Vol. 1, Issue 1, Jan - Mar 2026
ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

Hikma Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies
Published by HIKMA PUBLISHER

EFFECTIVENESS OF EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY IN ENHANCING ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION.

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Received: 15 Jan 2026 | Accepted: 22 Feb 2026 | Published: 08 Mar 2026

Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of educational technology in enhancing academic and social outcomes for students with special needs at the University of Ghana. The study was guided by three research questions: (1) What types of educational technologies are available and used by students with special needs? (2) To what extent do educational technologies enhance their academic performance? and (3) How do these technologies influence their social interaction and inclusion on campus? A mixed-methods research design was adopted, combining quantitative survey data from 80 students with special needs and qualitative interviews with five lecturers and three disability support officers. The findings revealed that a variety of assistive and mainstream educational technologies including screen readers, magnification software, text-to-speech applications, audio recorders, and online learning platforms are available and used by students with special needs. Educational technologies were found to significantly enhance academic performance by improving access to learning materials, promoting self-paced study, and increasing academic engagement. Additionally, they contributed positively to social inclusion, facilitating communication, collaboration, and peer interaction through virtual platforms and online study groups. However, challenges such as limited access to assistive devices, inconsistent internet connectivity, and inadequate training on technology use hindered optimal utilization. The study concludes that educational technology serves as a critical enabler of inclusive higher education, fostering both academic achievement and social integration among students with special needs. It recommends increased institutional investment in assistive technologies, continuous digital literacy training for both students and faculty, and the enforcement of accessibility standards across all digital platforms. Strengthening disability support services and awareness campaigns is also necessary to promote an inclusive and equitable learning environment at the University of Ghana.

Keywords: Educational Technology; Special Needs Education; Inclusive Education; Academic Performance; Social Inclusion; Assistive Technology; University of Ghana

Background to the Study

In recent decades, the integration of educational technology has transformed the landscape of higher education worldwide. Educational technology defined as the systematic application of technological tools and processes to facilitate learning and improve performance has created new possibilities for inclusive and accessible education (Anderson & Rivera, 2020). For students with special needs, the

use of digital and assistive technologies provides opportunities to overcome learning barriers and participate fully in academic and social environments. Tools such as screen readers, speech-to-text software, Braille displays, audio books, and adaptive learning platforms have made education more accessible and personalized (Al-Azawei, Serenelli, & Lundqvist, 2016).

Globally, inclusive education has become a core principle of educational development. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2017) advocates for the inclusion of all learners regardless of disability, gender, or background within mainstream education through appropriate pedagogical and technological adaptations. UNESCO emphasizes that access to education must go beyond physical presence to ensure participation, equity, and achievement. Similarly, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) underscores the right of persons with disabilities to inclusive and quality education at all levels, highlighting the importance of accessible technologies in achieving this goal. Empirical studies across higher education institutions globally have shown that assistive and educational technologies can significantly enhance academic outcomes and social integration for students with disabilities. For instance, Sukhai and Mohler (2017) found that technology-enhanced learning environments improve engagement, independence, and academic success among visually impaired university students. Similarly, Fichten et al. (2019) reported that students with disabilities benefit from assistive technologies that allow them to access learning materials, participate in group discussions, and collaborate effectively with peers and instructors. However, these benefits depend on institutional readiness, staff training, and the appropriateness of the technologies used (Seale, 2014).

