

Academic Impairment, Social Support and Resilient Behavior among Physically-Challenged in-School Adolescents

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Abstract:

Various stakeholders, including the government, have often neglected the educational needs of physically challenged in-school adolescents in Nigeria. Empirical studies examining the relationship between academic impairment, social support, and resilient behavior in this population remain scarce, particularly within the Nigerian context. Therefore, this study investigated academic impairment and social support as predictors of resilient behavior among physically challenged in-school adolescents in Lagos and Ekiti States in South-West Nigeria. A cross-sectional research design was employed, and purposive sampling was used to select the two states. Data were collected from 374 physically challenged in-school adolescents using validated measurement scales. The data were analyzed using multiple regression and independent samples t-tests to test four hypotheses at a significance level of $p < 0.01$. The results showed that both academic impairment and support from significant others independently predicted resilient behavior. Furthermore, academic impairment and social support jointly predicted resilience. The findings highlight the crucial role of significant others as a source of social support. The study underscores the need for the government and stakeholders to enhance infrastructure in special schools to improve learning experiences. This research is novel as it is the first to examine these variables across two Nigerian states.

Keywords: *Academic impairment, resilient behavior, physically-challenged in-school adolescents, social support*

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Introduction

Resilient behavior refers to an individual's capacity to effectively manage stress and traumatic situations (Portnoy et al., 2018). It is also defined as the ability to recover from stressful life events, maintain emotional balance in the face of significant threats, and apply positive coping strategies to overcome adversity (Smith et al., 2008). It involves confronting challenges and thriving despite difficult circumstances (Southwick et al., 2014). Resilient behavior fosters a positive and hopeful mindset, reducing the likelihood of stress-induced helplessness (Kataria, 2012). Physically challenged in-school adolescents often demonstrate such behavior. Among them, resilience reflects their ability to achieve goals despite formidable challenges in school and life more broadly (Agasisti et al., 2018). Their ability to navigate life and pursue personal goals remains a subject of growing scholarly interest. Several studies have

examined factors predicting resilient behavior among physically challenged in-school adolescents.

To begin with, academic impairment, defined as psychological and environmental factors that hinder physically challenged in-school adolescents from acquiring verbal, reading, and mathematics skills essential for post-secondary education (Daramola, 2023), significantly affects this group of students. It manifests in various forms, such as inattention and poor concentration, leading to difficulties in note-taking, susceptibility to distractions during learning, and inability to recall information during tests and examinations—all of which result in poor academic performance (Hammermeister et al., 2020; Mayes et al., 2022). Unlike in developed countries, where physically challenged in-school adolescents are provided with accommodations and instructional materials, those in Nigeria often lack such resources (Daramola, 2023). Studies have revealed that physically challenged in-school adolescents who score high on impairment scales tend to exhibit higher resilient behavior than those with lower scores (Keenan et al., 2019; Kahn et al., 2019; Ko & Chang, 2019; Van der Meulen et al., 2020).

In addition, social support, defined as assistance from family members, friends, and significant others (Ruiz-Rodriguez et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2017), affects resilient behavior among physically challenged in-school adolescents. Social support may be received or perceived. Received support refers to “the actual amount of supportive behavior” (Gulacti, 2010), whereas perceived support is “the belief that an individual would have support from family, friends, and significant others” (Gulacti, 2010). According to Cullen’s (1994) *social support theory*, relationships with parents, siblings, and other significant others offer different types of support that help individuals withstand and recover from adversity. Applied to this study, physically challenged in-school adolescents with supportive families, friends, and significant others are more likely to develop stronger resilient behavior than peers lacking such support. Consequently, individuals with high levels of social support demonstrate greater resilience than those with low levels (Anthony & Mol, 2017; Rizzi & Giuffo, 2023; Suhr et al., 2017).

Studies have found that parental support enhances resilient behavior among physically challenged children (Roming & Howard, 2019). Support from friends also promotes overall social, personal, and emotional adjustment among their physically challenged peers (Friedlander et al., 2007; Hirsch & Barton, 2011). However, recent studies have identified support from *significant others* as a key predictor of resilient behavior among physically challenged in-school adolescents (Daramola, 2023). Finally, Malkoc and Yalcin (2015) demonstrated that social support from friends, family, and *significant others* mediates the relationship between academic impairment and resilient behavior, thereby enhancing psychological well-being among physically challenged in-school adolescents.

