

Impact of Student Support Services on Learning Outcomes of Learners with Specific Learning Disabilities: A Mixed-Methods Study from Delhi Schools

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Abstract

Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) pose persistent challenges to academic achievement, social participation, and self-concept, particularly when school systems are insufficiently equipped to provide structured and responsive support. The present study examined the impact of student support services on learning outcomes among learners with SLD in Delhi schools, with special attention to tutoring, counselling, assistive technology, teacher perceptions, service quality, and teacher training. A mixed-methods design was adopted, combining quantitative evidence with qualitative contextualization. The analytic sample comprised 400 participants, including 235 learners with SLD, 127 teachers, and 38 parents drawn from government and private schools. The study used a stratified random sampling approach and employed self-developed instruments, including a Student Support Services Perception Scale, a Student Support Services Effectiveness Scale, and a semi-structured interview schedule. The findings showed that learners who received tutoring demonstrated significantly higher academic performance than those who did not. Learners who received counselling reported significantly better social skills, while learners who used assistive technology showed significantly higher self-esteem. However, service format and frequency were not consistently associated with stronger outcomes. Teacher gender significantly influenced perceptions of support-service effectiveness, while school type did not. Specialized training emerged as a significant factor in both perceived effectiveness and teacher confidence. Exploratory analyses further suggested that support-service quality differentiated academic and social outcomes more clearly than self-esteem. The study concludes that student support services are meaningful contributors to positive learning outcomes for learners with SLD, but their effects depend more on implementation quality and teacher preparedness than on service format or simple dosage alone.

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1. Introduction

Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) are neurodevelopmental conditions that substantially interfere with the acquisition and use of reading, writing, reasoning, listening, speaking, or mathematical skills, despite otherwise adequate educational opportunity and intellectual potential (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Fletcher et al., 2019). Learners with SLD often experience a striking gap between their potential and their academic performance, and this gap may extend into social functioning, self-esteem, and later educational transitions (Mather & Wendling, 2012; Swanson et al., 2013). In contemporary inclusive education, the question is no longer whether these learners can succeed, but whether schools can organize sufficiently responsive support structures to make such success possible.

Student support services form a crucial bridge between the learning needs of children with SLD and the demands of mainstream schooling. These services may include specialized tutoring, counselling, assistive technology, individualized accommodations, and structured teacher support. Prior scholarship has emphasized that such supports can strengthen academic engagement, socio-emotional adjustment, and educational persistence when they are tailored to learner profiles

rather than delivered as generic remedial add-ons (Edyburn, 2013; Lerner & Johns, 2015; Dreyer et al., 2020). In this sense, support services are not peripheral welfare measures; they are part of the instructional architecture of inclusive schooling.

The Indian context makes this issue especially urgent. Although policy and legislative developments have strengthened the formal recognition of disability rights, learners with SLD continue to encounter delayed identification, variable access to special educators, uneven teacher preparedness, and limited availability of pedagogical and technological accommodations. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, and the National Education Policy 2020 all signal important commitments to inclusion, yet the translation of these commitments into school-level practice remains uneven (MHRD, 2009; Government of India, 2016; Ministry of Education, 2020). The thesis chapters repeatedly situate this concern within a broader Indian landscape marked by stigma, inadequate awareness, and disparities in resource access.

Existing literature provides valuable insight into the nature of SLD and the broad promise of intervention, but a number of gaps remain. The available work often isolates one dimension at a time, such as diagnosis, academic remediation, teacher training, or family support, rather than examining how multiple school-based support services collectively relate to learner outcomes. There is also a shortage of research that simultaneously addresses academic, social, and self-related outcomes, particularly in Indian school settings. Further, the literature reviewed in the thesis identifies the need for more context-sensitive and integrative studies that bring together outcome measurement and implementation realities.

The present study responds to that gap by examining how tutoring, counselling, and assistive technology relate to academic performance, social skills, and self-esteem among learners with SLD in Delhi schools, while also considering teacher perceptions, support-service quality, school-level factors, and training-related conditions. Rather than reducing inclusive support to a single intervention type, the study investigates student support services as a multidimensional school phenomenon. In doing so, it contributes evidence relevant to inclusive practice, teacher preparation, and school policy in the education of learners with SLD.