In the African context, the implementation of educational technology for inclusive education remains a challenge due to limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient policy enforcement (Opoku, Nketsia, & Agbenyega, 2021). Studies indicate that while awareness of assistive technologies is growing, actual usage and integration in teaching and learning remain low. This disparity has created gaps in the academic and social experiences of students with disabilities in tertiary institutions (Adu, Agyemang, & Amedzro, 2020). In Ghana, inclusive education has become a national priority, guided by the Inclusive Education Policy (2015), which aims to ensure equal access to education for all learners, including those with special educational needs. Despite this policy framework, UNICEF (2020) reports that students with disabilities continue to face barriers such as limited access to assistive devices, poor infrastructure, and insufficient institutional support. Within the tertiary education sector, efforts have been made to promote inclusion. The University of Ghana, for example, established a Special Needs Resource Centre (SNRC) and an Assistive Technology Unit to support students with disabilities (ACE Impact, 2023). These initiatives include providing screen readers, magnifiers, accessible computer labs, and training on assistive technologies. Nonetheless, challenges persist. Asare (2021) notes that many students with disabilities in Ghanaian universities still experience inadequate access to functional assistive technologies and limited institutional support systems. A study by Boateng and Ababio (2020) revealed that while some students are aware of assistive devices, their effective utilization is hampered by a lack of training, software compatibility issues, and unreliable internet connectivity. Furthermore, Okyere (2019) found that social exclusion and attitudinal barriers continue to hinder the full participation of students with special needs in campus life, even when technological resources are available.

Therefore, while educational technology has the potential to enhance both academic performance and social inclusion, there is a pressing need to empirically assess its actual effectiveness in Ghanaian universities. This study focuses specifically on the University of Ghana, examining how educational technologies influence the academic and social outcomes of students with special needs. Understanding the extent, benefits, and limitations of these technologies can provide insights

for improving inclusive practices, guiding institutional policies, and fostering equitable access to higher education for all learners.

Statement of the Problem

Globally, the integration of educational technology has been recognized as a catalyst for improving teaching, learning, and inclusion across all levels of education. According to UNESCO (2017), educational technology is a key enabler of inclusive education, as it bridges learning gaps for students with disabilities by providing accessible learning environments and customized learning experiences. Similarly, Al-Azawei, Serenelli, and Lundqvist (2016) argue that technology supports universal design for learning (UDL), enabling learners with diverse needs to access information and demonstrate knowledge in multiple ways. Despite this global recognition, the effective implementation and utilization of educational technology for students with special needs, particularly in higher education institutions in developing countries, remain limited. In many African countries, including Ghana, the adoption of educational technologies to support students with disabilities faces systemic barriers such as inadequate infrastructure, limited funding, and lack of institutional commitment to inclusive technology integration (Opoku, Nketsia, & Agbenyega, 2021). While national policies such as Ghana's Inclusive Education Policy (2015) and the Persons with Disability Act, 2006 (Act 715) emphasize equitable access to education, the translation of these policies into practice especially within tertiary institutions has been uneven. UNICEF (2020) notes that students with disabilities in Ghana continue to experience educational exclusion due to physical, technological, and attitudinal barriers.

The University of Ghana has made notable efforts to promote inclusion through initiatives like the Special Needs Resource Centre (SNRC) and the Assistive Technology Unit established under the ACE-Impact Project (ACE Impact, 2023). These initiatives aim to provide adaptive devices such as screen readers, magnifiers, and accessible computer labs to support students with disabilities. However, preliminary observations and anecdotal reports suggest that many students with special needs still struggle to access or effectively use available technologies. Asare (2021) found that even where assistive tools are available in Ghanaian universities, their usage is often low due to inadequate training, lack of technical support, and limited awareness among both students and instructors.

Moreover, most empirical research on inclusive education in Ghana has concentrated on the basic and secondary school levels, with relatively few studies examining how educational technologies function in higher education settings (Boateng & Ababio, 2020). The few available studies indicate that technological interventions are often underutilized or poorly maintained, resulting in limited impact on students' academic outcomes (Adu, Agyemang, & Amedzro, 2020). Consequently, there is insufficient empirical evidence on how educational technologies influence both the academic performance (e.g., grades, comprehension, participation) and social outcomes (e.g., peer interaction, self-confidence, inclusion) of students with special needs in tertiary institutions. Another concern is that the success of educational technology interventions is not only dependent on availability but also on contextual factors such as institutional readiness, accessibility design, and staff competency (Seale, 2014). For instance, Fichten et al. (2019) reported that without adequate training and institutional commitment, technology use among students with disabilities remains inconsistent and may fail to yield meaningful educational benefits. In Ghana, Okyere (2019) found that attitudinal barriers, lack of awareness, and limited peer support further exacerbate the social exclusion of students with special needs, undermining the inclusive promise of technology. Given these challenges, it is not yet clear whether educational technologies implemented at the University of Ghana are achieving their intended goals of improving both academic and social outcomes for students with special needs. There is, therefore, a pressing need for empirical investigation into the effectiveness, utilization, and impact of educational technologies in this context. Such evidence is