Conclusively, gender appears to influence resilient behavior. Manijeh et al. (2016) found that female in-school adolescents in Tehran exhibited higher resilience than their male counterparts, whereas findings from India showed the opposite, with male in-school adolescents demonstrated greater resilience than females (Banerjee et al., 2018). Additionally, Warren and Hale (2018) reported that male physically challenged in-school adolescents exhibited greater resilience than their female

counterparts. These findings suggest that gender influences resilience differently across populations and sample contexts.

Although previous studies have examined psychological and demographic factors predicting resilient behavior across various populations and samples in developed countries, studies on academic impairment and social support as predictors of resilient behavior among physically challenged in-school adolescents – particularly in Nigeria – remain scarce, leaving a critical gap in the literature. Therefore, this study aims to investigate academic impairment and social support as predictors of resilient behavior among physically challenged in-school adolescents in Lagos and Ekiti States, located in South-West Nigeria. The following hypothesis was tested: Academic impairment will independently predict resilient coping behavior among physically challenged in-school adolescents. Social support (from significant others, family, and friends) will independently predict resilient coping behavior among physically challenged in-school adolescents. Academic impairment and social support will jointly and independently predict resilient coping behavior among physically challenged in-school adolescents. Gender will significantly influence resilient coping behavior among physically challenged in-school adolescents.

The study would provide up-to-date data on academic impairment and social support on resilient behavior among physically challenged in-school adolescents, informing policies to address their academic needs and challenges. Additionally, the role of social support from family, friends, and significant others in fostering resilience will guide social workers and other stakeholders in designing programs to help this group of in-school adolescents improve their resilient behavior. Finally, since the researchers engaged participants in learning customized skills during data collection, the study will benefit them by enhancing their ability to manage available social support and improve their academic performance and quality of life.

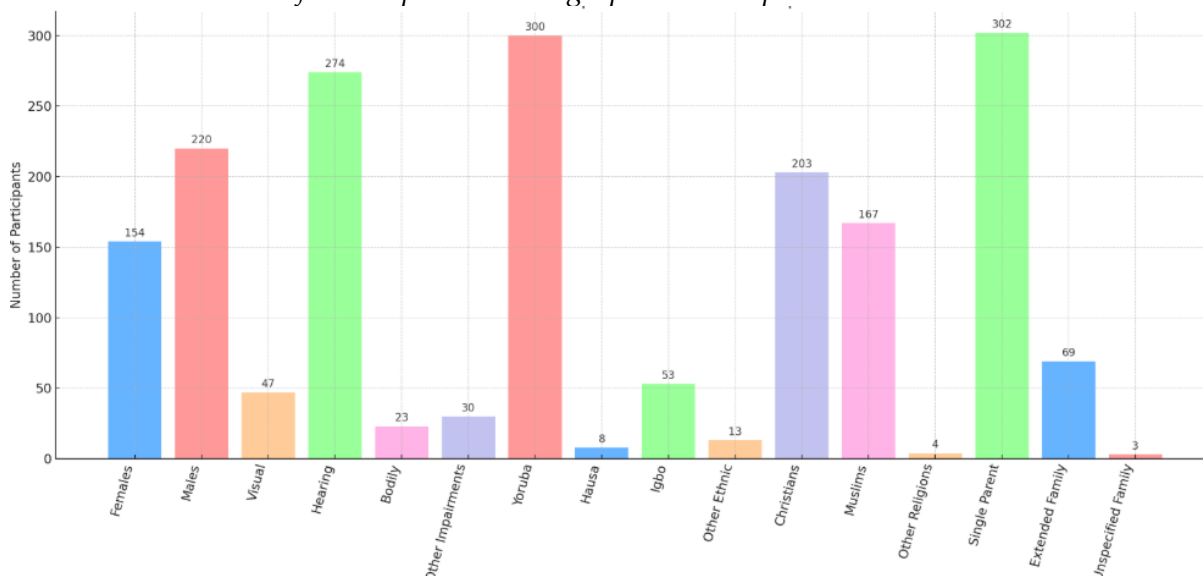
Method

This research examined academic impairment, social support, and resilient behavior due to the lack of empirical studies on these variables, especially in Lagos and Ekiti States, South-West Nigeria. An *ex-post facto* research design with a cross-sectional survey method was adopted to collect participant data. The independent variables were academic impairment and perceived social support, while resilient behavior was the dependent variable. The study was conducted among physically challenged in-school adolescents attending special schools in Lagos and Ekiti States. The rationale stemmed from the scarcity of empirical research on physically challenged in-school adolescents in central Nigerian states, which also represents one of the limitations of this study. These schools serve adolescents with various physical, intellectual, and behavioral challenges, such as visual and hearing impairments and other physical disabilities. They employ instructional materials for teaching and learning, including Braille, audiobooks, word predictors, and graphic organizers. The study employed multiple sampling techniques. First, simple random sampling technique by balloting was used to select two out of six states in the South-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Second, purposive sampling was used to select four special schools from Lagos and Ekiti States. Finally, a convenience sampling method was used to select participants for questionnaire administration. Convenience

sampling was considered appropriate because participants could not be compelled; only those willing and able to respond to the questionnaires were **included**.

