Psychological Research in Individuals with Exceptional Needs

OPEN PEER-REVIEW REPORT

Identifying the Cognitive and Emotional Components of Self-Advocacy in Exceptional Learners

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the sentence, "In the context of exceptional learners, self-advocacy refers to the process by which individuals recognize their own needs, communicate those needs effectively, and seek necessary accommodations," it would be beneficial to provide a more precise definition of "exceptional learners" early in the introduction, as this term can encompass a wide range of conditions (e.g., disabilities, giftedness, twice-exceptional learners).

The study mentions that "29 exceptional learners were recruited through online platforms." However, it does not specify which platforms were used or whether any inclusion/exclusion criteria were applied. Providing more details on recruitment strategies (e.g., specific forums, disability advocacy groups, educational institutions) would enhance transparency.

While theoretical saturation is mentioned, a justification for why 29 participants were sufficient for this study's scope would strengthen the methodological rigor. You could reference qualitative research standards or previous studies with similar sample sizes in self-advocacy research.

The section states, "Resilience in adversity was another key emotional factor, as participants described their ability to adapt to challenges and learn from failure." Consider linking this discussion to existing psychological resilience frameworks to provide greater theoretical grounding.

The statement, "Some schools make it really easy to get accommodations, while others make it feel like you're asking for too much," suggests variability in institutional support. A more systematic analysis of institutional differences (e.g., policies, teacher training) would strengthen this point.

The study identifies "online networks and digital advocacy resources" as beneficial. However, it does not discuss potential risks (e.g., misinformation, privacy concerns, accessibility issues). A balanced discussion of both benefits and limitations would improve the comprehensiveness of this section.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the document.

1.2.   Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The introduction effectively establishes the importance of self-advocacy, but it lacks a clear articulation of the specific gap in the existing literature. Consider explicitly stating what aspect of self-advocacy in exceptional learners has not been sufficiently explored (e.g., cognitive versus emotional interplay, digital advocacy tools).

The statement, "Despite growing recognition of the importance of self-advocacy, many exceptional learners continue to face barriers in asserting their educational rights," would benefit from additional citations to support this claim, particularly with recent empirical studies from 2022–2025.

The section states, "NVivo software was used to conduct thematic analysis," but does not specify the coding process. It would be helpful to include details on how themes were identified (e.g., deductive or inductive coding, inter-coder reliability checks, number of coding cycles).

The demographic description provides percentages but does not contextualize them. For example, stating, "The participants included 16 males (55.2%) and 13 females (44.8%)," could be followed by a comparison to broader statistics on gender distribution in self-advocacy studies, if available.

The quote from a participant, "I constantly assess my progress and tweak my approach if something isn't working," illustrates metacognition. However, further discussion is needed on how this aligns with existing theoretical models of metacognition and self-regulated learning.

The discussion effectively summarizes findings but should more explicitly compare them to prior studies. For instance, how do these findings confirm, challenge, or extend the work of Pfeifer et al. (2020) on self-advocacy in STEM students?

The section states, "Institutional policies should be revised to ensure that accommodations and advocacy resources are easily accessible." It would be useful to suggest specific policy recommendations, such as mandatory self-advocacy training or educator workshops.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the document.

2.   Revised

Editor's decision: Accepted.
Editor in Chief's decision: Accepted.