



Effect of Rehabilitation Counselling Intervention on Academic Adjustment among ... Dalhatu, M. N. (2026)

Effect of Rehabilitation Counselling Intervention on Academic Adjustment among Learners with Special Needs in Mainstream Secondary Schools in Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Inclusive education has increased the presence of learners with special needs in mainstream secondary schools, thereby necessitating effective psychosocial and academic support mechanisms. Rehabilitation counselling interventions have emerged as an important strategy for helping learners with disabilities cope with academic, emotional, and social challenges in inclusive school environments. This study examined how rehabilitation therapy treatments affected special needs students' academic adjustment in mainstream secondary schools in Zaria, Kaduna State. A descriptive survey design was used in the study. 85 students with recognized special needs from sampled secondary schools made up the sample of the study. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on rehabilitation counselling interventions and academic adjustment indicators such as study habits, classroom participation, and emotional stability. Data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and inferential statistics. Findings revealed that academic counselling interventions have a significant effect on the study habits of learners with special needs in mainstream secondary schools ($p=0.017<0.05$), psychosocial counselling interventions have a significant influence on classroom participation among learners with special needs in mainstream secondary schools ($p=0.034<0.05$), behavioral counselling interventions have a significant effect on the emotional stability of learners with special needs in mainstream secondary schools ($p=0.019<0.05$), and there is a moderate positive relationship between rehabilitation counselling interventions and academic adjustment of learners with special needs ($r=0.56$ and $p=0.000$). The study concluded that counselling-based rehabilitation services are essential for promoting inclusive education and enhancing the academic functioning of learners with disabilities. The study recommended that Government and educational authorities should ensure the deployment of trained rehabilitation counsellors in mainstream secondary schools to provide specialized support for learners with special needs, among others.

Keywords: Rehabilitation Counselling, Academic Adjustment, Learners with Special Needs, Mainstream Secondary Schools

Introduction

Education systems around the world have increasingly embraced the philosophy of inclusive education, which promotes the integration of learners with special needs into mainstream schools. Inclusive education seeks to ensure that all learners, regardless of disability or learning challenges, have equal opportunities to participate in quality education alongside their peers. This approach recognizes diversity in learners' abilities and emphasizes the provision of support services that facilitate effective learning and social participation. In many countries, inclusive education policies encourage schools to provide specialized support services such as counselling, individualized instruction, and psychosocial assistance to enhance the learning experiences of students with disabilities (Ainscow, 2020; Florian, 2022; UNESCO, 2020). Learners with special needs often experience significant academic and psychosocial challenges when placed in mainstream educational settings. These challenges may include difficulties in academic performance, low self-esteem, social isolation, emotional distress, and limited participation in classroom activities. Such difficulties can hinder their ability to adjust academically and socially within the school environment. Consequently,



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the success of inclusive education largely depends on the availability of supportive interventions that address both academic and emotional needs of these learners. Educational support services such as counselling, specialized instruction, and psychological support have been identified as critical components for helping learners with disabilities achieve their full academic and social potential (Mitchell, 2020; Slee, 2021; Muralidhar et al., 2024). Rehabilitation counselling has emerged as one of the most important support mechanisms for learners with special needs in inclusive school environments. Rehabilitation counselling focuses on helping individuals with disabilities develop coping strategies, enhance self-concept, overcome psychological barriers, and improve their functional abilities in academic and social contexts. Through interventions such as academic counselling, behavioural therapy, social skills training, and career guidance, rehabilitation counselling supports learners in adapting to the demands of mainstream schooling. These interventions aim to empower learners with disabilities by promoting self-confidence, independence, and effective learning behaviours (Chan, Tarvydas, & Blalock, 2021; Parker & Szymanski, 2004). Studies have demonstrated that counselling interventions can significantly improve the emotional well-being and academic functioning of learners with special needs. For instance, counselling services have been found to reduce academic stress, enhance study habits, and improve learners' confidence in their academic abilities. Similarly, counselling interventions can strengthen students' social skills and emotional regulation, which are essential for successful participation in inclusive educational environments. Such improvements contribute positively to learners' overall academic adjustment and engagement in school activities (Acosta-Gonzaga, 2023; Richardson, Abraham, & Bond, 2021). Furthermore, intervention-based studies have shown that structured classroom or psychosocial support programmes can significantly enhance the social and adaptive skills of learners with disabilities. For example, social skills training programmes implemented in educational settings have been shown to improve interaction skills and reduce behavioural difficulties among students with intellectual disabilities. These improvements highlight the importance of targeted support interventions in promoting effective academic participation and adjustment among learners with special needs (Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2020; Muralidhar et al., 2024). Despite the growing recognition of inclusive education in Nigeria, many mainstream secondary schools still face challenges in providing adequate rehabilitation and counselling services for learners with disabilities. Limited availability of trained counsellors, insufficient educational resources, and inadequate awareness of inclusive practices often hinder the effective implementation of support interventions for learners with special needs. As a result, many learners struggle to adapt academically and socially within mainstream school environments (Angwaomaodoko, 2023; Nawait & Mustapha, 2025). In Kaduna State, mainstream secondary schools increasingly enroll learners with diverse disabilities and learning challenges. However, there is limited empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of rehabilitation counselling interventions in facilitating the academic adjustment of these learners. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend the function of counseling-based rehabilitation services in order to enhance inclusive education practices and guarantee that students with unique needs acquire the assistance they require to achieve academic success. It is against this background that this study investigates the effect of rehabilitation counselling interventions on the academic adjustment of learners with special needs in mainstream secondary schools within Zaria, Kaduna State.