Figure 1

Combined Bar Chart of Participants' Demographic and Impairment Characteristics



Note. The majority of participants were male (59%) with hearing impairment (73%) and of Yoruba ethnicity (81%)

From the figure above, descriptive statistics revealed that 154 (41%) of the participants were female and 220 (59%) were male, with ages ranging from 13 to 32 years ($M = 22.03$, $SD = 3.13$). Regarding impairments, 47 (13%) had visual impairment, 274 (73%) had hearing impairment, 23 (6%) had bodily challenges, and 30 (8%) had other unspecified physical challenges. Regarding ethnicity, 300 (81%) were Yoruba, 8 (2%) Hausa, 53 (14%) Igbo and 13 (3%) were from other unspecified ethnic groups. Regarding religious faiths, 203 (54%) were Christians, 167 (45%) Muslims, 4 (1%) practiced other unspecified religions. Finally, 302 (81%) of the participants were from single parent families, 69 (18%) from extended families, and 3 (1%) from unspecified family **structures**.

The Academic Impairment Scale (AIS), developed by Weis et.al., (2022), was used to assess academic impairment among the participants. The scale consists of five items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from "Never," "Rarely," "Sometimes," "Often," to "Always a problem." Sample items include: "Mixing up letters and words when I read" and "Understanding what I read." Higher scores indicate greater academic impairment, while lower scores reflect fewer difficulties. The original authors reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.93, while the present study obtained a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89, indicating high internal **consistency**.

The Brief Resilient Coping Scale (BRCS) (Sinclair & Wallston, 2004) was used to measure resilient behavior. The BRCS is a 5-item scale rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Does not describe me at all" to "Describes me very well". Sample items include: "Regardless of what happens to me, I believe I can control my reaction to it" and "I believe I can grow in positive ways by dealing with difficult situations." Scores between 4 and 13 indicate low resilience, 14 to 16 reflect moderate resilience, and 17 to 20 represent high resilience. The original authors reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85,

while the present study obtained a Cronbach's alpha of 0.71, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

The *Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support* (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1988) was used to assess perceived social support. The MSPSS is a 12-item scale comprising three subscales: support from friends, family, and significant others. It is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *Strongly Disagree*, *Disagree*, *Neutral*, *Agree*, to *Strongly Agree*. Sample items include: "There is a special person with whom I can share my joys and sorrows" and "I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows." The authors reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85 for the overall scale and the subscales alpha of 0.73 for significant others, 0.70 for family, and 0.79 for friends. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for the overall scale was 0.82, with subscale alphas of 0.76 for significant others, 0.69 for family, and 0.77 for friends.

Procedurally, the researchers obtained a letter of introduction from the Department of Psychology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, which was presented to each selected special schools in the two states. Prior to administering the questionnaires, the head teacher of each school signed an informed consent form on behalf of the parents for participants under 18. The consent indicated that the study posed no risk to the participants or schools. Questionnaires were coded anonymously, with no personal data traceable to any participant or school, ensuring confidentiality. Two research assistants, skilled in using instructional materials for teaching physically challenged in-school adolescents, were employed alongside teachers to assist with data collection. Only in-school adolescents who were available, prepared, and willing to participate were included in the study. As part of the study's benefits, participants were taught various skills tailored to their individual needs during the four-week data collection period. Four hundred questionnaires (200 per state) were distributed, of which 374 were completed correctly, representing a 94% response rate used for analysis.

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS version 26. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were applied. Hypothesis 1 was tested using linear regression; hypotheses 2 and 3 with multiple regression; and hypothesis 4 with an independent sample t-test. All hypotheses were tested at the significance level of 0.01.