2. Review of Related Literature

The literature reviewed for the thesis demonstrates that support for learners with SLD has evolved across multiple but often disconnected lines of inquiry. Internationally, research has examined neurobiological foundations, inclusive pedagogy, assistive technology, teacher preparation, family support, and socio-emotional well-being. Recent work has also strengthened the evidence base for targeted interventions, including reading support, phonics-based instruction, technology-mediated learning, and higher education inclusion (Dumitru et al., 2024; Dunn et al., 2024). At the same time, the literature emphasizes that support must be interpreted as more than a technical intervention; it is embedded within classroom culture, teacher expertise, and learner self-efficacy.

A major strand of prior work concerns academic intervention. Tutoring and remedial instruction have long been associated with gains in reading, writing, and mathematics among learners with SLD. Fletcher et al. (2019) and Swanson et al. (2013) highlight that targeted instructional intervention is central to the educational response to SLD, especially when linked to specific processing needs rather than undifferentiated repetition. The thesis literature review also refers to international and Indian studies suggesting that structured instructional support can produce measurable academic improvement, especially when intervention is explicit, focused, and sustained.

A second strand focuses on socio-emotional support. Learners with SLD frequently experience frustration, anxiety, social isolation, bullying, and reduced self-belief, making counselling and relational support critical components of schooling rather than optional services (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; Gerber et al., 1992). The thesis material repeatedly emphasizes that emotional well-being and social integration are deeply tied to educational functioning. In this view, counselling operates not only as a therapeutic intervention but also as a school-based mechanism for strengthening peer relationships, communication, coping, and resilience.

Assistive technology has emerged as another important domain. Edyburn (2013) argues that assistive tools can create alternate pathways for access, participation, and expression, particularly for learners whose disability interferes with conventional print-based schooling. The Indian and international literature summarized in the thesis suggests that technology can be meaningful not only academically but also psychologically, by supporting autonomy and competence. Yet long-term adoption, classroom integration, and contextual suitability remain underexplored, especially in low-resource or linguistically diverse settings.

Teacher preparedness is a recurring theme across the thesis literature. Studies cited in the uploaded chapters suggest that professional development in inclusive pedagogy and SLD-specific instructional understanding can improve classroom participation and support responsiveness (Dalal & Pande, 2020; Lerner & Johns, 2015). The literature also indicates that access to services alone is not sufficient; support becomes educationally meaningful when teachers understand how to identify needs, adapt instruction, and coordinate interventions. This issue is particularly significant in India, where teacher preparation in inclusive practice remains uneven.

Parental and community involvement forms another key, though more variable, literature stream. Family engagement has often been presented as a reinforcing factor that helps sustain school-based interventions at home and strengthens advocacy for accommodations and support. However, the literature reviewed in the thesis also suggests that the effects of

parental involvement are context-sensitive and mediated by awareness, school-home communication, and local educational culture. This makes parental involvement important, but not automatically uniform in impact.

Overall, the thesis review identifies a clear gap: relatively few studies in Indian school contexts examine multiple support services together while linking them to a range of outcomes that includes academic performance, social skills, and self-esteem. Fewer still connect learner outcomes with implementation conditions such as teacher training, support quality, and school-level context. The present study was designed to address this gap through an integrated mixed-methods approach in Delhi schools.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives: to examine the impact of tutoring on academic performance among learners with SLD; to evaluate the effect of counselling on social skills; to assess the influence of assistive technology on self-esteem; to identify differences in teachers' perceptions of support-service effectiveness by gender and school type; to investigate the relationship between the frequency and quality of support services and learner outcomes; to explore barriers and facilitators affecting service implementation; to analyze the impact of teacher training on support effectiveness; and to assess the role of parental involvement in relation to service effectiveness and learning outcomes. These objectives were derived directly from the thesis design and guided both the statistical and interpretive components of the study.

4. Method

4.1 Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design. This design was selected because the impact of student support services is both an outcome question and an implementation question. Quantitative data were used to examine differences and associations in academic performance, social skills, self-esteem, and perceptions of support services, while qualitative interviews and focus groups were included to capture experiences, barriers, facilitators, and service-delivery realities in school contexts. The design integrated both strands at the level of interpretation so that the findings would be statistically grounded and contextually meaningful.

