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**Socio-Demographic Factors Affecting Reading Comprehension Achievement Among
Secondary School Students with Learning Disabilities in Ibadan, Nigeria**

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Abstract

The study examined the influence that socio-demographic factors (school social environment, type of school and gender) have on achievement in reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities. The study employed the correlational design. One hundred and twenty-three (123) Junior Secondary Class 1 (JSS 1) students with learning disabilities from six secondary schools (3 private and 3 public) all located in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria participated in the study. Three scales namely: the Pupil Rating Scale (Revised), the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (adapted) and the Test of Reading Comprehension were administered to the participants and the scores derived from these were subjected to Pearson Product Moment Correlation, Multiple Regression and t-test Statistics. The results revealed that the most potent factor in the prediction of reading comprehension achievement of students with learning disabilities is school social environment ($r=0.214$) followed by gender ($r=0.185$). The joint contribution of school social environment, school type and gender on reading comprehension achievement of students with learning disabilities was significant. While school social environment could considerably and independently predict reading comprehension achievement among students with learning disabilities, school type and gender could not. Further findings showed a significant difference in reading comprehension achievement between male and female students with learning disabilities (Cal.t = 2.075). Also, there was no observable significant difference in the reading comprehension achievement of students with learning disabilities in private and public schools. Therefore, it was suggested that teachers of students with learning disabilities should ensure that reading comprehension lessons take place in stimulating and conducive classroom environments devoid of unhealthy, risky and distracting stimuli.

Keywords: socio-demographic factors, learning disabilities, reading comprehension, achievement

Attainment of academic success and social adjustment are essential learning outcomes derived in schooling. This explains why a learner's future success in life is often attributed to his or her ability to learn effectively. Students' learning is a product of several organised activities and how well students learn at school can be linked to many factors. Among these factors are school social environment, type of school in terms of ownership and administration and gender. School social factor reveals whether the learning environment is supportive or hostile. According to the American Institutes for Research (2019), the school environment includes all services, support systems, school policing policies and related structured practices for the benefit of students and staff. The environment is compared to a hidden chain that connects all the activities of the school in many ways and its influence is felt by all members of the school.

Considering the influence of the environment in the school, it is possible that insignificant details could be seen affecting the ability of students to succeed in their studies. In a supportive school environment for instance, there are healthy and supportive relationships between teachers and students, teachers and teachers, students and students, and students and support staff. There is also less discrimination against students who might be experiencing some emotional, social or academic difficulties such as those with special needs in this type of school. Members of the school community benefit from warmth, security and safety. Excessive resistance, constant student-to-adult conflict in school, and frustration with all kinds of abuse are rare in a supportive school environment.

The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2009) explained that in a supportive school environment, there are a wide range of opportunities for learner participation and shared responsibility. Group activities are also encouraged in a socially supportive school and students engage in fewer risk behaviours such as non-compliance with school rules and regulations, bullying and aggression, that interfere with teaching and learning. Students with specific disabilities in learning domains, get along well with their peers and teachers in a socially positive environment. The free bond established by the school community promotes academic success and a healthy lifestyle. As reported by Nazir and Mattoo (2012), the formal educational setting and scholarly achievements are correlative and depend on each other. When schools provide stimulating and supportive learning environments, students' academic performance either directly or indirectly is bound to improve.

The type of school, described in terms of ownership and administration portrays whether the school management is controlled by the government/public or private individuals/organisations. By default, public educational institutions depend mainly on local, state or federal government allocations as the case may be. Conversely, private educational institutions depend on different sources of income including tuition fees borne by learners, disbursements, and donations from non-governmental organisations. In Nigeria, it is natural to find more classes and many students in public educational institutions compared to private learning categories. The reason may be that private schools are fee-paying institutions; as a result, many families may be unable to afford the fees so they send their children and wards to public schools.

Despite the increased funds demanded by private school owners and the idea of capitalism in the education sector projected by the private school system, it should be noted that private educational institutions provide learners with opportunities for improved learning outcomes. Similarly, teachers in private schools enjoy a greater sense of community than their counterparts in public schools. These features can have an impact on all learners, especially among those who have difficulty in learning academic tasks.