Results And Discussion

Result

Correlation statistics were employed to examine the relationships among the study variables- academic impairment, social support (from significant others, family, and friends support) and resilient behavior. This analysis provided a foundational step for subsequent regression analysis, and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Zero-order correlation statistics among study variables

SN	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean	SD
1	Academic impairment	-						176.00	22.26
2	Social support	.32*	-					44.37	8.95
3	Significant others support	.25*	.52*	-				15.26	3.57

4	Family support	.18*	.43*	.59*	-		15.49	3.33
5	Friends support	.34*	.52*	.47*	.50*	-	13.61	3.97
6	Resilient behavior	.42*	.35*	.38*	.29*	.20*	15.70	3.00

*Significant correlation at 0.01

Note. All study variables have a significant positive relationship with resilient behavior, with academic impairment having the highest correlation

The results in Table 1 showed a significant relationship between academic impairment and resilient behavior among physically-challenged in-school adolescents ($r = .42, p < .01$). Social support also had a significant relationship with resilient behavior ($r = .35, p < .01$). Specifically, the dimensions of significant others support ($r = .38, p < .01$), family support ($r = .29, p < .01$) and friends support ($r = .20, p < .01$) had significant relationships with resilient behavior. The strength of these relationships justified the use of regression analysis.

H1: Academic impairment would independently predict resilient behavior among physically-challenged in-school adolescents. The hypothesis was tested using linear regression analysis and the result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Linear regression showing academic impairment as independent predictor of resilient behavior among physically-challenged in-school adolescents

Predictor	β	t	p	R	R ²	F	p
Academic impairment	.42	8.87	<.01	.42	.18	78.64	<.01

Dependent variable: Resilient behavior

Note. Academic impairment is a significant independent predictor of resilient behavior among physically challenged in-school adolescents.

The results in Table 2 revealed that academic impairment independently predicted resilient behavior among physically-challenged in-school adolescents ($\beta = .42, p < .01$). The hypothesis was supported.

H2: Social support (significant others, family and friends support) would jointly and independently predict resilient behavior among physically-challenged in-school adolescents. The hypothesis was tested with multiple regression analysis and the result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Multiple regression analysis showing joint and independent predictors of social support dimensions on resilient behavior among physically-challenged in-school adolescents.

Predictors	β	t-value	p	R	R ²	F	p
Significant others	.33	5.37	<.01				
Family support	.10	1.63	>.01	.39	.15	22.42	<.01
Friends support	-.00	-.07	>.01				

Dependent variable: Resilient behavior

Note. The social support dimensions jointly predicted resilient behavior, but only support from significant others was a significant independent predictor

The results in Table 3 indicated that social support dimensions jointly predicted resilient behavior among physically-challenged in-school adolescents [$R^2 = .15$, $F(3, 374) = 22.42$, $p < .01$], accounting for 15% of the variance in the independent variables on the dependent variable. Significant others also support independently predicted resilient behavior among participants ($\beta = .33$, $p < .01$). However, family support ($\beta = .10$, $p > .01$) and friend support ($\beta = -.00$, $p < .05$) did not independently predict resilient behavior among physically-challenged in-school adolescents. The hypothesis was partially confirmed.

H3: Academic impairment and social support (from significant others, family and friends) were hypothesized to jointly and independently predict resilient behavior among physically-challenged in-school adolescents. The hypothesis was tested using multiple regressions analysis, and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Multiple regression analysis showing academic impairment and social support as joint and independent predictors of resilience coping among physically-challenged in-school adolescents.

Predictors	β	t	p	R	R^2	F	p
Academic impairment	.37	7.69	<.01	.52	.27	34.22	<.01
Significant others support	.28	4.83	<.01				
Family support	.12	2.09	<.01				
Friends support	-.12	-2.11	<.01				

Dependent variable: Resilient behavior

Note. Both academic impairment and social support jointly and independently significantly predict resilient behavior among physically-challenged in-school adolescents.

The results in Table 4 indicated that academic impairment and social support (from significant others, family and friends) jointly predicted resilient behavior among physically-challenged in-school adolescents [$R^2 = .27$, $F(4, 373) = 34.22$, $p < .01$], accounting for 27% of the variance observed in resilient.

H4: Male physically-challenged in-school adolescents were hypothesized to demonstrate higher resilient behavior than their female counterparts. The hypothesis was tested using an independent sample t-test, and the result is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

T-test of independent samples showing gender differences on resilient behavior among physically-challenged in-school adolescents

Gender	N	M	SD	Df	t	P
Male	154	15.36	3.19	373	-1.81	>.05
Female	220	15.93	2.84			

Dependent variable: Resilient behavior

Note. There was no significant difference in resilient behavior between male and female participants.

The results in Table 5 indicated no significant differences in resilient behavior of male and female physically-challenged in-school adolescents [$t(373) = -1.81, p > .05$]; hence, the hypothesis was rejected.