4.2 Participants and Sampling

The study was conducted in Delhi and focused on school-based support ecosystems involving learners with SLD, teachers, parents, and administrators in government and private school settings. A stratified random sampling approach was adopted to ensure subgroup representation across gender, school type, and related characteristics. The planned sample size was approximately 400 to 500 participants; the final analytic profile presented in Chapter 4 included 235 students, 127 teachers, and 38 parents, totaling 400 participants. Among the students, 53.19% were male and 46.81% female; 52.34% were enrolled in private schools and 47.66% in government schools. Among teachers, 53.54% were male and 46.46% female, with 55.91% reporting special education training.

4.3 Instruments

Three principal instruments were used. The Student Support Services Perception Scale was a self-developed 5-point Likert instrument initially containing 50 items and reduced to 25 after factor-based refinement, with a reported Cronbach's alpha of .87. The Student Support Services Effectiveness Scale was an objective-format instrument initially containing 47 items and reduced to 22, with a reported Cronbach's alpha of .89. A semi-structured interview schedule was also developed for the qualitative strand, validated through Lawshe's Content Validity Ratio procedure with 14 expert responses and a final CVR index of .753. The thesis also reports the use of EFA/CFA-related procedures in tool finalization through SPSS 28.0 and IBM AMOS 23.

4.4 Procedure

Data collection proceeded in phases. After conceptualization and literature review, permissions were obtained from participating schools, participants were informed about the study, and confidentiality and voluntary participation were emphasized. Quantitative tools were administered in participant-friendly formats, including paper and electronic modes where needed. Qualitative data were collected through interviews and focus groups with subsets of teachers, parents, learners, and administrators. Interviews generally lasted 30 to 40 minutes and were conducted in distraction-free settings or through feasible remote modes. The qualitative component was intended to explain practical realities behind the quantitative trends, including implementation barriers and enabling conditions.

4.5 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the sample and service profile. Inferential analyses included independent-samples *t* tests, one-way ANOVA, two-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression. The overall objective-wise statistical plan covered the 22 null hypotheses framed in the thesis. Because some later implementation-related analyses in Chapter 4 relied on derived classifications, proxy indicators, or simulated completion of missing values, these are treated more cautiously in the present paper than the core direct-comparison findings for tutoring, counselling, assistive technology, teacher perception, and specialized training.

5. Results

5.1 Profile and Availability of Services

The sample profile indicates that student support services were present but unevenly distributed across participants. Of the 235 learners with SLD, 121 reported receiving tutoring, 103 reported receiving counselling, and 108 reported using assistive technology. Among tutoring users, one-on-one tutoring (68) was slightly more common than group tutoring (53). Among counselling users, group counselling (53) and individual counselling (50) were nearly balanced. The most frequently reported assistive technology types included organizer apps (66), speech-to-text (62), reading apps (57), and text-to-speech tools (50). These distributions indicate that support access was substantial but far from universal.

5.2 Tutoring and Academic Performance

Tutoring was associated with significantly stronger academic performance. Learners who received tutoring had a mean academic score of 74.44 (SD = 11.29), compared with 63.21 (SD = 13.64) for those who did not receive tutoring, $t = 5.33$, $p = 2.45 \times 10^{-7}$. This is one of the clearest outcome patterns in the dataset and suggests that tutoring substantially supports academic achievement among learners with SLD. At the same time, no statistically significant difference emerged between one-on-one tutoring ($M = 75.34$, $SD = 10.91$) and group tutoring ($M = 74.04$, $SD = 11.66$), $t = 0.73$, $p = .469$. Similarly, tutoring frequency was only weakly and non-significantly related to academic score after tutoring, $r = .10$, $p = .277$. Taken together, these results suggest that access to tutoring matters more than frequency or format alone.

5.3 Counselling and Social Skills

Counselling showed a strong association with social skills. Learners who received counselling recorded a mean social skills score of 72.36 (SD = 10.85), whereas those who did not receive counselling recorded a mean of 60.19 (SD = 11.23), $t = 8.51$, $p = 2.28 \times 10^{-15}$. This indicates a large and statistically robust difference favoring counselling recipients. However, no statistically significant difference was found between individual counselling ($M = 72.04$, $SD = 11.35$) and group counselling ($M = 73.06$, $SD = 10.48$), $t = -0.67$, $p = .502$. The counselling findings therefore mirror the tutoring findings in an important respect: the presence of the support appears more consequential than the particular delivery format.

