

Self-Determination and Learning Environment as Determinants of Life-Skill Education of Inclusive Learning Teachers: A Diagnostic Research Design

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ABSTRACT

Educator capacity for life skills teaching is constrained. The influence of self-determination and learning environment on life-skill education among special education teachers was examined using a diagnostic research design. After analyzing the surveyed data from 143 respondents using the simple random sampling technique, it was revealed that the determinant variables have individual and combined (80.1%) influence on the criterion, supporting the Social Cognitive Theory. Future studies may explore additional factors using mixed-methods approaches, while education authorities may enhance teacher self-determination and learning environments to strengthen life-skill education.

Keywords: *Self-determination, learning environment, determinants of life-skill education, inclusive learning teachers, diagnostic research design*

INTRODUCTION

The Problem and Its Scope

The lack of educator life-skill education among faculty in both special education and mainstream teaching is increasingly recognised as a global concern (Jamil et al., 2024). However, research indicates that educators often feel unprepared to effectively integrate life skills into their teaching practices, thereby limiting learners' holistic development in inclusive and general educational settings (Iqbal, 2025).

In the United States, studies have highlighted that both special and mainstream education teachers report insufficient training in skills (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, educators face difficulties in implementing life skills curricula (Okeke, 2024). In Australia, research has identified gaps in teachers' skills, particularly in inclusive classrooms, where life-skills education is critical for student engagement and independence (Sharma & Sarkar, 2024).

In the Philippine context, the lack of educator life-skill education capacity among faculty in both special and mainstream education remains pronounced (Rivera et al., 2025). Many teachers in the country have limited exposure to structured life skills training and support systems within the school environment (Reyes & Santos, 2023). This gap is evident in both urban and rural schools, affecting the quality of inclusive education and teachers' ability to meet learners' diverse needs (Li & Li, 2023).

The consequences of this capacity gap are significant. Without educators equipped to deliver comprehensive life skills education, learners in both special and mainstream settings may experience delays in personal and social development, which can affect their academic performance, employability, and overall well-being (Rafiq-uz-Zaman, 2023). These consequences highlight the importance of addressing the lack of life skills educator capacity. Hence, the researchers conducted this study.

Significance of the Study

This study supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 - Quality Education by demonstrating how self-determination and a learning environment enhance life skills education for learners with special needs. It reflects

HCDC's vision to empower learners, its mission to provide inclusive, life-skills-oriented education, and its goal to equip educators to foster safe, effective classrooms. Findings may offer policy insights for the Department of Education, guidance for school heads, and practical direction for teachers.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine the influence of self-determination and a learning environment on life-skill education among special education teachers. Specifically, it answered the following objectives:

1. To determine the levels of life-skill education in terms of cognition, attitude, and self-efficacy; self-determination in terms of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and learning environment in terms of teacher approachability, positive peer relationships, and lack of identity safety.
2. To determine the significance of the relationship between Self-determination, and life-skill education, and learning environment, and life-skill education.
3. To determine the significant, distinct, and combined influence of self- determination and earning environment on life-skill education.

Hypotheses:

H01: There is no significant correlation among self-determination, the learning environment, and life-skill education.

H02: There is no significant, distinct, or combined influence of self- determination and the learning environment on life-skill education.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which posits that individual behaviour is part of an inseparable triadic structure in which behaviour, personal factors, and environmental factors constantly influence one another, reciprocally shaping each other (Hardin, 2010).

In this study, self-determination, as indicated by autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Wang et al., 2022), represents the personal factor in the theoretical framework. These components reflect internal motivational processes that influence how individuals initiate and regulate their behavior. The learning environment variable, as indicated by teacher approachability, positive peer responsibility, and psychological safety (Qamar, 2023), corresponds to the environmental factor in the theory. These indicators highlight the contextual and social conditions that shape teaching and learning experiences within the school setting. Lastly, life-skills education, as reflected in cognition, attitude, and self-efficacy (Balaguer et al., 2023), constitutes the behavioral factor in the framework. These dimensions reflect how individuals think, feel, and act in relation to the application and development of life skills.

Overall, integrating these variables provides clearer theoretical grounding by aligning the personal, environmental, and behavioral dimensions within the study's conceptual framework.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research design, study locale, sample, and sampling technique, data-gathering procedure, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative diagnostic research design to examine relationships among variables using numerical data (Ali,2021). Specifically, the design allowed the researcher to determine how self-determination and the learning environment influence life-skill education and to assess the relationships among these independent variables and the dependent variable (Cristea, 2025).