Discussion

The study investigated academic impairment and social support as predictors of resilient behavior among physically challenged in-school adolescents in Lagos and Ekiti States, Southwestern Nigeria. Four hypotheses were tested, all at a significance level of $p < 0.01$. The hypothesis that academic impairment would independently predict resilient behavior was supported. Results indicated that academic impairment negatively influenced resilience among participants. Physically challenged in-school adolescents experience difficulties with reading, note-taking, social skills, test-taking, and time management, all of which affect their academic performance and diminishing their capacity to develop resilience in learning and acquiring new skills.

This finding supports previous results indicating that academic impairment predicts resilient behavior (Daramola, 2023; Kahn et al., 2019; Keenan et al., 2019; Ko & Chang, 2019). Specifically, it corroborates Van der Meulen et al. (2020), who reported that physically challenged in-school adolescents with higher levels of academic impairment tended to exhibit greater resilient behavior.

The hypothesis that social support (from significant others, family, and friends) would jointly and independently predict resilient behavior among physically challenged in-school adolescents was partially supported. Results revealed that support from significant others independently predicted resilient behavior among the study participants, while support from family and friends does not significantly influence resilient behavior. Support from significant others is instrumental in fostering resilient attitudes among participants. When these adolescents perceive that others are willing to assist them, their sense of resilience is strengthened by hope – the hope to succeed and overcome life's challenges. This finding aligns with previous studies suggesting that social support predicts resilient behavior, particularly among physically challenged in-school adolescents (Anthony & Mol, 2017; Rizzi & Giuffo, 2023). Although family is traditionally viewed as a primary source of social support for physically challenged in-school adolescents (Fingerman et al., 2016; Roming & Howard, 2019), this study demonstrates that support from significant others is a stronger predictor of resilient behavior. One possible explanation is that individuals daily interacting with these adolescents – such as teachers, caregivers, or peers – may be more immediately available and emotionally supportive than parents, who may live far away, visit infrequently, or have limited involvement.

The hypothesis that academic impairment and social support (from significant others, family, and friends) would jointly predict resilient behavior among study participants was supported. Academic impairment, family support, significant others' support, and friends' support collectively predicted resilient behavior among physically challenged in-school adolescents. This indicates that the interaction between academic impairment and social support contributes to the development of strong resilience in this group of individuals with special needs. This finding supports

the result of Rahat & Ilhan (2016), who found that academic impairment and social support are strong predictors of resilient behavior among physically challenged in-school adolescents. Similarly, Daramola (2023) reinforces this conclusion, indicating that academic impairment and social support help those adolescents navigate life and develop resilience in the face of adversity, fostering peace of mind and a sense of fulfillment.

The hypothesis that male physically challenged in-school adolescents would demonstrate higher levels of resilient behavior than their female counterparts was not supported. This suggests that gender does not significantly influence resilient behavior among these adolescents. This finding contradicts previous research, which found that female physically challenged in-school adolescents exhibit higher levels of resilient behavior than males (Manijeh et al., 2016; Warren & Hale, 2020). and also disagrees with Banerjee et al. (2018), who reported that boys showed higher levels of resilient behavior than girls. Given the influence of cultural contexts, this discrepancy should be interpreted with caution. Conditions applicable in developed countries – where physically challenged in-school adolescents typically receive government and stakeholder support through educational and developmental facilities – are often absent in Nigeria. In Nigeria, these adolescents largely rely on NGO donations and limited government assistance.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of academic impairment and social support on resilient behavior among physically challenged in-school adolescents from special schools in Lagos and Ekiti States, located in the South-west geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The results demonstrate that academic impairment and social support are significant predictors of resilient behavior in the target population. Notably, the practical implication is that the *significant other* component of social support plays a crucial role in developing resilient behavior among these adolescents.

Therefore, the government and other stakeholders should improve infrastructure in these special schools to make teaching and learning more effective and rewarding for these adolescents. Additionally, *significant others* should be encouraged to provide greater support; establishing residential facilities within these schools would be a valuable investment in their lives and in society's overall well-being. Creating more schools with adequate infrastructure for physically challenged in-school adolescents represents a practical approach to alleviating their challenges. Moreover, teachers should be incentivized and motivated to acquire the specialized skills necessary to educate this group of students.

This study faced several limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, selecting only two states from a single geopolitical zone limits the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should include more schools across multiple states and geopolitical zones to enhance the representativeness and generalizability of the results. Second, data were collected using a structured questionnaire, which proved challenging for some participants. Future research should incorporate observational methods and teacher documentary evidence to triangulate data and strengthen the reliability of findings. Finally, this study investigated only two variables. Future research should consider additional variables,

such as learned helplessness and personality traits, to gain deeper insights into the behavior of physically challenged in-school adolescents.

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