A demographic factor of interest in this study is gender of learners. The impact of gender on students' learning success has been investigated particularly, with respect to reading achievement among learners without disabilities (Ezeokoli & Ezenandu, 2013). There seems to have been little focus on students with disabilities and their achievement in the aspect of text comprehension. Cekiso (2016) explained that discussion on differences in gender with respect to comprehension of texts is important in the light of growing low reading achievement scores obtained by male and female students in national and international tests and examinations. Certain studies suggest that females have better language abilities than males (Reilly, Neumann & Andrews, 2018). The veracity of this submission particularly among students, who face academic difficulties in Nigeria, is yet to be fully ascertained. Therefore, it would be pertinent to investigate the relationship between the achievement of boys and girls with learning disabilities in reading comprehension contexts.

The choice of reading comprehension as a dependent variable in this study is informed by the fact that it is the most important sub-skill in the continuum of reading skills. Every time a student reads a text with comprehension, he or she crosses a ladder that leads to academic success. Thus, reading comprehension helps learners to explore, explain, understand and interpret the information contained in a text. It involves active, dynamic thinking and thoughtful interpretation of texts by proficient readers. Going by this explanation, this study would be of immense benefit to learners who do not experience difficulties with text comprehension as well as those who have serious challenges with understanding of texts. Learners would also get to realise that the social environment where learning occurs has an effect on school learning. The findings of this study would provide succinct information to teachers, school administrators and policy makers on the impact that socio-demographic factors (school social environment, type of school and gender) have on comprehension of texts among students whose main academic challenges are in the areas of reading and language-related skills.

Literature Review

Difficulties in the acquisition and interpretation of reading-related activities, listening activities, mathematics, and written and spoken language tasks are the major areas of challenge facing students with learning disabilities. Approximately, eighty per cent of these students experience specific difficulties with reading (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). That is, of all academic skills, reading is the one which poses the most difficulty for many students with learning disabilities. Lazarus and Ige (2017) reported that some secondary school students with learning disabilities experience poor reading comprehension sometimes due to their lack of rich vocabulary and their inability to apply evidence-based reading strategies during reading.

In contrast to readers with academic difficulties, learners, who understand texts easily often have good decoding skills, read with ease and understand a large amount of vocabulary. Olu and Abiodun (2013) reiterated that activation of prior knowledge during reading enables readers to construct meaning and understand basic concepts in texts. Also, efficient readers seek to understand the structure of the text. They reflect on the information provided in the text and deduce what the author does not specifically reveal. On the contrary, lack of understanding makes reading a meaningless activity or a simple word calling exercise. Students' inability to understand texts creates difficulties for grasping of information in all school subjects and leads to poor academic results. To reduce the negative impact of academic failure on students struggling with school work, educators are working tirelessly to deepen their scientific understanding of how these students can benefit from reading comprehension tasks.

A study conducted by Shamaki (2015) involving 337 secondary school students studying in Yobe State, Nigeria revealed a significant difference between the mathematics performance of students taught in a stimulating learning environment and that of students taught in a non-stimulating learning environment. Schmitt and Kleine (2010) found that qualitative social relationships within the immediate school community involving children, classmates and teachers led to high performance in school subjects. Schmitt and Kleine (2010) concluded that the quality of pupil-teacher and pupil-student interactions determine school performance. Ayeni, Adeyemo and Olanikanmi (2014) studied the correlation between school environmental factors and adolescent school performance in Osun State, Nigeria, and found that environmental factors at school were strong indices that correlated with the academic performance of high school learners.

Similar studies on learning environment in a school system and school success indicated that school environment has a significant impact on student learning (Chepkonga, 2017; Chikezie & Ekott, 2019; Duruji, Azuh & Oviasogie, 2014; Ngene, Quadri, Bamigboye & Tenebe, 2018). In addition, Michalak (2014) found that a school environment that is safe and supportive, where student motivation and classroom diversity are promoted is among the factors that facilitate literacy learning. Byamugisha (2010) found that factors such as school attendance, repeating a grade, parent-teacher meetings, parents paying extra tuition, students taking school lunch, private or public school categories, the school setting, the material and pedagogical resources, and the educational qualifications of school staff, actually predicted reading and mathematics results of sixth grade students in Uganda.