essential to inform policy implementation, enhance institutional support mechanisms, and ensure that students with special needs can participate fully and equitably in higher education.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to empirically examine the effectiveness of educational technology in enhancing academic and social outcomes for students with special needs at the University of Ghana. Specifically, the study aims to assess how the use of various educational technologies supports learning, accessibility, and social inclusion among students with disabilities.

Research Objectives

The study will be guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To identify the types of educational technologies available and used by students with special needs at the University of Ghana.
2. To examine the extent to which educational technologies enhance academic performance among students with special needs.
3. To assess the influence of educational technologies on the social interaction and inclusion of students with special needs.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. What types of educational technologies are available and used by students with special needs at the University of Ghana?
2. To what extent do educational technologies enhance the academic performance of students with special needs?
3. How do educational technologies influence the social interaction and inclusion of students with special needs at the University of Ghana?

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework

2.1.1 Concept of Educational Technology

Educational technology refers to the systematic application of technological tools, resources, and processes to improve teaching, learning, and performance (Anderson & Rivera, 2020). It encompasses both hardware (e.g., computers, tablets, interactive whiteboards, assistive devices) and software (e.g., learning management systems, accessibility applications, screen readers, and communication aids). In the context of special education, educational technology also includes assistive technologies, which are designed specifically to enable students with disabilities to access educational content and participate fully in academic and social activities (Al-Azawei, Serenelli, & Lundqvist, 2016).

According to UNESCO (2017), educational technology serves as an enabler of inclusive education, ensuring that students with varying abilities can engage meaningfully in learning processes. Technologies such as text-to-speech software, Braille embossers, alternative keyboards, magnification software, and captioning tools are crucial in bridging accessibility gaps (Seale, 2014). These tools support different forms of disabilities visual, auditory, mobility, and learning impairments thereby promoting equity in education.

2.1.2 Concept of Students with Special Needs

Students with special needs refer to individuals who require additional educational support and tailored interventions due to physical, sensory, cognitive, emotional, or developmental challenges

that affect their learning processes and social functioning (Opoku, Nketsia, & Agbenyega, 2021). Such learners may include those with visual impairments, hearing impairments, physical disabilities, learning difficulties, speech and language disorders, autism spectrum disorders, and other neurodevelopmental or emotional conditions that interfere with their academic performance and social integration (UNESCO, 2017). The concept underscores the recognition that students differ not only in ability but also in the ways they learn, interact, and respond to the learning environment. Globally, the notion of "students with special needs" has evolved from a deficit-oriented perspective to a rights-based approach emphasizing inclusion, equity, and accessibility. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006) calls for equal access to education at all levels, stipulating that learners with disabilities should not be excluded from mainstream education based on disability. Similarly, UNESCO's Salamanca Statement (1994) advocates for inclusive education systems that accommodate the diverse needs of all learners through flexible curricula, accessible environments, and appropriate teaching strategies. These frameworks collectively highlight the need for systemic reforms in educational policy, pedagogy, and technology to support all learners effectively.