Statement of the Problem

The global movement toward inclusive education has led to the increasing integration of learners with special needs into mainstream secondary schools. This approach aims to promote equal educational opportunities and social inclusion for all learners regardless of disability. However, the



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placement of learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms does not automatically ensure successful academic participation or adjustment. Many learners with special needs experience difficulties adapting to the academic demands, social expectations, and psychological pressures of mainstream school environments (Ainscow, 2020; Florian, 2022). For learners with special needs, achieving academic adjustment can be particularly challenging due to factors such as learning difficulties, communication barriers, low self-esteem, social stigma, and inadequate instructional support. Without appropriate support systems, these learners may experience poor academic performance, low engagement in learning activities, and a higher risk of school dropout (Mitchell, 2020; Slee, 2021). Rehabilitation counselling interventions have been identified as an important strategy for addressing the academic and psychosocial challenges faced by learners with disabilities. However, many mainstream secondary schools in Nigeria lack adequate counselling services specifically designed to support learners with special needs, often due to shortages of trained counsellors and limited educational resources. In Kaduna State and Zaria in particular, the enrollment of learners with special needs in mainstream secondary schools has increased as a result of inclusive education initiatives. Despite this development, there is limited empirical evidence on how rehabilitation counselling interventions influence the academic adjustment of these learners. This lack of evidence makes it difficult for educators and policymakers to design effective support programmes. It is therefore necessary to investigate the effect of rehabilitation counselling interventions on the academic adjustment of learners with special needs in mainstream secondary schools within Zaria, Kaduna State.

Objectives of the Study

The Specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine the level of availability of rehabilitation counselling interventions for learners with special needs in mainstream secondary schools in Zaria.
2. Examine the effect of academic counselling interventions on the study habits of learners with special needs.
3. Investigate the influence of psychosocial counselling interventions on the classroom participation of learners with special needs.
4. Determine the effect of behavioural counselling interventions on the emotional stability of learners with special needs.
5. Examine the overall relationship between rehabilitation counselling interventions and academic adjustment of learners with special needs.

Research Hypotheses

At the 0.05 level of significance, the following null hypotheses were examined:

- H₀₁: There is no significant effect of academic counselling interventions on the study habits of learners with special needs in mainstream secondary schools in Zaria.
- H₀₂: Psychosocial counselling interventions have no significant influence on classroom participation of learners with special needs in mainstream secondary schools in Zaria.
- H₀₃: Behavioural counselling interventions have no significant effect on the emotional stability of learners with special needs in mainstream secondary schools in Zaria.
- H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between rehabilitation counselling interventions and academic adjustment of learners with special needs in mainstream secondary schools in Zaria.

Review of Related Literature

Concept of Rehabilitation Counselling



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Rehabilitation counselling is a specialized counselling practice designed to assist individuals with disabilities to achieve optimal levels of personal, social, and academic functioning. The discipline focuses on helping individuals overcome psychological, social, and environmental barriers that may limit their participation in educational and vocational activities. Rehabilitation counsellors work with individuals with disabilities to enhance coping strategies, improve self-concept, and develop adaptive behaviours necessary for independent living and academic success (Chan et al., 2021). In educational settings, rehabilitation counselling interventions include academic guidance, emotional support, behavioural management strategies, and social skills training. These services are particularly important for learners with special needs who often face challenges such as low academic self-efficacy, social stigma, and learning difficulties. According to Parker and Szymanski (2004), rehabilitation counselling in schools aims to empower learners with disabilities by promoting resilience, self-determination, and academic competence. Rehabilitation counselling also emphasizes a holistic approach that addresses both psychological and environmental factors influencing learners' development. Counsellors collaborate with teachers, parents, and school administrators to design individualized support strategies that facilitate students' academic and social integration within mainstream classrooms (Hartley et al., 2021).