It was also reported by certain studies that students who attend privately owned schools obtained better test and examination scores than those in public schools (Adeyemi, 2014; Bonsu, 2016; Ehigiamusoe, 2012). In 2017, Adeniji explored how school status and gender influenced students' success in mathematics and found that students in private schools were sixty-four percent more likely to achieve better results than their counterparts in public educational institutions. Duruji, Azuh and Oviasogie (2014) revealed that students gain better learning outcomes in private learning environments than in their public-school counterparts. A study by Gumede (2018) involving seventy Grade 9 students from public and private schools was conducted in Bulawayo Central District high schools in Zimbabwe. The findings showed that the reading comprehension performance of students in public schools were significantly lower than the reading comprehension performance of students in private schools. Gumede (2018) therefore submitted that there is need to provide intervention to students who lag behind in reading comprehension to avoid further challenges in the academic area.

The study by Nazir and Mattoo (2012), involved 80 adolescents in Srinagar enrolled in private and public schools. The results revealed that public and private school types strongly influenced the academic achievement of males and females. Other results showed a significant link between the school and university context and academic achievement among women enrolled in private educational institutions. Ocheho, Oke and Lanre-Babalola (2019) found that while students in public educational institutions of higher learning experienced higher levels of learned helplessness those in private educational institutions of higher learning experienced higher school connectedness. The scholars therefore concluded that private educational institutions enjoy a peaceful school environment capable of enabling students to have free and open interactions with school staff without inhibitions.

Furthermore, results showing gender differences in learners' reading scores are inconclusive. For example, Halpern, Straight and Stephenson (2011) reported that in terms of language and

communication, there are obvious gender stereotypes among boys and girls. According to Plante, Sabboniere, Aronson and Theoret (2013), most studies corroborate the fact that females perform better than men in reading and language-related work. Reilly, Neumann, and Andrews (2018) equally found that females performed better in language-related tasks than their male counterparts. Although no statistical differences in participants' reading scores based on gender were obtained by Ezeokoli and Ezenandu (2013), scores of female participants were higher than reading scores of their male counterparts. This implies that treatment had more a positive effect on females than on males. In contrast, Elui (2015) found that gender did not significantly affect learner average scores in reading and Caplan and Caplan (2016) questioned the existence of gender gaps in verbal tasks.

Based on the foregoing review, it can be deduced that investigation into the impact of environment in the school on learners' achievement mainly utilised participants without specific disabilities in reading. These studies placed an emphasis on students' mathematics learning, English language learning and social skills acquisition. There appears to be few studies that focused on the reading comprehension of learners with academic disabilities. This study therefore, addressed the gap and provided information that will increase the awareness of educators on learners' academic prowess. The study examined a social factor, school social environment, and two demographic factors which are type of school and gender and the connections that exist between these factors and reading comprehension among students experiencing disabilities in learning academic skills.

Methodology

The following research questions guided the study.

- What is the level of relationship existing between socio-demographic factors and the achievement in reading comprehension of participants in the study?
- Do the socio-demographic factors jointly and relatively contribute to the prediction of achievement in reading comprehension of participants?
- Is there a difference in achievement in reading comprehension on the basis of the type of school attended by participants?
- Is there a difference in achievement in reading comprehension on the basis of the participants' gender?

This study used a descriptive survey. McCombes (2019) posited that a descriptive research study describes a population, situation or phenomenon. It can answer "what", "when", "where" and "how" questions but not "why" questions. Participants were selected step by step through a multi-stage sampling procedure. The screening instrument was administered to a total of 951 students who were in JSS1 in the six schools. The results of the projection showed that one hundred and twenty-three (123) JSS 1 students out of nine hundred and fifty-one (951) JSS 1 students selected from the six schools had learning differences. The age range of the participants was 11 to 17 years old. Several reasons account for the variability of age among participants. Students are admitted into secondary school in Nigeria immediately after they complete primary education which is designed for pupils aged 6-12 years. By implication, enrolment age is estimated at 12 years (Section 2, Parts C & D, pp. 9, 12: National Policy on Education, 2013). However, socio-cultural and economic factors could account for the presence of younger or older students in the first year of secondary school. For instance, a student who dropped out of school may re-enter at an older age. Some students might have commenced schooling late or experienced delay in schooling due to stigmatisation and/or

delays in cognitive and concept development. The distribution of participants by demographic characteristics revealed that there were: thirty (30) students (24.39%) from private schools and ninety-three (93) students (75.61%) from public schools. The gender distribution of participants showed that forty-five (45) male students (35.59%) and seventy-eight (78) female students (63.41%) participated in the study.

