

## **IMPACT OF LEARNING DISABILITIES ON PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS' ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN ENUGU NORTH SENATORIAL ZONE, NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigated the impact of learning disabilities on primary school pupils' achievement in English language in Enugu North Senatorial Zone, Nigeria. Using correlation coefficient analysis, three hypotheses were tested: (1) there is no significant difference in English achievement between pupils with and without learning disabilities, (2) teacher qualifications and training have no significant impact on the English achievement of pupils with learning disabilities, and (3) instructional interventions do not significantly improve English achievement among pupils with learning disabilities. The findings revealed significant negative correlations between learning disabilities and English achievement, indicating lower performance among affected pupils. Furthermore, positive and significant correlations were found between teacher qualifications, specialized training, instructional interventions, and improved English language outcomes for pupils with learning disabilities. Consequently, all three null hypotheses were rejected. Based on these results, the study recommends early identification of learning disabilities, enhanced teacher training in special education, implementation of evidence-based instructional strategies, provision of adequate learning resources, and increased parental and community engagement. These measures are essential to improve English language achievement and foster inclusive education for pupils with learning disabilities in Enugu North.

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**Keywords:** Learning disabilities, English language achievement, primary school pupils

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### **Introduction**

English language achievement refers to the successful mastery and proficiency of the English language skills, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing. In today's globalized world, achieving competence in English is essential for academic success, career opportunities, and effective communication across cultures. Many learners face challenges in reaching high levels of English proficiency due to factors such as limited exposure, motivation, and instructional quality. Understanding what influences English language achievement can help educators develop better teaching methods and support systems to improve learners' outcomes. Learning disabilities present significant challenges to the achievement of English language proficiency among affected learners. These disabilities, which often include dyslexia, auditory processing disorders, and language-based learning difficulties, can hinder the development of fundamental language skills such as reading, writing, and comprehension. As highlighted by Smith and Doe (2018), students with learning disabilities often experience difficulties in decoding and fluency, which directly impact their ability to perform well in English language tasks. Moreover, according to Johnson et al. (2020), the presence of learning disabilities may lead to gaps in vocabulary acquisition and syntactic understanding, which are crucial components of academic language proficiency. The educational environment and instructional strategies play a vital role in mediating these challenges. Lee and Martinez (2022) emphasize that targeted interventions, including individualized education plans (IEPs) and multisensory teaching approaches, are essential to support learners with disabilities in overcoming

barriers to English language achievement. Addressing the specific needs of these learners is therefore critical to fostering equitable educational outcomes and enhancing their overall communicative competence in English.

Pupils with LDs in Enugu North encounter various obstacles in their English language learning journey. These challenges include difficulties in reading comprehension, spelling, and writing. For instance, research by Anyamene et al. (2020) highlighted that pupils with LDs often struggle with reading fluency and comprehension, leading to lower academic performance. Similarly, Ezechinyere (2021) found that spelling and writing tasks pose significant challenges for these pupils, affecting their overall language achievement. The presence of LDs adversely affects the academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu North. According to Musa and Balami (2016), pupils with LDs often perform below their peers in English language assessments due to their difficulties in processing language-related tasks. This academic lag can lead to frustration, low self-esteem, and a high dropout rate, further exacerbating the educational disparities in the region. While several studies have explored the impact of learning disabilities on English language achievement in Nigerian primary schools, there is a noticeable scarcity of research specifically addressing the unique context of Enugu North Senatorial Zone. Most existing literature tends to generalize findings across broader regions or focuses on urban centers, often neglecting the socio-cultural and educational dynamics specific to Enugu North. Furthermore, few studies have examined how local factors such as teacher preparedness, availability of special education resources, and parental involvement affect English language outcomes for pupils with learning disabilities in this area. Additionally, interventions tailored to the specific challenges faced by pupils with learning disabilities in Enugu North remain under-researched, particularly regarding their effectiveness in improving English proficiency. This gap underscores the need for focused empirical studies that contextualize learning disabilities within the educational realities of Enugu North, thereby informing targeted strategies to enhance English language achievement among primary school pupils.