5.4 Assistive Technology and Self-Esteem

Assistive technology use was associated with significantly higher self-esteem. Learners who used assistive technology had a mean self-esteem score of 78.24 (SD = 9.14), compared with 68.29 (SD = 10.65) among non-users, $t = 6.59$, $p = 2.91 \times 10^{-10}$. This suggests that assistive technology may contribute not only to academic access but also to competence, autonomy, and self-confidence. Yet neither the type of assistive technology nor the frequency of its use yielded statistically significant differences. The ANOVA comparing different assistive technology types returned $F = 0.33$, $p = .804$, while the correlation between assistive-technology frequency and self-esteem was negligible, $r = -.021$, $p = .8325$. These results indicate that having an assistive tool available may matter more than its specific type or frequency of use.

5.5 Teacher Perceptions of Support-Service Effectiveness

Teachers' perceptions of support-service effectiveness varied significantly by gender but not by school type. Female teachers reported a higher mean perception score ($M = 105.70$, $SD = 13.18$) than male teachers ($M = 97.25$, $SD = 18.54$), $t = 2.99$, $p = .0034$. By contrast, the difference between private-school teachers ($M = 102.30$, $SD = 17.24$) and government-school teachers ($M = 99.79$, $SD = 16.26$) was not statistically significant, $t = 0.844$, $p = .4006$. A two-way ANOVA further showed a significant main effect of gender, $F = 8.75$, $p = .004$, but no significant main effect of school type, $F = 0.87$, $p = .352$, and no significant interaction between gender and school type, $F = 2.96$, $p = .088$. These results suggest that perception of support effectiveness is more closely related to teacher-level characteristics than to school sector alone.

5.6 Combined, Quality, and School-Level Analyses

The study also explored whether tutoring frequency, counselling receipt, and assistive technology use jointly predicted performance change. Multiple regression showed no significant effects for tutoring frequency ($p = .7529$), counselling receipt ($p = .6772$), or assistive-technology use ($p = .7450$) when entered together as predictors of performance change. Similarly, perceived service quality was not significantly correlated with performance change, $r = -.030$, $p = .6509$. However, exploratory ANOVA results suggested that support-service quality significantly differentiated academic performance ($p = .0289$) and social skills ($p = .0417$), but not self-esteem ($p = .9467$). Because these quality-level comparisons were based on manually classified and proportionally assigned support-quality categories in the thesis dataset, they are best interpreted as suggestive rather than definitive.

At the school level, specialized training emerged as a more meaningful factor than simple resource availability. A two-way ANOVA showed that special education training had a statistically significant effect on teachers' perceived support-service effectiveness, $F = 9.060$, $p = .003$, whereas resource availability did not, $F = 0.358$, $p = .700$, and the interaction was also non-significant, $p = .200$. Likewise, teachers with specialized training reported significantly higher confidence scores ($M = 71.76$, $SD = 7.40$) than untrained teachers ($M = 67.63$, $SD = 8.73$), $t = 2.826$, $p = .0056$. By contrast, access to professional development opportunities alone did not significantly affect perceived effectiveness, $F = 1.153$, $p = .3191$. These results indicate that specialized training is more consequential than generalized or nominal training access.

5.7 Parental Involvement

Exploratory parental-involvement analyses did not show significant effects. Performance change was nearly identical for high-involvement ($M = 19.24$, $SD = 10.61$) and low-involvement groups ($M = 19.23$, $SD = 12.26$), $t = 0.011$, $p = .9915$. The correlation between parental-involvement level and performance change was very weak and non-significant, $r = .098$, $p = .1332$. However, the thesis notes that valid involvement entries were limited and that missing involvement levels were filled from a predefined distribution for one correlation analysis. Accordingly, these parental-involvement findings should be read as exploratory and not as conclusive evidence of absence of effect.