Instruments

To collect data, participants in this study completed three instruments namely: the Pupil Rating Scale (Revised), the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (adapted) and the Test of Reading Comprehension. The researcher used Myklebust's (1981) Pupil Rating Scale (Revised) for screening purposes. Myklebust (1981) explained that teachers can rate students on the twenty-four items of the scale using a five-point scale (with 1 indicating poor behaviour, 3 indicating average behaviour and 5 indicating good behaviour). Lazarus and Aransiola (2016) obtained Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 for the Pupil Rating Scale. The second instrument was used to collect information on school social environment. An adapted version of the instrument developed by the National School Climate Centre (NSCC) in 2015, called Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) was used. This instrument has two sections. Section A required the participants to supply demographic data on type of school (private or public) and gender. Sixteen questions in Section B focused on participants' experiences in school with an emphasis on safety, supportive learning environment and relationships among individuals in the school. The reliability and validity of the adapted version of the CSCI was further determined by the researcher through a pilot test. The researcher ensured that students who participated in the pilot test were not among the study sample. The Cronbach's alpha statistics was computed. The result of the coefficient of reliability obtained by the researcher was thus 0.72.

The third instrument is an achievement test of 25 items tagged "Test of Reading Comprehension" (TRC). It comprises two reading comprehension passages (a narrative text and an expository text) selected from an online teachers' resource (Language arts worksheets), designed by Teachnology, Inc. (1999-2012). These reading passages were adjudged appropriate for JSS 1 students experiencing disabilities in academics. Each correct answer on the TRC receives 4 marks to give a total of 100 marks. The questions were intended to elicit responses on students' ability to identify significant points/themes, developmental ideas, draw interpretations, recall facts and comprehend the meaning of words in context. The coefficient alpha results from pilot testing the scale on 20 students with disabilities in academics that were not part of the sample were as follows: Reading Passage 1 ($r=0.75$), and Reading Passage 2 ($r=0.73$). The researcher engaged three research assistants for ease of test administration in the selected schools. Pearson Moment Correlation; multiple regressions and the independent t-test statistics were used for data analysis.

Ethical Consideration

In order to meet standard ethical consideration for the nature of this study, the researcher applied to the Ethical and Research Committee of the Ministry of Education in Oyo State, Nigeria. A copy of the research proposal was submitted with a parental/guardian consent form. After three weeks, the Ethical and Research Committee approved the conduct of the research. From this point, a letter of introduction and parental/guardian consent form were dispatched through the students with learning disabilities to their parents/guardians. Since the participants were minors, it was essential that confidentiality and fairness were maintained. In all, 123 JSS 1 students with learning disabilities whose parents agreed to their children/wards' participation in this study participated.

Results

Table 1: Correlation matrix showing the relationship between school social environment, school type, gender and achievement in reading comprehension

Variable	Mean	Stand. Dev.	Achievement in reading comp.	School social environment	School type	Gender
Achievement in reading comp.	57.30	10.47	1			
School social environment	55.56	5.71	0.214* (0.018)	1		
School type	1.76	0.43	0.065 (0.472)	0.056 (0.538)	1	
Gender	1.63	0.48	0.185* (0.040)	0.081 (0.374)	0.080 (0.382)	1

What is the level of relationship existing between socio-demographic factors and the achievement in reading comprehension of participants in the study?

Table 1 shows a positive significant relationship existing between the school social environment ($r = 0.214$, $p (0.018) < 0.05$); gender ($r = 0.185$, $p (0.040) < 0.05$) and the students with learning disabilities' achievement in reading comprehension. This implies that the more the social environment in the school is conducive, cordial and pleasant, the more students with learning disabilities will obtain high grades in reading comprehension and vice versa. However, no significant relationship between the demographic factor-school type ($r = 0.065$, $p (0.472) > 0.05$) and participants' achievement in reading comprehension was obtained. That is, the status of the school (whether private or public) does not have a positive link to reading comprehension achievement of students with learning disabilities.

Table 2: ANOVA, model summary and coefficients of the multiple regression of the joint contribution of school social environment, school type and gender to the prediction of achievement in reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities

Multiple R= 0.275						
Multiple R ² = 0.076						
Multiple R ² (Adjusted) = 0.052						
Standard Error of Estimate =10.1949						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1013.530	3	337.843	3.251	0.024
	Residual	12368.340	119	103.936		
	Total	13381.870	122			

Do the socio-demographic factors jointly and relatively contribute to the prediction of achievement in reading comprehension of participants?

