

Research Paper

Academic Resilience among Students with Learning Disabilities: Contributing Factors and Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Academic resilience is considered a crucial factor in students' educational adversity. It implies the ability to achieve success despite facing significant academic challenges. Learning disabled students, who often face academic, social, and emotional hurdles, fostering resilience among them can be a helpful hand to overcome the hurdles and can enhance their educational outcomes. Existing literature indicates that students with learning disabilities frequently experience lower self-esteem and high level of anxiety, which hamper their academic performance. In this case, protective factors such as strong self-belief, effective coping strategies, motivation, well-being, and supportive relationships with adults and peers can significantly strengthen resilience. These factors help in mitigating the detrimental impact of learning disabilities by promoting academic engagement and motivation during learning. The present study aims to highlight the importance of academic resilience for students with learning disabilities (SLD) by examining its contributing factors, and emphasizing how these factors help the students (SLD) to cope with academic challenges and achieve success. Additionally, this study explored effective strategies for fostering academic resilience in students with learning disabilities.

Keywords: *Academic Resilience, Learning Disability*

The modern world is filled with various challenges and difficulties, particularly in the sphere of education, which has grown increasingly competitive in recent years. Various obstacles influence the learning environment which is vital for successful teaching and learning. It is the equilibrium between adversities and the capacity or skill of a person to cope with these adversities (Bertsia & Poulou, 2022). Academic resilience refers to the ability of students to handle setbacks effectively, thriving; highlighting their potential to overcome challenges and creating new strategies for learning and problem-solving. It indicates a higher possibility of success in academic settings despite difficulties (Cassidy, 2016).

Academic resilience is crucial for students with learning disabilities to attain educational success and maintaining their overall well-being. Learning disabilities (LD) are neurological disorders that hinder a student's ability to process information. It affects an individual's

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Academic Resilience among Students with Learning Disabilities: Contributing Factors and Strategies

ability to comprehend and use language, whether oral or written. This may result in linguistic and mathematical problems such as impediment while communicating with others and performing mathematical calculations. They (SLD) often encounter persistent academic and social-emotional challenges which can steer to the feelings of feebleness, lower self-esteem and a higher menace of dropping out of school. Learning disabled students might be more challenging due to their exceptional traits, which may pose certain risks (Morrison & Cosden, 1997). A large number of pupils having learning disabilities often feel disconnected and isolated from secondary school, as conventional programs do not successfully address their requirements (Palladino, Poli, Masi, & Marcheschi, 2000). Likewise, students who suffer from learning disabilities tend to drop the school while encountering to a small academic challenge (Jancek, 1999).

Learning-disabled students also encounter various social and emotional difficulties as an outcome of the pressure in their surroundings (Piers & Duquette 2016). Nevertheless, there also exist the students who despite of learning disabilities exhibit impressive resilience, conquer their difficulties and get success in their academic pursuits. In this case, academic resilience enhances the academic progress of students (SLD) by providing them with the necessary skills to navigate challenges, encouraging active participation in their learning, and fostering supportive relationships within their educational environment. The present study aims to emphasize the importance of academic resilience among students who have learning disabilities by examining its contributing factors, and emphasizing how these factors help the students (SLD) to cope with academic challenges and ensure success and explores effective strategies for fostering academic resilience in students with learning disabilities.

Academic Resilience

In an academic context, resilience refers to a student's ability to effectively cope with obstacles, stress, and difficulties in the educational environment. Academically resilient students, as described by Alva (1991), sustain strong motivation and high-performance levels when confronted with difficult circumstances and stressful affairs threatening their academic success and heightening the possibility of drop out. Therefore, academic resilience enables students to effectively engage in their academic activities leading to their educational achievement (Ononye, 2022). Many studies (Lisa et al. 2016, Margalit, 2003 and Gardynik, 2008) showed that fostering academic resilience can enhance students' likelihood of achieving academic success and contribute to their overall well-being as well as it equips students with the skills to manage and face the odds that could hinder their academic progress.

Students with Learning Disabilities (SLD)

Disability denotes any bodily or psychological condition that considerably restricts a person's capacity to carry out specific activities. It is a mental condition that impacts the brain's capacity to process, comprehend, or remember information, which can make particular learning tasks more challenging. The National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children (USA) states that children with learning disabilities show difficulties in different fundamental psychological processes necessary for comprehending and utilizing spoken or written language. Learning disabilities can appear in various ways, including dyslexia (difficulties with reading), dyscalculia (difficulties with math), and dysgraphia (issues with writing). The American Psychiatric Association (2013) indicated that this interaction adversely affects an individual's brain's ability to effectively perceive and process

Academic Resilience among Students with Learning Disabilities: Contributing Factors and Strategies

the information. A learning disability occurs when an individual experiences considerable difficulties in a specific academic area. This condition can create challenges for an individual in his/her learning process.

Research Questions

- What are the contributing factors or protective factors of academic resilience for students with learning disabilities?
- Which strategies can be effective for enhancing academic resilience among students with learning disabilities?