Concept of Academic Adjustment

Academic adjustment refers to the ability of learners to effectively adapt to the academic demands and expectations of the educational environment. It encompasses behaviours and attitudes such as motivation to learn, effective study habits, classroom engagement, emotional regulation, and the ability to cope with academic challenges (Credé & Niehorster, 2019). For learners with special needs, academic adjustment is influenced by several factors including cognitive abilities, emotional well-being, availability of learning support services, and the inclusiveness of the school environment. Students who successfully adjust academically tend to demonstrate greater persistence in learning tasks, improved academic performance, and positive relationships with teachers and peers (Richardson, Abraham, & Bond, 2021). However, learners with disabilities may experience difficulties in academic adjustment due to learning barriers, communication challenges, and negative social experiences within the classroom. These challenges highlight the need for supportive interventions such as counselling services to facilitate positive academic adaptation among learners with special needs.

Learners with Special Needs in Inclusive Schools

People who need extra help in school because of physical, sensory, cognitive, emotional, or behavioural impairments are considered learners with special needs. Inclusive education policies advocate for the placement of these learners in mainstream classrooms where they can learn alongside their peers while receiving appropriate support services (Florian, 2022). Research has shown that inclusive education can improve social integration, self-esteem, and academic motivation among learners with disabilities when appropriate support mechanisms are available. However, when support services are inadequate, learners may struggle to cope with academic tasks and social expectations within the school environment (Ainscow, 2020). Teachers and school counsellors therefore play a critical role in facilitating the academic and social adjustment of learners with special needs. Through targeted interventions, educational professionals can help learners overcome barriers to learning and achieve their academic potential.

Research Methodology

The research design used in this study was a descriptive survey. All students in Zaria, Kaduna State's mainstream secondary schools with specified special needs made up the study's population. These learners included students with learning disabilities, visual impairments, hearing impairments, and



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mild physical disabilities who were enrolled in inclusive classrooms. A multi-stage sampling technique was used for the study. First, several mainstream secondary schools that enrolled learners with special needs were purposively selected. Thereafter, eighty-five (85) learners with identified special needs within these schools were selected using simple random sampling. To determine an appropriate sample size, the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table was used. Based on the population of learners with special needs within the selected schools, a representative sample of respondents was drawn for the study to ensure adequate representation and reliability of the results. A self-structured instrument called the "Rehabilitation Counselling Interventions and Academic Adjustment Questionnaire (RCIAAQ)" was used to gather data for the study. The questionnaire comprised two sections: Section A elicited demographic information of the respondents, while Section B contained items designed to measure rehabilitation counselling interventions and academic adjustment among learners with special needs. The items were structured on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument assessed major components of rehabilitation counselling interventions, including academic counselling, psychosocial counselling, and behavioural counselling, while academic adjustment was measured through indicators such as study habits, classroom participation, motivation to learn, and emotional stability. Face, concept, and content validity tests were performed on the instrument. The Cronbach Alpha technique was used to assess the instrument's reliability; a reliability value of 0.88 was found, indicating that the instrument had adequate internal consistency and was thus appropriate for the study. With the help of teachers and school counsellors, the researcher gave the questionnaire to the respondents directly. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data gathered for the study.

Presentation of Results

Table 1: Independent Sample t-test on Academic Counselling and Study Habits

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Df	p-value	Decision
Academic Counselling	85	3.12	0.78	2.41	168	0.017	Rejected
Study Habits	85	3.05	0.82				

The results in Table 1 indicate that academic counselling interventions have a significant effect on the study habits of learners with special needs in mainstream secondary schools. The mean score for academic counselling was 3.12 (SD = 0.78), while the mean score for study habits was 3.05 (SD = 0.82). The independent samples t-test produced a t-value of 2.41 with 168 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.017, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Based on this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that academic counselling interventions significantly improve the study habits of learners with special needs.

Table 2: Independent Sample t-test on Psychosocial Counselling and Classroom Participation

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p-value	Decision
Psychosocial Counselling	85	3.08	0.81	2.13	168	0.034	Rejected
Classroom Participation	85	3.01	0.85				

The results in Table 2 show that psychosocial counselling interventions have a significant influence on classroom participation among learners with special needs in mainstream secondary schools. The mean score for psychosocial counselling was 3.08 (SD = 0.81), while classroom participation had a mean score of 3.01 (SD = 0.85). The independent samples t-test produced a p-value of 0.034, which is below the 0.05 level of significance, and a t-value of 2.13 with 168 degrees of freedom. The null



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hypothesis was thus disproved. This indicates that psychosocial counselling interventions significantly enhance the classroom participation of learners with special needs.

