
**SOCIO-ACADEMIC CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES AND
PREVENTIVE MEASURES ON PREVALENCE OF SUICIDAL
IDEATION AMONG SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS IN
TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN OYO STATE**

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Abstract

The issue around suicide ideation (SI) among special needs students in Nigerian tertiary institutions seems under-researched, and this prompts the need to examine the prevalence of SI among special needs students in tertiary institutions, socio-academic causes, consequences and preventive measures. Descriptive research design was employed and data were collected from 200 special needs students purposively sampled across tertiary institutions in Oyo State with the aid of SI inventory. Data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Findings revealed a prevalence of SI with high evidence among 50.5% of the respondents. Socio-academic causes of SI included repeated academic failure, negative teacher attitudes and bullying, while the socio-academic consequences included social withdrawal and isolation, declining academic performance and consideration of school dropout. Finally, socio-academic preventive measures should include the introduction of policies against bullying, inclusive classroom environments, peer support programs, and academic flexibility. It is therefore recommended that collaborative effort be made between tertiary institutions and the society at

large on taking steps for holistic focus on the socio-academic wellbeing of special needs students. This should concern all stakeholders including parents, lecturers, management and the policy makers.

Keywords: Suicidal ideation, Special needs students, Tertiary institutions

Introduction

Suicide is an occurrence that is often preconceived by those involved. It must have been previously conceived in thought form. This mental-conception can be termed Suicidal Ideation (SI). It encompasses a range of thoughts, from transient considerations of death to detailed planning of the act of suicide. It will not be out of place to state that despite the disturbing estimated statistics of a high prevalence of suicide, it is more disturbing and imperative to note that the number of those who nurture SI outnumbers those who have eventually carried out the actual practice. This is based on the earlier allusion that most (if not all) individuals recorded to have committed suicide must have in one way or another first conceived it in their thought. Although not every instance of SI leads to suicide, but every successful suicide most certainly must have passed through the stage of SI. This is irrespective of the duration of time (either for a long or short period).

Suicide Ideation, which refers to mean the thought of taking one's own life, can equally be possible among students of tertiary institutions. This is premised on the basis of their exposure to various forms of socio-academic pressure. Studies have shown that the issue of suicide among students is often preceded by stigmatization, relationship conflicts and breakups, lack of social support, bullying and the loss of a loved one among others (Ogunwale, 2016; Abdulganiyu, et al, 2023). Also, immense pressure that students face from high expectations and academic stress, typically imposed by parents and guardians and other educational stakeholders cannot be overlooked as a cause (Olaseni, et al, 2024; Fadipe & Dauda, 2025). A more contemporary analysis has equally shown the increasing influence of social media and digital communication has introduced a range of new risk factors of SI particularly among adolescents and young adults. One significant factor is cyberbullying and exposure to harmful

content knowing students of tertiary institutions are part of the population which uses the social media the most.

Beyond the socially identified factors, it is equally often argued that suicide seems more prevalent in low-income countries like Nigeria where suicidal trend has been solidified as a result of poverty and the current economic realities. Okeke et al (2020), in their study established the effects of economic instability, poverty and social inequality on the risk factors of mental health issues which is closely linked to suicide which does not exempt students at various level of learning.

Considering the argument that socio-academic pressure can be a source of challenge to students of tertiary institutions (Amali et al, 2020), it is equally germane to state that special needs students, if not most vulnerable are equally susceptible to difficulties from same source as regular students. This implies that students with special needs, been part of the tertiary educational and larger societal system are not exempted from exposure to social and academic challenges. Consequently, it will not be out of place to know if students impaired in speech/language, hearing, visual and physical ability, mentally retarded or learning disabled, emotional/behaviourdisordered and intellectuallygifted or talented are not equally exposed to SI as a result of any form of socio-academic pressure.

Based on the foregoing, it becomes imperative to empirically look into the issues around SI among special needs students in tertiary institutions. On the issue of prevalence, Anjit and Nagarajan (2024) established that students with learning disability (a form of special need) in colleges (which are tertiary institutions) in India exhibit a high degree of suicidal thought than those without learning disability. On the causes of SI among special needs students in tertiary institutions, the study by Ogunwale (2016) examined the determinants of SI among tertiary institution students with hearing impairment and established that depression, anxiety and stress have a significant relationship with the development of suicidal thoughts. These causes are more of psychological and less socio-academically inclined which is the interest of studies in the discipline of sociology of education

such as this. Abdulganiyu, et al (2023) examined the socio-academic pressures which often results in SI among undergraduates and identified frequent academic failure, poor academic finances and academic expectations.