Table 1
Participant Profile and Availability of Student Support Services

Indicator	n / value	Percentage / detail
Total analytic sample	400	235 learners with SLD; 127 teachers; 38 parents
Learners with SLD	235	Core learner-outcome group
Teachers	127	Teacher perception and training analyses
Parents	38	Parent-related exploratory strand
Student gender	125 male; 110 female	53.19% male; 46.81% female
Student school type	123 private; 112 government	52.34% private; 47.66% government
Tutoring received	121 of 235	Support access substantial but not universal
Counselling received	103 of 235	Socio-emotional support subgroup
Assistive technology used	108 of 235	Technology-access subgroup
Teachers with special education training	71 of 127	55.91% trained

Note. SLD = Specific Learning Disabilities. Values are drawn from the study profile and results narrative in the source manuscript.

Table 2
Primary Outcome Comparisons for Student Support Services

Support service	Outcome	Support group M (SD)	Comparison group M (SD)	t	p	Interpretation
Tutoring	Academic performance	74.44 (11.29)	63.21 (13.64)	5.33	2.45×10^{-7}	Significant; tutoring group higher
Counselling	Social skills	72.36 (10.85)	60.19 (11.23)	8.51	2.28×10^{-15}	Significant; counselling group higher
Assistive technology	Self-esteem	78.24 (9.14)	68.29 (10.65)	6.59	2.91×10^{-10}	Significant; assistive-technology users higher

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation. The comparison group refers to learners who did not receive/use the corresponding support service.

Table 3
Supplementary Format, Frequency, Teacher-Level, and Family-Level Findings

Domain	Specific comparison or association	Statistic	Journal interpretation
Tutoring format	One-on-one vs. group tutoring	$t = 0.73, p = .469$	No significant format difference
Tutoring frequency	Frequency with academic score after tutoring	$r = .10, p = .277$	Weak and non-significant
Counselling format	Individual vs. group counselling	$t = -0.67, p = .502$	No significant format difference
Assistive technology type	Different assistive-technology types	$F = 0.33, p = .804$	No significant type difference
Assistive technology frequency	Frequency with self-esteem	$r = -.021, p = .8325$	Negligible association
Teacher gender	Female vs. male teacher perception	$t = 2.99, p = .0034; F = 8.75, p = .004$	Significant teacher-gender effect
School type	Private vs. government teacher perception	$t = 0.844, p = .4006$	No significant sector effect
Specialized training	Training effect on perceived effectiveness/confidence	$F = 9.060, p = .003; t = 2.826, p = .0056$	Specialized training meaningful
Parental involvement	High vs. low involvement and performance change	$t = 0.011, p = .9915; r = .098, p = .1332$	Exploratory and non-significant

Note. Some supplementary analyses in the source manuscript are described as exploratory because of derived classifications or reconstructed values.

6. Discussion

The findings of the present study support a central conclusion: student support services matter for learners with SLD, but the strength of their effects depends less on delivery format or simple dosage and more on access, instructional responsiveness, and implementation quality. Across the clearest outcome comparisons, the study found that tutoring was associated with better academic performance, counselling with stronger social skills, and assistive technology with higher self-esteem. This pattern supports a multidimensional view of learning outcomes and aligns with scholarship that conceptualizes SLD support as academic, psychosocial, and participatory rather than purely remedial (Edyburn, 2013; Fletcher et al., 2019; Swanson et al., 2013).

The tutoring findings are especially instructive. Students who received tutoring performed significantly better than those who did not, yet one-on-one and group formats did not differ significantly, nor did tutoring frequency show a significant correlation with academic performance. This suggests that the main gain may arise from structured and targeted support itself rather than from the specific organizational form in which it is delivered. In practical terms, this means schools may have flexibility in service design as long as the support is intentional, responsive, and pedagogically sound.

A similar pattern is visible in counselling. Learners who received counselling had markedly higher social skills scores, but individual and group counselling formats did not differ meaningfully. This reinforces the idea that socio-emotional support is indispensable for learners with SLD and that the core benefit may lie in relational, guided, and psychologically supportive intervention rather than format-specific packaging. In inclusive schooling, social competence is not secondary to academic achievement; it is part of the condition that makes academic participation sustainable.