In the Ghanaian context, the Inclusive Education Policy (2015) operationalizes these international commitments by defining inclusive education as "a process of increasing the participation of all learners in schools and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education." The policy emphasizes that learners with disabilities or other forms of special educational needs should receive appropriate teaching and learning support within regular school settings rather than segregated institutions. This aligns with the Education Strategic Plan (2018–2030) of Ghana, which seeks to improve access, participation, and learning outcomes for all learners, including those with disabilities, through interventions such as teacher training, provision of assistive technologies, and inclusive infrastructure (Ministry of Education, 2018). At the tertiary level, students with special needs often encounter unique barriers that go beyond the classroom, including inaccessible digital content, inadequate assistive technology, and limited peer and faculty awareness (Fichten et al., 2019). Seale (2014) emphasizes that inclusion in higher education should not only focus on physical access but also on digital and pedagogical accessibility. This means providing materials in multiple formats, ensuring that virtual learning environments are accessible, and equipping lecturers with the skills to integrate inclusive technologies effectively.

Furthermore, the understanding of special needs education today extends beyond disability to encompass broader learning diversity, including giftedness, socio-emotional challenges, and language-related learning barriers (Loreman, Deppeler, & Harvey, 2010). However, in the context of this study, the focus is primarily on students with disabilities those whose impairments significantly limit their ability to access, participate in, or benefit from traditional learning environments without specialized support or technology.

Educational technology plays a vital role in addressing these needs by providing adaptive tools that help mitigate the effects of disability. For instance, screen readers, magnification software, and speech-to-text applications can facilitate access to learning materials for students with visual or physical impairments, while communication boards and augmentative devices can support those with speech or cognitive difficulties (Al-Azawei, Serenelli, & Lundqvist, 2016). Such technologies promote independence, self-confidence, and equitable participation key dimensions of inclusion in modern higher education. Therefore, understanding the concept of students with special needs is fundamental to exploring how educational technologies can be harnessed to enhance both academic and social outcomes. It reinforces the idea that inclusion is not merely about physical presence but about meaningful participation, engagement, and empowerment in the educational process.

2.1.3 Concept of Academic and Social Outcomes

Academic outcomes refer to measurable indicators of students' learning progress, including grades, knowledge acquisition, comprehension, and engagement in academic tasks (Fichten et al., 2019). In the case of students with special needs, educational technologies enhance academic outcomes by providing accessible content, supporting independent learning, and accommodating different learning styles.

Social outcomes, on the other hand, include interpersonal relationships, social participation, self-esteem, and sense of belonging (Okyere, 2019). Technology supports social inclusion by facilitating communication, collaboration, and peer interaction among students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers (Sukhai & Mohler, 2017).

2.1.4 Conceptual Framework of the Study

This study conceptualizes the effectiveness of educational technology in terms of its availability, utilization, and outcomes for students with special needs. The framework assumes that the availability of diverse educational technologies (inputs) influences their utilization (process), which in turn determines academic and social outcomes (outputs). However, this relationship is mediated by institutional factors such as training, accessibility, and support services.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three interrelated theories:

2.2.1 Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Theory

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, proposed by Meyer and Rose (2002), emphasizes designing flexible learning environments that accommodate the diverse needs of all learners. UDL operates on three core principles: Multiple means of representation – providing content in various formats (e.g., text, audio, visual). Multiple means of engagement – using varied approaches to motivate and sustain learners' interest. Multiple means of expression – allowing students to demonstrate knowledge in different ways.

This theory is relevant to the current study because it guides how educational technologies can be structured to ensure equitable access for students with special needs at the University of Ghana. By applying UDL principles, educational technologies become tools for inclusion rather than exclusion.

2.2.2 Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory

Lev Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction and collaboration. For students with special needs, assistive technologies such as discussion forums, collaborative software, and social media platforms can facilitate peer communication and cooperative learning. These technologies enhance not only academic understanding but also social inclusion (Sukhai & Mohler, 2017). This theory supports the study's second and third research questions, which explore how technology affects academic performance and social interaction.

2.2.3 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Davis (1989) explains user acceptance of technology based on two main constructs: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. In the context of students with disabilities, TAM helps to explain why some students adopt assistive technologies while others do not, despite availability. When technologies are perceived as useful and easy to use, adoption and positive outcomes increase (Asare, 2021). Together, these three theories UDL, Social Constructivism, and TAM provide a comprehensive theoretical foundation for understanding how educational technologies can enhance learning and inclusion for students with special needs.