In Table 2, the F-ratio of 3.251 was recorded. This indicates that school social environment, school type and gender when considered as a unit, significantly predict students with learning disabilities' achievement in reading comprehension. The R value of 0.275 and R² value of 0.076 were obtained. This means that the combination of the three factors produced 7.6% of the variance in participants' achievement in reading comprehension. Table 3 further illustrates

the relative contributions of each of the three predictor variables (namely: school social environment, school type and gender) to the prediction of the dependent variable-reading comprehension achievement among students with learning disabilities.

Table 3: Relative contribution of school social environment, school type and gender to the prediction of achievement in reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	29.502	9.841		2.998	0.003
School social environment	0.363	0.162	0.198	2.235	0.027
School Type	0.998	2.150	0.041	0.464	0.643
Gender	3.596	1.920	0.166	1.873	0.064

From table 3, while school social environment ($\beta=0.198$, $t=2.235$, $p<0.05$) could significantly and singly predict participants' achievement in reading comprehension, school type ($\beta=0.041$, $t=0.464$, $p>0.05$) and gender ($\beta=0.166$, $t=1.873$, $p>0.05$) could not. This implies that school social environment can determine the reading comprehension achievement of students with learning disabilities.

Table 4: t-test indicating the difference in achievement in reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities in private and public schools

Achievement in Reading comprehension	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Crit-t	Cal-t.	DF	p value
Private school	30	56.1000	12.2653	1.96	0.721	121	0.472
Public school	93	57.6882	9.8698				

Is there a difference in achievement in reading comprehension on the basis of the type of school attended by participants? Table 4 reveals that although students with learning disabilities in public schools obtained 57.6882 mean score in reading comprehension and those in private schools got 56.1000, no observable significant differences in achievement in reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities in private and public schools (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = 0.721, DF = 121, $p>0.05$) were obtained.

Table 5: t-test indicating the difference in achievement in reading comprehension of male and female students with learning disabilities

Achievement in Reading comprehension	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Crit-t	Cal-t.	DF	p value
Male	45	54.7556	11.0744	1.96	2.075	121	0.040
Female	78	58.7692	9.8863				

Is there a difference in achievement in reading comprehension on the basis of the participants' gender? Table 5 reveals that female students with learning disabilities ($\bar{x} = 58.7692$) performed better compared to their male counterparts with learning disabilities ($\bar{x} = 54.7556$) in the study (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = 2.075, DF = 121, $p < 0.05$).

Discussion

Regarding research question 1, a significant positive relationship between the social environment of the school and gender (two independent variables) and the reading comprehension scores of students with learning disabilities (dependent variable) was obtained. However, no significant relationship was found between the type of school and the reading comprehension scores of the participants. This finding supports the findings of Nazir and Matto (2012) and Ngene, Quadri, Bamigboye and Tenebe (2018). These researchers found that the school social environment was directly related to academic achievement and that a positive social environment played an important role in developing students' academic abilities. When students study in a stimulating and supportive environment, they feel welcome and emotionally stable, indirectly leading to better academic outcomes, including reading comprehension. These findings also support the findings of Ezeokoli and Ezenandu (2013), who reported higher average post-test reading scores for women than men, although these scores are not statistically significant.

Research question 2 results also revealed that the social environment of the school, the type of school and gender of students with disabilities in academics had a significant joint contribution to the reading comprehension scores of students with disabilities. This result is consistent with Michalak's (2014) findings, which indicate that a safe and supportive school environment, classroom diversity and student motivation leads to improved literacy learning among students. Gumede (2018) found that reading comprehension performance among learners in private schools differ significantly in favour of students in private schools. Nazir and Mattoo (2012) found that the type of school (public and private) had a major effect on student success in their studies. Adeniji (2017) found that students in private educational institutions had better scores than students in public educational institutions in terms of academic achievement. Reilly, Neumann and Andrews (2018) corroborated the conclusion that girls' performance in language-based activities was greater than that of boys.

Research question 2 showed that the social environment of the school could independently predict the reading comprehension scores of students with disabilities in academics. This finding is also consistent with that of Byamugisha's (2010) in which both home and school factors predict students' reading and mathematics scores. The present findings also support those of Schmitt and Kleine (2010), who concluded that improved school success is a product of improved student-teacher interactions, pupil-student interactions and parental involvement. In a safe, challenging and reassuring school environment, students learn and achieve better school results.