Assistive technology also demonstrated a meaningful positive relationship with self-esteem. The use of assistive tools was associated with significantly higher self-esteem, but neither the type nor frequency of technology use showed a reliable relationship with self-esteem outcomes. This suggests that assistive technology may operate as an enabling condition, restoring learner confidence and agency by reducing barriers to participation. The psychological value of assistive technology may therefore lie in what it permits learners to do, rather than in the technical identity of the tool itself.

The teacher-level results deepen the interpretation of these findings. Female teachers reported higher perceived effectiveness of support services than male teachers, while school type did not significantly shape perceptions. More importantly, specialized training was significantly associated both with higher perceived effectiveness and with stronger teacher confidence. This is one of the most consequential findings of the study. It suggests that the educational

effectiveness of support services is not secured simply by the nominal presence of resources, but by the preparedness of those who must translate those resources into instructional practice. This insight resonates strongly with the broader literature on inclusive education in India, which repeatedly identifies teacher preparedness as a major challenge.

The implementation-related results also warrant reflection. Exploratory analyses suggested that support-service quality differentiates academic and social outcomes more clearly than self-esteem, while resource levels and general training access did not show strong independent effects. Although some of these supplementary analyses were constructed through derived categories in the thesis dataset and therefore require caution, they still point in an important direction: the issue may not be resource abundance alone, but how intelligently and consistently support is delivered within schools.

Parental involvement yielded non-significant findings in the available analyses, but these should be interpreted with restraint. The broader literature reviewed in the thesis gives good reason to believe that parental involvement can matter meaningfully for learner support. In the present dataset, however, the measured association was weak, statistically non-significant, and partly constrained by limited and reconstructed involvement data. This likely reflects the difficulty of capturing the quality and character of parental engagement through simple grouping alone. Accordingly, the study does not warrant the conclusion that parents do not matter; rather, it suggests that this relationship was not robustly captured here.

7. Educational Implications

The study has several practical implications for inclusive education. First, schools should treat tutoring, counselling, and assistive technology as central educational supports for learners with SLD rather than as optional add-on services. Each of these supports was associated with a distinct learner outcome domain, indicating that holistic support is more appropriate than a narrow remedial model.

Second, teacher preparation deserves priority. The evidence from this study suggests that specialized training is more decisive than resource availability alone in shaping both perceived effectiveness and teacher confidence. This has direct implications for pre-service teacher education, in-service professional development, and school-level mentoring systems.

Third, school leadership should focus not only on the existence of support services but also on implementation quality. Where support is available but weakly integrated into instructional practice, the expected gains may not materialize. Schools may therefore benefit from clearer service coordination, systematic progress monitoring, and stronger collaboration among teachers, special educators, counsellors, and families.

Finally, policy implementation in the Indian context must move from formal inclusion to quality inclusion. Legal and policy frameworks already provide a foundation, but the educational value of those frameworks depends on trained personnel, school-level planning, culturally responsive practices, and sustained learner-centered support.

8. Limitations

The study has several limitations. It was delimited to Delhi schools, which constrains generalizability to other regions and educational contexts. The instruments used in the study were self-developed, though they were standardized and supported by internal consistency and validation procedures. The study also relied largely on cross-sectional comparisons rather than long-term follow-up.

A second limitation concerns some supplementary analytic procedures reported in the thesis. In particular, the support-quality comparisons involved manual classification and proportional assignment, the barriers-versus-facilitators comparison used a proxy indicator, and one parental-involvement relationship analysis involved simulated completion of missing involvement entries. These procedures do not invalidate the study's strongest direct-comparison findings, but they do require cautious interpretation of some later exploratory analyses.

9. Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that student support services can make a meaningful difference in the learning outcomes of learners with Specific Learning Disabilities. Tutoring was associated with stronger academic performance, counselling with better social skills, and assistive technology with higher self-esteem. These findings affirm that learners with SLD benefit not from generic inclusion alone, but from structured, targeted, and responsive support mechanisms that address academic, social, and psychological dimensions together.

At the same time, the study shows that the effectiveness of support services depends not simply on frequency, format, or institutional labeling, but on the quality with which services are delivered and the preparedness of teachers to use them well. In this sense, the paper contributes to a more operational understanding of inclusive education: for learners with SLD, support services are not supplementary to learning outcomes; they are among the conditions that make those outcomes possible.

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