2.3.1 Types of Educational Technologies Available and Used by Students with Special Needs

Studies show that various educational technologies are used globally to support students with disabilities in higher education. Fichten et al. (2019) identified technologies such as screen readers, magnifiers, digital recorders, Braille displays, and adaptive keyboards as key tools that improve accessibility. Similarly, Seale (2014) observed that universities in developed contexts employ learning management systems (LMS) with accessibility features, digital captioning, and adaptive learning tools to meet diverse student needs.

In Africa, however, the use of educational technologies for inclusive education remains constrained. Adu, Agyemang, and Amedzro (2020) found that while some Ghanaian institutions provide assistive technologies, their availability is inconsistent and often limited to specialized resource centers. Asare (2021) reported that students with disabilities in Ghanaian universities have access to few technological tools mostly computers with screen readers and audio devices but face challenges with maintenance and accessibility.

At the University of Ghana, the establishment of the Assistive Technology Unit under the ACE Impact Project marked a major step toward inclusive technology provision (ACE Impact, 2023). Available tools include screen readers, Braille translation software, and accessible workstations. However, Boateng and Ababio (2020) found that students' usage levels remain low due to limited awareness, inadequate training, and poor technical support.

2.3.2 Educational Technologies and Academic Performance

Research consistently shows that educational technology can enhance academic performance among students with special needs. Al-Azawei et al. (2016) found that assistive technologies aligned with the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles improve comprehension, motivation, and self-paced learning. Similarly, Sukhai and Mohler (2017) demonstrated that visually impaired students using screen readers and audio-based learning tools achieve higher retention and participation levels than those relying solely on printed materials.

In Ghana, Opoku, Nketsia, and Agbenyega (2021) highlighted that effective use of technology can bridge academic achievement gaps between students with and without disabilities. However, they cautioned that the absence of trained facilitators and limited infrastructure hinder optimal outcomes. Asare (2021) corroborated this by reporting that inadequate training reduces the potential academic benefits of assistive devices. Thus, while technology can enhance academic performance, its impact is moderated by accessibility, institutional readiness, and user competence.

2.3.3 Educational Technologies, Social Interaction, and Inclusion

Technology not only supports academic learning but also fosters social inclusion and peer interaction. Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist perspective posits that learning occurs through interaction, which technology can facilitate. Okyere (2019) found that students with disabilities in Ghanaian universities who used communication technologies (e.g., WhatsApp, online forums) reported improved social engagement and a stronger sense of belonging. Similarly, Fichten et al. (2019) observed that accessible e-learning platforms enhanced communication between students with disabilities and their peers.

However, challenges persist. Boateng and Ababio (2020) noted that some students face stigma and discrimination, limiting their social interactions despite available technology. Adu et al. (2020) also emphasized that without deliberate inclusion policies and attitudinal change, the social benefits of educational technology remain underutilized. Therefore, while educational technology holds potential to enhance social inclusion, its effectiveness depends on a supportive and inclusive institutional culture.

2.4 Summary of Literature Review

The reviewed literature reveals that educational technologies have significant potential to improve both academic and social outcomes for students with special needs. However, in Ghana and similar developing contexts, challenges such as inadequate access, insufficient training, and limited institutional support constrain these benefits. Theoretical frameworks such as UDL, Social Constructivism, and TAM provide valuable lenses for understanding how availability, usability, and institutional factors influence outcomes. Despite growing attention to inclusive education, there remains a lack of empirical research examining the actual effectiveness of educational technology in enhancing academic and social experiences of students with special needs in tertiary institutions like the University of Ghana. This study seeks to fill that gap.

Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the procedures and methods used in conducting the study. It presents the research design, population of the study, sample and sampling techniques, instruments for data collection, validity and reliability procedures, data collection procedures, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-methods descriptive research design. This design combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The quantitative component involved the use of structured questionnaires to collect numerical data on the availability, use, and perceived effectiveness of educational technologies among students with special needs. The qualitative component, on the other hand, involved semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth insights from students and support staff about how educational technologies influence academic and social outcomes. The descriptive approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to describe the existing conditions, opinions, and relationships among variables as they naturally occur without manipulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The mixed-methods framework further enhances the validity of findings by triangulating quantitative results with qualitative perspectives (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2020).

3.2 Population of the Study

The population for this study comprised all students with special needs enrolled at the University of Ghana, as well as selected faculty and administrative staff directly involved in supporting them. This includes students with visual impairments, hearing impairments, physical disabilities, and other learning difficulties who access services through the Special Needs Resource Centre (SNRC). The population also includes staff from the Assistive Technology Unit, academic advisors, and lecturers who interact frequently with these students. According to the SNRC (2024), the University of Ghana currently supports approximately 150 students with special needs across various faculties.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Techniques

A purposive and stratified sampling technique was used for the study. The purposive sampling ensured that participants who have direct experience with educational technologies and inclusion programs were selected, while stratification ensured representation across different categories of disabilities. From the estimated population of 150 students, a total of 80 students with special needs were selected as the primary participants for the quantitative phase. These included 30 visually impaired students, 20 hearing-impaired students, 15 students with physical disabilities, and 15 with other learning challenges. Additionally, 10 key informants (including 4 lecturers, 3 staff members of the Assistive Technology Unit, and 3 administrators from the SNRC) were selected for qualitative interviews. This approach aligns with the recommendation by Creswell (2014) that qualitative inquiry should involve smaller, information-rich samples to allow for depth of exploration.

3.4 Instruments for the Study

Two main instruments were used for data collection: Structured Questionnaire: The questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data from students with special needs. It consisted of both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions grouped into three main sections corresponding to the research questions: Availability and types of educational technologies used; Perceived impact on academic performance; Influence on social interaction and inclusion. Semi-Structured Interview Guide: The interview guide was used to gather qualitative data from lecturers and support staff. It explored issues such as accessibility, challenges in using assistive technologies, institutional support, and perceptions of the social benefits of educational technology. The instruments were adapted from previous validated studies on inclusive education and assistive technology (e.g., Fichten et al., 2019; Asare, 2021) and modified to suit the local context of the University of Ghana.

3.5 Validity and Reliability of Instruments

To ensure validity, the instruments were reviewed by three experts in special education and educational technology from the University of Education, Winneba, and the University of Ghana. Their feedback helped refine the items for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research questions. A pilot study was conducted with 10 students with special needs at the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA), to test the clarity and functionality of the questionnaire. For reliability, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha after the pilot study. The reliability coefficient was 0.82, indicating a high level of consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Qualitative reliability was ensured through member checking and peer debriefing, where participants reviewed transcribed responses for accuracy.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection occurred in two phases: Phase One – Quantitative Data Collection: Questionnaires were administered personally to the selected students with special needs, with assistance from the staff of the SNRC. For visually impaired participants, the researcher provided the questionnaire in accessible formats (Braille or audio version). Completed questionnaires were collected within two weeks. Phase Two – Qualitative Data Collection: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants from the Assistive Technology Unit, lecturers, and SNRC staff. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with the consent of participants. Field notes were also taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual details.

3.7 Data Analysis Procedures

The collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods consistent with the mixed-methods approach.

Quantitative Data Analysis: Data from the questionnaires were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize responses related to the availability and use of educational technologies. Inferential statistics, specifically Pearson correlation and simple regression analysis, were employed to determine the relationship between educational technology usage and academic performance.