On socio-academic consequences of SI among special needs students in tertiary institutions, there is an obvious dearth in empirical studies as most existing researches examined prevalence, causes and preventive strategies of SI among schooling individuals and not special needs students. Nwafor et al (2023), though never mentioned special needs students in the study, but can be credited for identifying that SI among undergraduates could have consequences beyond suicide itself. Part of these consequences include depression, anxiety, anti-social behaviour, poor academic performance, dropout from school and relationship problems. On the aspect of preventive measures, Fadipe and Dauda (2025) submitted that an environmental approach should be best applied. It means environment free of negative judgment and provision of supportive facilities should be encouraged. Also, it was argued that the prevalence of SI in educational settings can be minimised through reduction of academic stress and pressure. Beyond the school environmental effort, it was further posited that engaging parents and other stakeholders such as teachers, school administrators and professional counsellors would be effective strategies. Alfakeh et al (2023) equally opined that recovery from SI among university students is beyond the school as it was stated that support from family and friends cannot be over emphasized.

Based on the backdrop, the gap this study filled becomes evident as none among all cited studies above adequately addressed the prevalence of SI among special needs students in tertiary institutions, its socio-academic causes, consequences and preventive measures. This identified lacuna constituted the focus of this study. The specific objectives are to:

- i. reveal the prevalence of SI among special needs students in tertiary institutions in Oyo State;
- ii. examine the socio-academic causes of SI among special needs students in tertiary institutions in Oyo State;
- iii. analyse the socio-academic consequences of SI among special

- iv. needs students in tertiary institutions in Oyo State; and present the socio-academic preventive measures of SI among special needs students in tertiary institutions in Oyo State.

Research Questions

To address this study, the following questions were answered;

1. What is the prevalence of SI among special needs students in tertiary institutions?
2. What socio-academic causes account for SI among special needs students in tertiary institutions?
3. What socio-academic consequences are there from SI of special needs students in tertiary institutions?
4. What socio-academic preventive measures can be adopted in curbing SI among special needs students in tertiary institutions?

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive research design allowing for the explanation of the prevalence of SI among special needs students in tertiary institutions, its socio-academic causes, consequences and preventive measures. The population for this study included all special needs students in tertiary institutions in Oyo State, Nigeria. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to select 200 participants from sampled tertiary institutions. This was based on the condition that only students with special needs such as Hearing Impairment, Visual Impairment, Intellectual Disability, Communication and Behavioural Disorder, Learning Disability, Physical Handicap and Gifted/Talented were considered eligible to participate in the study. Data were collected ethically through an adopted 4-point Likert “**Suicidal Ideations Inventory**” with five sections. While Section A was used for demographic information, B, C, D and E having 43 items were used for collecting data concerning the prevalence of SI, socio-academic causes, consequences and preventive measures respectively. The inventory was validated by experts and subjected to pilot testing for reliability which after Cronbach alpha analysis yielded a coefficient of $\alpha = 0.9$. Data were ethically collected through self-administration of the inventory by the researchers. Percentage, mean score and standard deviation were used for answering research questions.

Results

Research Question One: What is the prevalence of SI among special needs students?

Table 1: Percentage analysis of the Prevalence of SI among Special Needs Students in Tertiary Institutions in Oyo State

SI	Range	Frequency	Percentage
Low	12 - 30	99	49.5
Levels High	31 - 48	101	50.5
Total		200	100

Keys: 12-30=Low Level; 31-48= High Level

Table 1 shows that 99 (49.5%) of these special needs students had a low level of SI while 101 (50.5%) exhibited a high degree of SI. This therefore implies that there is a prevalence of SI among special needs students in tertiary institutions in Oyo State.

Research Question 2:What socio-academic causes account for SI among specialneeds students in tertiary institutions?

