ratings for resilience and self-confidence imply that learners may require additional support in developing coping strategies and maintaining positive self-perceptions when confronted with academic or social challenges. The findings corroborate the work of Pastore and Luder (2021), who reported that inclusive classrooms enhance learners' emotional well-being through supportive relationships, acceptance, and responsive educational practices. Likewise, Goldan et al. (2021) found that inclusive learning environments contribute positively to learners' emotional adjustment by promoting belongingness, self-esteem, and emotional security. Furthermore, Donohue and Bornman (2014) emphasized that effective inclusive practices create emotionally supportive environments where learners with special needs can thrive socially and emotionally. However, the findings must also be considered alongside the observations of Goodall (2020), who noted that some learners with special needs may continue to experience emotional difficulties and feelings of exclusion despite being educated in inclusive settings. This contrasting perspective highlights the complexity of emotional well-being and underscores the need for ongoing efforts to strengthen emotional support systems within inclusive classrooms. The findings affirm that inclusive education positively contributes to the emotional well-being of learners with special needs by fostering emotional security, self-expression, teacher support, and positive emotional experiences. Nevertheless, schools and educators should continue implementing interventions that strengthen peer acceptance, emotional resilience, coping skills, and self-confidence to ensure that all learners fully benefit from the emotional advantages of inclusive education. Such efforts are essential in promoting holistic development and creating learning environments where learners with special needs can flourish both academically and emotionally.

The findings suggest that while the level of integration of learners with special needs demonstrates a positive association with both social and emotional well-being, the relationships are not statistically significant. This indicates that increasing learners' participation and presence within inclusive classrooms does not automatically result in enhanced social or emotional outcomes. Although integration remains a

fundamental principle of inclusive education, the findings imply that the benefits of inclusion may depend on factors beyond physical placement and classroom participation alone. The weak positive correlations observed in the study suggest that integration may contribute to social and emotional development to some extent; however, other variables likely play a more substantial role in shaping learners' overall well-being. Factors such as the quality of peer relationships, teacher support, classroom climate, family involvement, access to specialized interventions, and the availability of emotional support services may exert greater influence on learners' social and emotional experiences than integration alone. These findings support the view that meaningful inclusion involves more than simply placing learners with special needs in regular classrooms; it requires intentional efforts to foster acceptance, belongingness, and supportive relationships. The absence of a significant relationship between integration and social well-being may indicate that social development is influenced by the quality rather than the quantity of interactions. Learners with special needs may be physically integrated into inclusive classrooms yet still encounter difficulties in forming meaningful friendships, gaining peer acceptance, or participating fully in social networks. This observation supports the argument that authentic social inclusion requires deliberate strategies that encourage positive peer interactions, collaborative learning, and mutual understanding among learners. Without these elements, physical integration may not necessarily translate into improved social outcomes. Likewise, the non-significant relationship between integration and emotional well-being suggests that emotional development is a multifaceted process influenced by numerous personal and environmental factors. Emotional well-being encompasses feelings of security, self-worth, resilience, acceptance, and psychological comfort. While inclusive environments can provide opportunities for emotional growth, learners' emotional experiences may also depend on individual characteristics, family support systems, teacher responsiveness, and the extent to which their unique needs are addressed. Therefore, emotional well-being may not be directly determined by classroom integration alone. The findings corroborate the study of Bryant et al. (2019), who reported that inclusive settings do not automatically guarantee improved social and emotional outcomes for learners with special needs. Their study emphasized that the quality of support systems, interpersonal relationships, and educational practices significantly influences learners' well-being. Similarly, Goodall (2020) noted that some learners with special needs continue to experience emotional and social difficulties despite being educated in inclusive environments, suggesting that inclusion alone is insufficient to ensure positive psychosocial outcomes. Furthermore, Goldan et al. (2021) emphasized that learners benefit most when inclusive practices are accompanied by strong emotional support, positive peer relationships, and responsive teaching strategies. However, the findings contrast with those of Hymel and Katz (2019), who found a stronger positive relationship between successful integration and learners' social and emotional well-being. Their research suggested that when inclusion is implemented effectively, learners with special needs experience greater acceptance, belongingness, and emotional adjustment. The discrepancy between the findings may be attributed to differences in educational contexts, implementation practices, available support services, and the extent to which inclusive principles are embedded within the school culture. The findings highlight that integration is an important component of inclusive education but should not be viewed as the sole determinant of learners' social and emotional well-being. Effective inclusion requires

a holistic approach that prioritizes meaningful relationships, supportive classroom environments, emotional support mechanisms, and individualized interventions. Educational institutions must therefore focus not only on integrating learners with special needs into mainstream settings but also on ensuring that these learners experience genuine acceptance, belonging, and support that contribute to their overall well-being and development.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study examined the level of integration of learners with special needs (LSNs) in inclusive classrooms and its relationship to their social and emotional well-being. The findings revealed that learners with special needs were highly integrated into inclusive educational settings, as evidenced by their active participation in classroom discussions, involvement in extracurricular activities, positive interactions with peers, and support from teachers. The results further showed that learners with special needs generally experienced high levels of social and emotional well-being, indicating that inclusive classrooms provide environments that foster belongingness, social participation, emotional security, and positive interpersonal relationships. Despite these favorable outcomes, the findings revealed that the level of integration of learners with special needs was not significantly related to either their social well-being or emotional well-being. Although weak positive relationships were observed, the results suggest that integration alone does not directly influence learners' social and emotional outcomes. This implies that factors beyond classroom integration, such as the quality of peer relationships, teacher support, emotional support systems, school climate, family involvement, and individualized interventions, may play more substantial roles in promoting the holistic well-being of learners with special needs. Therefore, while inclusive education remains an essential framework for equitable learning, meaningful inclusion must extend beyond physical placement and focus on creating supportive environments that nurture learners' social and emotional development.

Based on the findings of the study, schools implementing inclusive education programs should strengthen initiatives that promote meaningful social interactions and authentic peer relationships among learners with and without special needs. Structured peer-support programs, cooperative learning activities, and inclusive extracurricular opportunities may be implemented to foster greater empathy, acceptance, and social connectedness within the classroom community. Teachers should continue to cultivate inclusive classroom environments by employing learner-centered and differentiated instructional strategies that support both the academic and psychosocial needs of learners with special needs. Professional development programs focusing on inclusive practices, social-emotional learning, and positive behavior support should likewise be enhanced to equip teachers with the necessary competencies to address diverse learner needs effectively. School administrators and policymakers should establish comprehensive support systems that extend beyond classroom integration. These may include counseling services, social-emotional learning programs, parent engagement initiatives, and multidisciplinary collaboration among educators, guidance personnel, and special education specialists. Such interventions can help strengthen learners' emotional resilience, self-confidence, and overall well-being. Furthermore, future researchers

may explore other factors that influence the social and emotional well-being of learners with special needs, including peer acceptance, teacher attitudes, family support, school climate, and access to specialized services. Employing mixed-methods or qualitative approaches may provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of learners with special needs and contribute to the development of more responsive and effective inclusive education programs.

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