Locale of the study

The researcher conducted the study in the Schools Division of Digos City, Davao del Sur, under the Department of Education. The division implements inclusive education programs, including Special Education (SPED), in public elementary schools and serves learners from diverse backgrounds. Its strong commitment to inclusive and supportive learning environments makes it a suitable setting for examining factors that influence life-skill education.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The study included 143 respondents, which constitutes an adequate sample size for statistical analysis (Hasan & Kumar, 2024). The respondents comprised teachers with more than one year of experience teaching learners with disabilities and permanent positions in public schools in the Digos City Division. Additionally, these participants apply appropriate pedagogical practices in inclusive classrooms.

The researcher used simple random sampling to select participants. This probability sampling technique ensures that every member of the population has an equal and independent chance of selection. Furthermore, it minimizes selection bias, improves representativeness, and enhances the validity and reliability of the findings (Rahman et al., 2022).

Data Gathering Technique

This study used a survey to collect data. The study employed a quantitative method to collect data from a group of respondents through questionnaires to describe attitudes, opinions, behaviours, or characteristics of a population. Researchers use this method to analyze large datasets efficiently and gather standardized information from a relatively large population. It is an efficient source, especially in studies of perceptions, experiences, or social trends. Its advantages include cost-effectiveness, the ability to collect large amounts of data quickly, ease of analysis due to structured responses, and generalizability of findings when the sample is properly selected, making it widely used in social science and educational research (Tin & Bui, 2024).

To gather data, the study used three adapted questionnaires measuring self-determination, the learning environment, and life-skill education, totalling 76 items. The self-determination questionnaire, adapted from Zhang (2023), measures teacher self-determination (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$). The learning environment questionnaire, adapted from Haidari and Karakuş (2019), assesses the learning environment (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$). Lastly, the life skill education questionnaire was adapted from Chen and Liu (2020) and measures teacher capacity for life-skill education (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.96$). These instruments were adapted, modified, and validated to suit the study's objectives and the respondents. The researcher utilized a Likert scale, and reliability testing indicated that all instruments were highly reliable.

Data Analysis Techniques

This study employed three analyses: descriptive, correlation, and regression. Descriptive, correlation, and regression analyses are key statistical techniques used sequentially in research (Selvamuthu & Das, 2024). Descriptive analysis summarises data through averages, frequencies, and percentages (Baruah, 2025). Correlation analysis examines the strength and direction of relationships between variables without implying causation (Murdock, 2022). Regression analysis models the effect of independent variables on a dependent variable, enabling hypothesis testing and prediction (Kulaylat et al., 2023). Together, they provide a structured approach from data description to explanation and forecasting (Jiang et al., 2025).

The following table contains the range of means, descriptive level, and interpretation of each variable. Specifically, it measures the descriptive levels of self-determination, the learning environment, and the capacity for life-skill education.

<i>Scale</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Self-Determination</i>	<i>Learning Environment</i>	<i>Life-Skill Education</i>
3. 25 – 4.00	Very High	Very Strong	Very Good	Very Good

2.50 - 3.24	High	Strong	Good	Good
1.75- 2.49	Low	Weak	Poor	Poor
1.00 – 1.74	Very Low	Very Weak	Very Poor	Very Poor

Standard Deviation Value Ranges and Interpretation:

<i>SD Value Range</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<0.50	Highly Consistent Responses	Strong Uniform Perception
0.51-1.00	Moderately Consistent Responses	Acceptable Consistency
1.01-1.50	Low Consistency Responses	Differing Views or Experiences
>1.50	Very Low Consistent Responses	High Variability and Lack of Consensus

The study used a standard descriptive guide for interpreting the Pearson r-value, as outlined by Guilford (1956). The following scale was applied:

<i>Computed r</i>	<i>Descriptive Interpretation</i>
+/- 1.00	Perfect correlation
Between +/-0.75-+/-0.99	High correlation
Between +/-0.51-+/-0.74	Moderate high correlation
Between +/-0.31-+/-0.50	Moderate low correlation
Between +/-0.01-+/-0.30	Low correlation
0.00	No correlation

The study used a standard descriptive guide for interpreting Pearson's r-values, largely based on Guilford (1956). It adopted Cohen's (1988) and Hair et al.'s (2019) guidelines for interpreting the strength of Beta (B) coefficients.