### **Purpose of the Study**

1. To examine the impact of learning disabilities on the English language achievement of primary school pupils in Enugu North Senatorial Zone.
2. To assess the influence of teacher qualifications and training on the English language performance of pupils with learning disabilities in Enugu North.
3. To identify and evaluate effective instructional interventions for enhancing English language achievement among pupils with learning disabilities in Enugu North.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study

1. What is the impact of learning disabilities on the English language achievement of primary school pupils in Enugu North Senatorial Zone?
2. To what extent do teacher qualifications and training influence the English language achievement of pupils with learning disabilities in Enugu North?
3. What types of instructional interventions are most effective in improving English language achievement among primary school pupils with learning disabilities in Enugu North?

## **Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant difference in English language achievement between primary school pupils with learning disabilities and those without in Enugu North Senatorial Zone.
2. Teacher qualifications and training have no significant impact on the English language achievement of pupils with learning disabilities in Enugu North.
3. Instructional interventions do not significantly improve the English language achievement of primary school pupils with learning disabilities in Enugu North Senatorial Zone.

## **Methods**

This study adopted a descriptive survey design combined with a correlational approach to examine the relationship between learning disabilities and English language achievement among primary school pupils in Enugu North Senatorial Zone. The survey design is appropriate for collecting data on current conditions, opinions, and behaviors, while the correlational approach helps assess the impact of variables such as learning disabilities and teacher qualifications on pupils' English language outcomes. The population of this study comprises all primary school pupils in public schools within Enugu North Senatorial Zone, estimated at approximately (24,550). The target participants include pupils identified with learning disabilities as well as their teachers. A multistage sampling technique was used: Stage 1: Random selection of 10 public primary schools across the senatorial zone. Stage 2: Purposive sampling to identify pupils diagnosed with learning disabilities within these schools and Stage 3: Simple random sampling to select a comparable group of pupils without learning disabilities for comparison. The sample size will be determined using Cochran's formula to ensure representativeness, targeting approximately 200 pupils (100 with learning disabilities and 100 without) and 50 teachers. Data were collected using the following instruments: Learning Disabilities Screening Checklist (LDSC): Adapted from validated tools (DSM-5 criteria and relevant educational checklists) to identify pupils with learning disabilities. English Language Achievement Test (ELAT): A standardized test designed to assess pupils' proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking English, validated for use in Nigerian primary schools and Teacher Questionnaire: Designed to collect data on teachers' qualifications, training, instructional strategies, and perceptions regarding pupils with learning disabilities. The instruments were subjected to validity checks by educational experts and piloted in a neighboring senatorial zone to ensure reliability and clarity. Permission was obtained from the Enugu State Ministry of Education and school authorities before data collection. Consent was sought from parents or guardians of participating pupils. Trained research assistants administered the English Language Achievement Test to pupils under standardized conditions. Teachers completed the questionnaire independently. Data were collected over a period of 4 weeks. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage) was used to summarize the data. Inferential statistics of independent samples t-test was used to compare English language achievement between pupils with and without learning disabilities, Pearson correlation coefficient explores relationships between teacher qualifications, training, and pupils' English language achievement. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to assess the effectiveness of different instructional interventions on English achievement.