METHODOLOGY

This study operates a systematic review to identify the contributing or protective factors and effective strategies for promoting the academic resilience in students with learning disabilities. Relevant databases and information sources such as PubMed, Google Scholar, and Web of Science were selected for investing the researches pertaining to the study. The retrieval of relevant literature was carried out by using keywords such as academic resilience and learning disabilities, then the content analysis was done to get the answer of the formulated research questions.

Learning Disability as a Risk Factor

Learning disability is also considered as a risk factor or challenging condition that increases an individual's weakness in educational life and often leads to academic struggles and setbacks (Gardynik, 2008). Children, adolescents, and adults with learning disabilities frequently exhibit higher levels of anxiety and depression than those without disabilities (Bursuck & Epstein, 1987; Gregg, Hoy, King, Moreland, & Jagota, 1992; Hall & Haws, 1989; Huntington & Bender, 1993; Margalit & Raviv, 1984). Previous studies have found that learning disability serve as a risk factor and learning-disabled students face more academic challenges in school compared to their non-disabled peers. These challenges increase the likelihood of academic failure, difficulty in adjusting to the school, and a maximum risk of dropping out beforehand finishing high school (AI-Yagon & Mikulincer, 2004; Daniel et al., 2006; Wilson et al., 2009). Hence, to reduce the risk factor, focus should be placed on strengthening the protective factors.

Models that Link Risk and Resilience

Resilience theory encompasses different models that demonstrate how positive factors can mitigate, protect, and prepare young people against the adverse impact of risks. (Masten et al., 2007 & Luthar, 2015). Most of these models incorporate the concepts of risk factors and protective factors, with their interplay resulting in a positive outcome, which is mentioned as the resilience model. Garmezy et al. (1984) proposed three models of resilience: the compensatory model, the challenge model, and the protective factor model. A compensatory model refers to a situation where a promoting factor counteracts or works against a risk factors. The challenging model describes a framework in which encountering manageable levels of risk can improve a person's capacity to handle future difficulties and protective factor model highlighted that individuals with strong attributes are mostly unaffected by large stresses, whereas those with weaker attributes tend to struggle more and show decreased competence when faced with higher levels of stress. These three models together are known as the risk and resilience model. The risk and resilience model has been employed to deeply investigate the life experiences and enduring impact that expose individuals to various risks, including poverty, maternal mental health issues, and severe

Academic Resilience among Students with Learning Disabilities: Contributing Factors and Strategies

prenatal stress. Additionally, it seeks to pinpoint the aspects that can diminish these risks (Bryan, 2003).

Contributing Factors of Academic Resilience in Students with Learning Disabilities (SLD)

Resilience as a protective factor supports mental health and fosters positive development. It helps individuals facing challenges to sustain a certain level of functioning and can positively impact their lives. Students in vulnerable situations seek extensive support from it to achieve a successful academic career. Many factors known as protective factors contribute to academic resilience, and some of them are social competence, high self-esteem and self-efficacy, motivation, peer support, good parent-child relationship, positive interpersonal relationships with adults, parental support, and supportive school environments (McMillan & Reed, 1994; Gardynik, 2008; Luthar, 2015; Meltzer, 2004; Piers & Duquette, 2016).

A learning disability affects individuals throughout their lives, often leading to increased school dropout rates, job-related difficulties, and issues with self-esteem and emotional well-being (Spekman, Goldberg, et al., 1993). Hence, protective factors present within the individual can help to mitigate the adverse effects of learning disability, enabling positive adaptation and growth. In the resilience model, a protective factor interacts with a risk factor to lower the likelihood of a negative outcome. It can fulfill this role in two ways: (a) by moderating the impact of exposure to the risk, or (b) by altering the individual's response to the risk factor (Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). Previous studies on academic resilience shown that some elements are motivation, self-efficacy, social competence, positive temperament, home environment associated with positive findings for those with learning disabilities (Margalit, 2003; Miller, 2002; Morrison & Cosden, 1997).

Keogh and Weisner (1993) claimed that risk factors uplift the likelihood of adverse outcomes, whereas protective factors reduce that likelihood. Protective factors such as classroom environment, good relationship with parents (Miller, 2002) and the presence of significant assistance from family members and adults (Wyman et al., 1991) vanish the harmful effect of risk factors. Grossman et al. (1992) highlight the value of family involvement, strong cohesion and effective communication with a mother, attachment to teachers and peers (Wehlage et al., 1989) can help as a protective element against negative effect. A study by Richmond and Beardslee (1988) focused on temperament and various cognitive and behavioral patterns, including specific coping strategies, positive self-esteem, and a sense of control over one's environment.