<i>β Value Range</i>	<i>Strength of Influence</i>
+/-0.00-+/-0.09	Very Weak
+/-0.10-+/-0.29	Weak
+/-0.30-+/-0.49	Moderate
+/-0.50-+/-0.69	Strong
+/-0.70 and above	Very Strong

Ethical Considerations

The researcher strictly observed ethical standards. The researcher obtained data from all respondents, who signed an agreement indicating their voluntary participation after being fully informed of the study's purpose. Confidentiality was ensured by not requiring respondents to write their names on the questionnaires. The researcher also secured participants' permission before conducting the study and treated all responses with respect and integrity. Rigour was maintained through the careful development of the research proposal and its evaluation and critique by a panel of experts. Furthermore, the researcher obtained approval from the SMILE ethics review board before conducting the study.

RESULTS

This section includes descriptive, correlational, and regression analyses, along with tabular presentations and the corresponding analysis and interpretation of the statistical results. It ends with a summary of findings.

Descriptive Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics. It also includes the levels of variables involved, namely self-determination, a learning environment, and life-skill education, with their respective indicators. It also includes the sample size, standard deviations, mean, and descriptive level.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (N= 143)

Variables	Sample Size	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
Self-Determination	143	0.26	3.83	Very High
<i>Autonomy</i>		0.27	3.84	<i>Very High</i>
<i>Competence</i>		0.32	3.82	<i>Very High</i>
<i>Relatedness</i>		0.32	3.83	<i>Very High</i>
Learning Environment	143	0.18	3.90	Very High
<i>Teacher Approachability</i>		0.22	3.89	<i>Very High</i>
<i>Positive Peer Responsibility</i>		0.2	3.89	<i>Very High</i>
<i>Lack of Identity Safety</i>		0.16	3.93	<i>Very High</i>
Life-Skill Education	143	0.17	3.88	Very High
<i>Cognition</i>		0.15	3.92	<i>Very High</i>
<i>Attitude</i>		0.22	3.87	<i>Very High</i>
<i>Self-Efficacy</i>		0.2	3.87	<i>Very High</i>

Table 1 shows that self-determination obtained a mean score of 3.83, which is described as very high. It indicates that self-determination is very strong. The table also shows that all indicators obtained mean scores within the very high mean scores. The corresponding Standard Deviation of 0.26 indicates that, as highly consistent responses, it signifies a strong and uniform perception. Furthermore, the learning environment received a mean score of 3.90, which is considered very good. It indicates that a learning environment is always very good. The table shows that all indicators obtained mean scores within the very high range. The corresponding standard deviation of 0.18 indicates that, as highly consistent responses, it signifies a strong and uniform perception. Finally, the life-skill education obtained a mean score of 3.88, which is described as very high. It indicates that life-skill education is very good. The table also shows that all indicators obtained mean scores within the very high mean scores. The corresponding Standard deviation of 0.17 indicates that, as highly consistent responses, it signifies a strong and uniform perception.

Self-determination, learning environment, and life-skill education are all interpreted at a very high level, indicating that each variable is strongly and consistently very high. Among them, the learning environment appears to be the most consistently evident, while self-determination and life-skill education closely follow, with similarly strong manifestations.

Correlation Results

Table 2 shows the correlational results. It also contains the independent and dependent variables. In addition, the table presents the corresponding r-values, p-values, the decision on the hypotheses, and the corresponding interpretation.

Table 2. Correlation Table (N= 143)

Variables	Life-Skill Education			
	r	p-value	Decision on H ₀	Interpretation
Self-Determination	.764	.000	Reject	High Positive, Significant Correlation
Learning Environment	.891	.000	Reject	High Positive, Significant Correlation

Level of Significance: 0.05

Decision Rule: Reject H₀ if $p < 0.05$

The table specifically shows the correlation between self-determination and life-skill education, with a corresponding p-value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis. It indicates that the correlation is significant. The r-value of .764 indicates a high correlation; it implies that for every unit change in self-determination, there is a corresponding unit change in life-skill education. Moreover, a learning environment with the corresponding p-value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis. It indicates that the correlation is significant. The r-value of .891 indicates a high correlation; it implies that for every unit change in learning environment, there is a corresponding unit change in capacity for life-skill education.

Both self-determination and a learning environment show significant and strong relationships with life-skill education. However, the learning environment shows a stronger relationship than self-determination.

Regression Results

Table 3 is the regression table. It contains the determinant variables and the criterion variable. It also includes the unstandardized Beta coefficients, the standardised Beta coefficients, the standard error, the t-value, the p-value, the decision on the null hypothesis, and the corresponding interpretation.