Table 2: Mean and Rank analysis of the Socio-academic Causes of SI among Special Needs Students

S/N	Socio-academic causes of SI	MC	PC	FC	NC	Mean	Std. Dev	Ranks
1	Repeated academic failure and underachievement	60	24	8	9	3.3366	.96205	1 st
2	High academic pressure without considering individual differences	15	60	16	10	2.7921	.81629	7 th
3	Bullying, Peer rejection and harassment in school environment	50	19	27	5	3.1287	.97635	3 rd
4	Social isolation and poor peer integration in academic environment	20	46	23	12	2.7327	.91533	8 th
5	Negative attitudes of teachers, low expectations and punitive discipline	58	18	15	10	3.2277	1.03809	2 nd
6	Stress from family related issues to schooling (e.g. Financial, blame and unrealistic expectations)	20	46	18	37	2.2871	1.16049	10 th
7	School demands such as attendance, punctuality, respect for rule and regulations and time management	30	49	19	3	3.0495	.77944	4 th
8	Maltreatment or abuse that affects school functioning	41	28	22	10	2.9901	1.01484	5 th

S/N	Socio-academic causes of SI	MC	PC	FC	NC	Mean	Std. Dev	Ranks
9	Uncertain academic/career pathway and lack of guidance	26	20	19	36	2.3564	1.21313	9 th
10	Stigma, internalization shame and identity conflict within school culture	28	48	14	11	2.9208	.92394	6 th
Weighed Mean						2.88		

The Table 2 explores the socio-academic causes of SI among the 101 participants with high severity of SI among special needs students in tertiary institutions in Oyo State. It shows a mean range between 2.28 and 3.33. It was revealed that the most salient cause was repeated academic failure and underachievement with a mean score (3.33), followed by the negative attitudes of teachers (3.22). Bullying, peer rejection and harassment in school environment is also a major cause with a mean score of 3.12, school demands (3.04), maltreatment and abuse (2.99). Other causes are stigma and internalised shame (2.92), high academic pressure without considering the individual (2.79) and social isolation and poor peer integration (2.73).

Research Question 3: What socio-academic consequences are there from SI of special needs' students in tertiary institutions?

Table 3: Mean and Rank analysis of the Socio-academic Consequences of SI among Special Needs Students

S/N	Socioacademic consequences of SI	MC	PC	FC	NC	Mean	Std. Dev	Ranks
1	Social withdrawal and isolation	66	23	4	8	3.4554	.90027	1 st
2	Stigmatization and labelling from peers or teachers	20	34	18	29	2.4455	1.10883	10 th
3	Breakdown of peer relationships	48	25	18	10	3.0990	1.02474	3 rd
4	Family strain and misunderstanding	25	14	20	42	2.2178	1.22967	11 th
5	Decline and lack of interest in religious / cultural activities	25	27	45	4	2.7228	.88452	7 th
6	Decline in academic performance	52	18	20	11	3.0990	1.07243	4 th

S/N	Socio-academic consequences of SI	MC	PC	FC	NC	Mean	Std. Dev	Ranks
7	Poor attendance and school/class avoidance	32	16	43	10	2.6931	1.02706	8 th
8	Disruption of learning processes	26	45	19	11	2.8515	.93152	5 th
9	Inability to engage in personal study and revisions	46	28	21	6	3.1287	.94513	2 nd
10	Consideration of dropping out	26	19	47	9	2.6139	.96923	9 th
11	Lack of interest in group discussion and other academic engagement	24	45	15	17	2.7525	1.00405	6 th
Weighed Mean						2.83		

Table 3 shows the socio-academic consequences of SI among special needs students with high severity in tertiary institutions in Oyo State revealing a mean range between 2.21 and 3.45. It was shown that the most severe consequence was social withdrawal and isolation with a mean score (3.45) followed by inability to engage in personal study and revisions (3.12). Breakdown of peer relationships is also a major consequence with a mean score of 3.09, decline in academic performance (3.09), disruption of learning process (2.85). Other consequences lack of interest in group discussion and other academic engagement (2.75), decline and lack of interest in religious / cultural activities (2.72) poor attendance and school/class avoidance (2.69).

Research Question 4: What socio-academic preventive measures can be adopted in curbing SI among special needs students in tertiary institutions?

Table 4: Mean and Rank analysis of the Socio-academic preventive Measures of SI among Special Needs Students

S/N	Socio-academic causes of SI	VR	FR	JR	NR	Mean	Std. Dev	Ranks
1	Introduction of inclusive learning/classroom environment	49	13	6	33	2.7723	1.34819	8 th

S/N	Socio-academic causes of SI	VR	FR	JR	NR	Mean	Std. Dev	Ranks
2	Early identification and counselling	49	33	13	6	3.2376	.89609	3 rd
3	Peer support programs	33	40	18	10	2.9505	.95264	6 th
4	Teacher and administrator training on emotional wellbeing	51	21	13	16	3.0594	1.12979	4 th
5	Parental involvement and education	31	18	37	15	2.6436	1.07317	9 th
6	Policies against bullying	56	22	15	8	3.2475	.98393	1 st
7	Flexibility in academics and support	29	26	40	6	2.9703	2.12817	5 th
8	Program for social skills and development	23	49	23	6	2.8812	.82810	7 th
9	Access to mental health services in schools	53	25	17	6	3.2376	.93966	2 nd
10	Increased extra curricular engagement	20	25	43	13	2.5149	.95513	10 th
Weighed Mean						2.95		