Many Researchers (Grossman et al., 1992; & Rutter, 1987) recognized self-esteem as a protective factor. However, there has been limited researches to know the extent a child's self-esteem influences his/her behavior in stressful situations or his/her ability to handle challenging circumstances. Self-esteem and self-awareness can serve as protective elements that help to lower anxiety levels, especially when faced with difficulties caused by learning disability (Patten, 1983 & Steven-Son & Romney, 1984). Successful completion of tasks by children is associated with a stronger sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy due to their achievements, as noted by Rutter (1987). Studies conducted by him demonstrated that individuals who are provided with opportunities to tackle challenges and achieve success tend to experience improved academic outcomes. In contrast, Garmezy (1993) emphasized that schools play a significant role as a supporting factor for children dealing adversity. He highlights the need of a positive school environment that fosters collaboration among

Academic Resilience among Students with Learning Disabilities: Contributing Factors and Strategies

teachers, parents, and administrators. Accessibility of supportive educational environment is crucial for promoting resilience. Barriers in these areas can hinder the academic experience and overall well-being (Martins & Moríña, 2022).

Also, psychological problems such as stress, anxiety, pressure, depression, and mental fatigue are seen in students due to learning disability. Students can take proactive steps to manage academic stress by building their resilience. Academic resilience enables individuals to endure, overcome, and adapt to challenging and stressful situations in the educational field. The most important factors of academic resilience are self-efficacy, self-esteem, and motivation. In this context, it is frequently acknowledged that students who have learning disabilities typically encounter more significant obstacles when dealing academic challenges. Facing these challenges can result in a deficiency in self-assurance, academic self-belief, and a heightened likelihood of failure (Mawila, 2023). Therefore, Academic resilience assists learning disabled students in identifying negative thoughts and transforming them into positive ones and improves academic performance. While emphasizing resilience is crucial, it is similarly vital to acknowledge the barriers that students with learning disabilities encounter. Different obstacles can deter their ability to cultivate resilience, even when they possess personal strengths and supportive network. Hence, strategies for fostering academic resilience will be significantly required.

Strategies for Fostering Academic Resilience among Students with Learning Disabilities

To foster academic resilience among students with learning disabilities, the following strategies may be implemented:

- It is essential to provide tailored instruction that meets the unique requirements of the students. This involves utilizing a range of educational resources, flexible teaching methods, and different assessment techniques. Teachers may implement various strategies to provide diverse modes of learning, which may include visual aids, hands-on activities, and verbal explanations (Damyanov, 2024).
- The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is an essential resource that assures that students (SLD) may obtain the necessary support to thrive in their educational environment (Damyanov, 2024).
- Promoting self-advocacy among students and encouraging them to articulate their learning needs is a crucial aspect in enhancing academic resilience. It is important to teach students how to recognize their learning disabilities ((Piers & Duquette, 2016). Students who have learning disabilities should be encouraged to express their needs, seek support when needed, and make use of available resources. Practicing self-advocacy enhances their sense of control and independence, ultimately leading to enhanced academic motivation and determination, as well as greater perseverance.
- Positive reinforcement fosters resilience by enhancing students' motivation and self-confidence. Frequently recognizing students' efforts, progress, and accomplishments rather than only emphasizing the outcomes may boost up the resilience.
- A classroom atmosphere that promotes inclusivity and fosters positive relationships, along with strong bonds among peers, teachers, and parents creates a supportive network that enhances academic resilience among students having learning problems (Pietsch, 2023 & Piers, 2015).

Academic Resilience among Students with Learning Disabilities: Contributing Factors and Strategies

Improving academic resilience in students with learning disabilities (SLD) requires a comprehensive approach that combines teaching strategies, psychological support system, and environmental resources.

Implications

This study aims to increase awareness among school principals, teachers, and administrators about the learning-disabled students, to equip them with the required knowledge and skill, and to deliver the essential support needed to aid students to make positive difference. The advancement of academic resilience in students (SLD) can be promoted by nurturing learning environment, which involves compassionate teachers and support from peers.

Academic resilience not only contributes to positive academic results but also significantly influences the social-emotional growth of students with learning challenges. This study highlights the significance of resilience in individuals with learning disabilities and proposes practical strategies for educators and support systems to improve self-esteem, self-perception, motivation, overall life satisfaction, and well-being. This study also emphasized some protective factors that can be fostered through effective strategies. Schools should focus on developing protective attributes to enhance resilience in students with learning disability and should create positive environment that allow students to achieve academic success along with better outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Academic resilience is imperative to the success and well-being of students with learning disabilities. By assisting these students in overcoming challenges, building positive self-esteem, motivation and acquiring essential life skills, resilience helps them to achieve academic success despite of the obstacles. Teachers, parents, and peers have a key role in nurturing academic resilience by offering support, motivation and resources. By improving academic resilience, students with learning disabilities can boost their academic achievement and also develop the emotional and cognitive abilities required to excel in all areas of life. Additionally, effective strategies such as differentiated instruction, individualized education plans (IEPs), and the cultivation of self-advocacy competencies all of these collaboratively contribute to the enrichment of students' engagement and success within academic settings.

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Academic Resilience among Students with Learning Disabilities: Contributing Factors and Strategies

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Academic Resilience among Students with Learning Disabilities: Contributing Factors and Strategies

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Academic Resilience among Students with Learning Disabilities: Contributing Factors and Strategies

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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