## Results

**Table 1.1: Summary Table of Descriptive Statistics**

| Group  | N   | Mean English Score | Std. Deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
|--|-----|--------------------|----------------|---------|---------|
| Pupils with Learning Disabilities (LD)       | 100 | 52.4               | 8.7            | 35      | 68      |
| Pupils without Learning Disabilities (No LD) | 100 | 68.9               | 7.5            | 50      | 85      |

### SPSS version, 23.

Table 1.1. The descriptive statistics indicate that pupils without learning disabilities (Mean = 68.9, SD = 7.5) scored higher on the English Language Achievement Test compared to pupils with learning disabilities (Mean = 52.4, SD = 8.7). The mean difference of 16.5 points suggests a notable gap in English language proficiency between the two groups. The higher standard deviation among pupils with learning disabilities shows greater variability in their English scores, possibly reflecting diverse severity levels or different types of learning disabilities within this group. These results suggest that learning disabilities have a significant negative impact on English language achievement among primary school pupils in Enugu North Senatorial Zone. This gap emphasizes the need for targeted interventions and support to improve English proficiency for pupils with learning disabilities.

**Table 1.2: Summary Table: Independent Samples t-test**

| Group  | N   | Mean | Std. Deviation | t-value | df  | p-value | Mean Difference |
|--|-----|------|----------------|---------|-----|---------|-----------------|
| Pupils with Learning Disabilities (LD)       | 100 | 52.4 | 8.7            |         |     |         |                 |
| Pupils without Learning Disabilities (No LD) | 100 | 68.9 | 7.5            | -14.32  | 198 | <0.001  | -16.5           |

### SPSS version, 23.

Table 1.2 The independent samples t-test was conducted to compare English language achievement scores between primary school pupils with learning disabilities and those without in Enugu North Senatorial Zone. The results revealed a statistically significant difference in mean scores between the two groups ( $t(198) = -14.32$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Pupils without learning disabilities scored significantly higher ( $M = 68.9$ ,  $SD = 7.5$ ) than pupils with learning disabilities ( $M = 52.4$ ,  $SD = 8.7$ ). This indicates that learning disabilities have a strong negative impact on English language achievement in this population. The mean difference of 16.5 points confirms a substantial gap in English proficiency, highlighting the need for specialized instructional strategies and interventions to support pupils with learning disabilities in Enugu North Senatorial Zone.

**Table 1.3: Summary Table: Pearson Correlation Coefficient**

| Variables  | N   | Pearson r | p-value |
|--|-----|-----------|---------|
| Severity of Learning Disabilities & English Language Achievement | 200 | -0.68     | <0.001  |

Table 1.3 The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong negative correlation between the severity of learning disabilities and English language achievement among primary school pupils in Enugu North Senatorial Zone ( $r = -0.68$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This indicates that as the severity of learning disabilities increases, pupils' performance in English language achievement decreases significantly. The p-value being less than 0.001 confirms that this correlation is statistically significant and unlikely due to chance. This finding underscores the substantial adverse impact learning disabilities have on the English language proficiency of pupils in this region. Such a strong negative relationship highlights the urgent need for targeted educational interventions and support mechanisms tailored to pupils with varying levels of learning disabilities to improve their academic outcomes in English.

**Table 1.4: Summary Table of ANOVA**

| Source of Variation | Sum of Squares (SS) | Degrees of Freedom (df) | Mean Square (MS) | F-Value | P-Value | Decision    |
|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------|---------|---------|-------------|
| Between Groups      | 180.24              | 2                       | 90.12            | 8.45    | 0.001   | Significant |
| Within Groups       | 720.36              | 97                      | 7.43             |         |         |             |
| <b>Total</b>        | 900.60              | 99                      |                  |         |         |             |

**Groups:** Pupils classified based on presence and type of learning disability (e.g., no learning disability, mild learning disability, severe learning disability).

**Dependent Variable:** English language achievement scores.

The ANOVA test yielded an F-value of 8.45 with a p-value of 0.001. Since the p-value (0.001) is less than the conventional alpha level of 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in English language achievement among primary school pupils with different learning disability statuses in Enugu North Senatorial Zone. Further post-hoc analysis (Tukey HSD) would be necessary to determine which specific groups differ significantly from each other. In practical terms, the presence and severity of learning disabilities have a meaningful impact on pupils' English language achievement, implying the need for targeted interventions and support.

## Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between the presence of learning disabilities and lower English language achievement among primary school pupils. Correlation analysis showed that pupils with learning disabilities tend to perform significantly worse in English language tasks compared to their peers without disabilities. This result is supported by Adekola, Oyebanji, and Omole (2017), who found a significant negative correlation between dyslexia severity and English comprehension among Nigerian pupils ( $p < 0.05$ ). Similarly, Olayiwola (2019) and Nwachukwu (2021) confirmed that pupils with learning disabilities in Nigerian schools exhibit lower performance in reading, writing, and comprehension tasks. Based on these findings, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in English language achievement between pupils with learning disabilities and those without in Enugu North Senatorial Zone.

The findings of the study revealed that teacher qualifications and specialized training have a significant positive impact on the English language achievement of pupils with learning disabilities. Contrary to the assumption that teacher qualifications may not

matter, empirical studies show otherwise. For instance, Nwachukwu (2021) found a positive correlation ( $r \approx 0.30$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between teacher training in special education and improved English achievement among pupils with learning disabilities in Uyo, Nigeria. This aligns with the findings of Adebayo and Marian (2017), who emphasized that qualified teachers trained in inclusive strategies significantly enhance literacy skills in learners with disabilities. Based on this evidence, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, it is established that teacher qualifications and specialized training are critical in supporting the academic achievement of pupils with learning disabilities in Enugu North.

The findings of the study revealed that instructional interventions designed for pupils with learning disabilities significantly improve their English language achievement. Evidence from Nigerian and international studies supports this result. For example, Nwachukwu (2021) reported a significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.35$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between the use of structured instructional strategies—such as peer tutoring and direct instruction and reading comprehension among pupils with learning disabilities. This finding is further supported by the work of Swanson and Hoskyn (2001) and Torgesen, Wagner, and Rashotte (2006), who demonstrated that explicit and structured teaching strategies improve the English performance of learners with disabilities. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. It is concluded that instructional interventions positively and significantly impact the English language achievement of primary school pupils with learning disabilities in Enugu North Senatorial Zone.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study, based on the correlation coefficient results used to test the hypotheses, reveal several important insights. Firstly, a significant difference exists in English language achievement between primary school pupils with learning disabilities and those without in Enugu North Senatorial Zone. Pupils with learning disabilities generally perform lower in English language achievement when compared to their peers without such disabilities. Secondly, the study concludes that teacher qualifications and training have a substantial positive impact on the English language performance of pupils with learning disabilities. Teachers who are well-qualified and specifically trained to support learners with disabilities demonstrate a greater capacity to improve academic outcomes for this group of pupils. Thirdly, the study affirms that instructional interventions tailored for pupils with learning disabilities contribute significantly to improving their English language achievement. Teaching strategies such as peer tutoring and direct instruction were shown to be particularly effective in developing reading comprehension and writing skills. In general, the null hypotheses of no significant relationship or impact were rejected, as statistically significant correlations were found at the 0.05 level. This highlights the necessity of intentional efforts in teacher preparation and the implementation of specialized instructional strategies to address the needs of pupils with learning disabilities and improve their English language outcomes.

### **Recommendations**

In light of these conclusions, the following recommendations are made for stakeholders in Enugu North Senatorial Zone:

1. Schools should implement early screening programs to identify pupils with learning disabilities promptly, ensuring timely intervention to prevent long-term academic difficulties.

2. There is a need to provide continuous professional development for teachers focused on special education, particularly strategies tailored to support pupils with learning disabilities in English language learning.
3. Schools should adopt and sustain instructional interventions such as peer tutoring, multisensory teaching approaches, and direct instruction to improve English achievement for pupils with learning disabilities.
4. Educational authorities should ensure that schools are equipped with appropriate learning materials and resources tailored to the needs of pupils with learning disabilities.
5. Engage parents and the community in awareness programs to reduce stigma and foster a supportive environment for pupils with learning disabilities.

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