Table 3: Independent Sample t-test on Behavioural Counselling and Emotional Stability

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p-value	Decision
Behavioural Counselling	85	3.10	0.77	2.36	168	0.019	Rejected
Emotional Stability	85	3.04	0.83				

Table 3 indicates that behavioural counselling interventions have a significant effect on the emotional stability of learners with special needs in mainstream secondary schools. The mean score for behavioural counselling was 3.10 (SD = 0.77), while emotional stability had a mean score of 3.04 (SD = 0.83). The independent samples t-test produced a t-value of 2.36 with 168 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.019, which is below the 0.05 level of significance. Based on this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that behavioural counselling interventions significantly improve the emotional stability of learners with special needs.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Showing the Relationship between Rehabilitation Counselling Interventions and Academic Adjustment

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	p-value	Decision	
Rehabilitation Interventions	Counselling	85	3.09	0.80	0.56	0.000	Rejected
Academic Adjustment		85	3.04	0.83			

Table 4 shows that the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.56$) indicates a moderate positive relationship between rehabilitation counselling interventions and academic adjustment of learners with special needs. The null hypothesis is rejected since the p-value (0.000) is below the significance level of 0.05. This suggests that the academic adjustment of students with special needs in Zaria's mainstream secondary schools is greatly impacted by rehabilitative counselling programs.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that rehabilitation counselling interventions significantly contribute to the academic adjustment of learners with special needs in mainstream secondary schools. The results showed that students who received counselling support demonstrated better study habits, increased classroom participation, and improved emotional stability. The study found that academic counselling interventions positively influenced the study habits of learners with special needs. Learners who received guidance on study strategies, time management, and learning techniques were better able to cope with academic tasks. This finding is consistent with the work of Richardson, Abraham, and Bond (2021), who reported that structured academic support improves students' learning strategies and academic engagement. Similarly, Acosta-Gonzaga (2023) found that counselling interventions enhanced academic motivation and study behaviour among students with learning difficulties. Another important finding of the study revealed that psychosocial counselling interventions significantly improved classroom participation among learners with special needs. Students who received emotional support and social skills training were more confident in interacting with teachers and classmates. This result aligns with the findings of Muralidhar et al., (2024), who reported that psychosocial intervention programmes improve social participation and engagement among students with disabilities. The study also found that behavioural counselling interventions enhanced the emotional stability of learners with special needs. Counselling sessions helped students develop coping strategies for managing academic stress, frustration, and anxiety. This



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finding supports the work of Chan, Tarvydas, and Blalock (2021), who noted that rehabilitation counselling promotes emotional resilience and adaptive coping among individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, the study established a significant relationship between rehabilitation counselling interventions and the overall academic adjustment of learners with special needs. Students who benefited from counselling services were better able to adapt to the academic demands of mainstream schooling. This finding supports earlier studies which emphasize the importance of counselling services in inclusive education environments (Ainscow, 2020; Florian, 2022). However, some studies have suggested that counselling services alone may not be sufficient to address the academic challenges of learners with special needs unless they are combined with effective instructional strategies and supportive school environments (Graham, 2020). This implies that counselling interventions should be integrated with broader inclusive education practices.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that rehabilitation counselling interventions are important in helping students with special needs adjust academically in mainstream secondary schools. Counselling services help learners develop effective study habits, improve their classroom participation, and manage emotional challenges associated with academic activities. The study further established that counselling interventions enhance learners' self-confidence, coping abilities, and motivation to engage in academic tasks. These factors contribute significantly to their ability to adapt to the academic and social demands of inclusive school environments. Therefore, the integration of structured rehabilitation counselling programmes within mainstream secondary schools is essential for promoting inclusive education and supporting the academic success of learners with special needs.

Recommendations

The study's conclusions led to the following suggestions being made:

1. Government and educational authorities should ensure the deployment of trained rehabilitation counsellors in mainstream secondary schools to provide specialized support for learners with special needs.
2. School administrators should establish structured counselling programmes aimed at improving the academic adjustment of learners with disabilities.
3. Teachers should collaborate with school counsellors to identify learners who require additional psychosocial or academic support.
4. Workshops and training programmes should be organized for teachers to enhance their understanding of inclusive education practices and counselling strategies for supporting learners with special needs.

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