The Table 4 shows the preventive measures against SI among special needs students in tertiary institutions in Oyo State. The table shows a mean range between 2.51 and 3.24. The majority of the respondents recommended strongly that provisions of policies against bullying is the most effective preventive measure with a mean score (3.24) which was followed by the Access to mental health services in schools with a mean score of 3.23. Early identification and counselling (3.23) come third in the ranking, followed by teacher and administrator training on emotional well-being (3.05), flexibility in academics and support (2.97), peer support programs (2.95) and social skills and development (2.88).

Discussions

The study found a prevalence of high SI among a higher percentage of special needs students in tertiary institutions. This establishes the earlier position by Anjit and Nagarajan (2024) who emphasised that students with learning disability in colleges exhibit a high degree of suicidal thought compared to those without learning disability.

Although both studies were conducted in different countries, but the findings are similar which possibly is as a result of the argument that both are third world and developing countries. Also, it is possible that both countries having similar result is because of similarity in their ways of handling special needs students.

The second finding showed that the major socio-academic causes of SI among special needs students in tertiary institutions include repeated academic failure and underachievement, negative attitudes of teachers, bullying, peer rejection and harassment in school environment, school demands, maltreatment and abuse. Also, stigma and internalization shame, high academic pressure without considering the individual and social isolation and poor peer integration are equally prevailing socio-academic causes. This agrees with the position of Abdulganiyu, Abdulateef and Oriola (2023) on that the major causes of SI among tertiary institution students includes frequent academic failure, poor academic finances and academic expectations among other factors.

It is equally found that the major socio-academic consequences of SI among special needs students includes social withdrawal and isolation, inability to engage in personal study and revisions, breakdown of peer relationship, decline in academic performance, disruption of learning process, lack of interest in group discussion and other academic engagement, decline and lack of interest in religious / cultural activities, poor attendance and school/class avoidance. This is consistent with Nwafor et al (2023) who revealed that with SI among special needs students in tertiary institutions, there can easily exhibit anti-social behaviour, poor academic performance, dropout from school and relationship problems among others.

Finally, the most potent socio-academic preventive measure against SI according to the findings in this study includes provisions of policies against bullying, access to mental health services in schools, early identification and counselling, teacher and administrator training on emotional well-being, flexibility in academics and support, peer support programmes, social skills and development.

Furthermore, other preventive measures found are introduction of inclusive learning/classroom environment, program for parental involvement and education and increased extra-curricular engagement for special needs students. This is consistent with the submission of Alfakeh et al (2023); Fadipe and Dauda (2025) who unanimously stated that socio-academic preventive measure against SI needs a collaborative effort between the school and the larger society. In other words, it would be a concern of all stakeholders including family and friends of students having SI.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is evident that SI is prevalent among special needs students in tertiary institutions caused by persistent academic pressure and failure, inappropriate attitude of teachers and peers which could take the form of bullying, abuse and stigmatization. For special needs students in tertiary institutions, the consequences are termination of relationships with peers and family and decline in academic engagement further affecting academic performance. However, SI can be prevented through collaborative efforts of school and the larger society which includes families and other educational stakeholders.

Recommendations

In line with the study objectives and findings, it is recommended that the establishment of counselling services in tertiary institutions be taken seriously by appropriate authorities for students with special needs and such individuals be exposed to periodic counselling sessions. Practices like bullying which can be in form of physical and emotional abuse should be discouraged with the use of pragmatic policies to protect students with special needs in tertiary institutions. There should be a deliberate step to promote inclusion and culture of mutual respect in tertiary institutions. Support programmes that will discourage isolation and enhance a sense of belonging among special needs students be encouraged. Beyond that, periodic training be made to lecturers, administrators, students and parents on the likely socio-academic causes of SI and how they can in their capacity reduce it to the barest possible minimum. Collaborative effort between school and the family be strengthened through regular interaction on how to

improve the socio-academic situation of the special needs students in tertiary institutions. Finally, there should be awareness campaign to stakeholders to make them aware of the prevalence of SI among special needs students in tertiary institutions.

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