Table 3. Regression Table (N = 143)

Variables	Life-Skill Education						
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Decision on H ₀	Interpretation
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.		
(Constant)	.596	.144		4.129	.000	-	-
Self-Determination	.101	.042	.151	2.422	.017	Reject	Positive Significant Influence
Learning Environment	.743	.060	.771	12.397	.000	Reject	Positive Significant Influence

Model Summary:

$R = 0.895$ | $R^2 = 0.801$ | $F(2,140) = 282.611$ | $p = 0.000$

Level of Significance: 0.05

Decision Rule: Reject H₀ if $p < 0.05$

Specifically, the table shows that the self-determination variable obtained a standardised beta coefficient of .151. The corresponding p-value is 0.017, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis. These results indicate that self-determination contributes 0.151 to the life-skill education, a significant contribution. Implies that for every unit increase in self-determination, there is a corresponding 0.151 unit increase in life-skill education. Moreover, the learning environment variable obtained a standardised beta coefficient of 0.771. The corresponding p-value is 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis. These results indicate that the learning environment contributes 0.771 to the life-skill education, a significant contribution. Implies that for every unit increase in the learning environment, there is a corresponding 0.771-unit increase in life-skill education. Both self-determination and a learning environment significantly influence life-skill education. However, a learning environment has a much stronger impact than self-determination.

Summary of Findings

The statistical results specifically revealed:

1. Self-determination and learning environment significantly correlate with life skill education capacity.
2. Both individual and collective levels of self-determination, together with the learning environment, significantly influence life-skills education.

DISCUSSIONS

This section discusses the results of the correlational and regression analyses. The discussions aim to highlight how the study's results support previous findings. Here, the conclusions and recommendations, based on the results and discussions, are also presented.

Correlation of Self-Determination and Learning Environment

with Life-Skill Education

This study found that self-determination and the learning environment are significantly correlated with teachers' capacity to deliver life-skills education. These findings are consistent with Valli and Sheeba (2023), who emphasized that teachers with higher levels of self-determination demonstrate greater motivation, autonomy, and instructional capability in delivering life-skills education in inclusive classrooms. This highlights the importance of internal motivational processes in strengthening teachers' instructional effectiveness (Khun-Inkeeree et al., 2022).

Similarly, the present findings support those of Rafiq-uz-Zaman et al. (2025), who reported that a supportive learning environment significantly enhances special education teachers' teaching efficacy. Their study underscores that positive environmental conditions, such as collaboration, support systems, and an inclusive school culture, are essential for facilitating the effective implementation of life-skills programs. Together, these studies reinforce the idea that both personal and environmental factors interact to shape teachers' instructional capacity.

Life-Skill Education as Influenced by Self-Determination

and Learning Environment

These findings are also supported by Passanisi et al. (2024), who found that teacher autonomy and supportive classroom environments significantly enhance the implementation of life-skills education for learners with special needs. Likewise, Merdiaty and Sulistiasih (2024) reported that both intrinsic motivation and a positive learning environment are strong predictors of teachers' effectiveness in delivering life-skills instruction. These converging results suggest that self-determination and environmental support jointly strengthen teachers' professional practice.

In contrast, the present findings differ from those of Strnadová et al. (2024), who reported that teaching strategies and peer support were stronger determinants of students' life-skills development than teacher self-determination and the learning environment, and found no significant direct relationship between these variables and life-skills capacity. This discrepancy may be attributed to differences in research focus: their study emphasized student outcomes, whereas the present study focuses on teachers' instructional capacity in inclusive classrooms.

Similarly, Gupta et al. (2024) found that although self-determination and learning environment are important factors, they did not significantly influence teachers' capacity to implement life-skills education in certain contexts. Their findings suggest that other factors, such as teacher training, institutional support, and teaching experience, may play a more decisive role. However, it is important to note that Gupta et al. conducted their study in Bangladesh. In contrast, the present study is situated in the Philippine educational context, where differences in policy implementation, school resources, and inclusive education practices may account for variations in findings.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that self-determination influences a learning environment, and that, individually, a learning environment is significant; collectively, both exert a strong influence (80.1%). Hence, the Social Cognitive Theory, which posits that individual behaviour is part of an inseparable triadic structure in which behaviour, personal factors, and environmental factors constantly influence one another, is affirmed.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, the study recommends the following:

1. Future studies may explore additional variables that could account for the remaining 19.9% of the variance in life-skills education outcomes, such as instructional strategies, teacher competence, learner motivation, and school support systems.
2. A mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative techniques such as interviews or focus group discussions, is recommended to identify emerging factors and to provide richer, more in-depth insights into the experiences and practices of teachers in life-skills education.
3. The Department of Education and school administrators are encouraged to implement programs that strengthen teacher self-determination, professional development, and instructional support, while also fostering positive learning environments that further enhance educators' capacity for effective life-skills instruction.

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