However, the results for research question 2, also revealed that school type and gender could not predict significantly and independently the scores in reading comprehension among students with learning disabilities. This finding is in disagreement with that of Nazir and Mattoo (2012) regarding the impact that school type has on academic achievement, but corroborates Elui's (2015) view that gender gaps do not exist in reading scores. Reading comprehension is an essential sub-skill of reading that requires a stimulating and supportive teaching and learning environment for optimal results. Therefore, it is not enough to enroll

them in a private or public school. Regardless of the type of school they attend, attention must be paid to the nature of the school environment and the subject taught.

For research question 3, the results showed that the gender of students with learning disabilities is connected to the success of students with learning disabilities in reading comprehension. The female students in this study scored better than the males. This finding supports that of Reilly, Neumann, and Andrews (2018), but contradicts the findings of Elui (2015) and Caplan and Caplan (2016), who found no gender differences in student reading scores.

Results for research question 4, also did not show any significant variance in the reading comprehension scores of students with learning disabilities in private and public schools. This finding does not support Duruji, Azuh and Oviasogie (2014) and Adeniji's (2017) because the researchers maintained that students in private learning environments perform better than their typical peers in public learning environments. However, the present results corroborate the findings of Nazir and Mattoo (2012), which revealed a major impact of school type on student achievement.

Limitations and Future Research

The study was limited to only social environment within the school. Future research could benefit from investigating other components of the environment such as physical, emotional and psychological environments of the school. The influence of these variables can be studied vis-a-vis reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities. In addition, participants were only 123 year one students drawn from six secondary schools and one local government area in Ibadan. Further studies can be conducted with larger numbers of students spread across the eleven local government areas in the Ibadan metropolis. By so doing, a wider geographical scope would be covered. Future studies should consider using assessment measures which involve complex grade-level materials in identifying the study participants. It would be advisable if multiple reading comprehension measures could be used as opposed to the use of a single test.

Recommendations

This study has provided clear educational implications and recommendations for stakeholders in the secondary school setting. A rich social environment promotes effective reading comprehension among secondary school students, especially those with learning disabilities. The English language teachers should provide a learning environment that is conducive to reading comprehension instruction. Respectful and friendly social relationships should be maintained while teaching reading comprehension to all secondary school students, especially those with learning disabilities.

Other content area teachers of students with learning disabilities should ensure that classes take place in stimulating class environments that are free of unhealthy, risky and annoying stimuli. They should place emphasis on a safe and healthy school environment for learning. There should be no room for unwholesome relationships in the school community. Students with learning disabilities who struggle in academic classes need to acquire relevant social skills useful for regulating a person's behaviour, understanding one's emotions and those of others, and effectively managing interpersonal relationships for an improved school achievement.

Policy makers and school administrators should be prepared for the challenge of educating all learners, particularly those with learning disabilities, in a supportive and positive school environment. They should ensure that public and private schools provide students with clearly defined rules and regulations, maintain socio-emotional security by eliminating harassment and all forms of physical and psychological violence within the school and provide strong social support to all students. If these measures are maintained, the socio-emotional stability that results will certainly be metamorphosed into better academic outcomes, principally in reading comprehension for those students who struggle to succeed in academic classes.

Parents of learners with learning difficulties must frequently communicate with the school principal and cooperate with that individual on matters relating to the general welfare of their children to ensure that learning takes place in a healthy school environment. Guidance counsellors should conduct routine counselling sessions where all learners, including those with learning disabilities, may be exposed to the importance of maintaining healthy social relationships with teachers and other students. Some students with learning disabilities have difficulty with social skills; therefore, training students in these skills will also strengthen the social environment of the school and indirectly lead to improved outcomes in learning for all students, including those with disabilities.

Conclusion

The study found that students with learning disabilities will perform better in reading comprehension if they learn in a positive and supportive school environment. The results reveal that the positive school social environment has significantly influenced the reading comprehension scores of students with learning disabilities. With respect to the joint and relative contributions of socio-demographic factors (social environment in the school, the type of school and gender) to achievement in reading comprehension of students who experience disabilities with academics, it should be noted that the contributions of these factors may not be isolated but combined by at least two factors. However, only the social environment of the school could predict significantly and independently the achievement in reading comprehension among students with learning disabilities.

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