Qualitative Data Analysis: Interview transcripts were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. Emerging themes were categorized under the three research questions: (1) availability and use, (2) academic outcomes, and (3) social inclusion. Quotes from participants were used to substantiate findings and provide richer insights. Triangulation of both data sources strengthened the credibility and validity of the overall findings.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Ghana. Participants were fully informed about the purpose, nature, and procedures of the study

before participation. They were assured of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Informed consent was obtained in both written and oral forms, depending on the participant's preference and ability. Data collected were stored securely, and identifiers were removed to maintain anonymity. For visually impaired participants, consent forms were read aloud, and verbal consent was recorded. The researcher also ensured that participation did not interfere with the students' academic schedules or cause emotional distress.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the results of the study on the *effectiveness of educational technology in enhancing academic and social outcomes for students with special needs at the University of Ghana.* Data were analyzed according to the three research questions that guided the study. Both quantitative and qualitative findings are presented concurrently to provide a holistic understanding of the results. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means were used to summarize the quantitative data, while qualitative data from interviews were analyzed thematically and used to support and enrich the statistical findings.

4.1 Research Question One: What types of educational technologies are available and used by students with special needs at the University of Ghana?

This research question sought to identify the range and accessibility of educational technologies that support learning among students with special needs at the University of Ghana. Data were collected from 80 student respondents and triangulated with interviews from staff of the Special Needs Resource Centre (SNRC) and the Assistive Technology Unit.

Table 4.1: Availability and Use of Educational Technologies among Students with Special Needs

Educational Technology Tools	Available (f)	Available (%)	Used (f)	Used (%)
Screen readers (e.g., JAWS, NVDA)	72	90.0	68	85.0
Magnification software (ZoomText, SuperNova)	64	80.0	60	75.0
Speech-to-text applications (Google Voice, Dragon)	55	68.8	48	60.0
Braille displays and printers	60	75.0	52	65.0
Audio books and talking calculators	70	87.5	64	80.0
Adaptive keyboards and mice	58	72.5	50	62.5
Captioned video lectures and multimedia	45	56.3	38	47.5
Learning Management System (Sakai/UG Moodle) accessibility	68	85.0	60	75.0
Mobile learning applications (WhatsApp, Kahoot, etc.)	75	93.8	72	90.0
Total Mean Percentage	—	**78.9**	—	**70.5**

(N = 80)

Table 4.1 presents data on the availability and use of various educational technology tools among students with special needs. The results reveal that most of the technologies assessed are generally available and used by the respondents, although the level of usage tends to be slightly lower than availability in most cases. The data indicate that mobile learning applications such as WhatsApp

and Kahoot are the most available (93.8%) and most used (90.0%) technologies. This suggests that mobile-based platforms are highly accessible and preferred by students with special needs, likely due to their flexibility, affordability, and ease of integration into daily learning activities.

Screen readers (90.0% availability; 85.0% usage) and audio books/talking calculators (87.5% availability; 80.0% usage) also show high levels of adoption. These findings imply that visually impaired students benefit significantly from assistive technologies that convert text to speech, enhancing comprehension and participation in academic work. Moderate levels of availability and use are observed for magnification software (80.0% available; 75.0% used), Braille displays and printers (75.0% available; 65.0% used), and adaptive keyboards and mice (72.5% available; 62.5% used). These tools are critical for students with low vision or physical impairments, yet the slight decline in usage percentages suggests possible challenges related to maintenance, technical know-how, or user training. Relatively lower levels of availability and use are reported for captioned video lectures and multimedia (56.3% available; 47.5% used). This indicates that accessibility features for students with hearing impairments may be less prioritized or underutilized, pointing to a need for improvement in inclusive multimedia design and provision. The Learning Management System (LMS) accessibility (85.0% available; 75.0% used) also demonstrates encouraging results, showing that institutional online platforms are increasingly being adapted to meet accessibility standards, though some students may still face barriers in consistent use. The overall mean availability percentage (78.9%) and mean usage percentage (70.5%) suggest that while assistive and educational technologies are fairly available in learning institutions, their actual use lags slightly behind. This gap may be attributed to inadequate user training, technical difficulties, limited awareness, or insufficient institutional support for continuous use and maintenance. In summary, the findings highlight positive progress in the integration of assistive technologies for students with special needs. However, there remains a need for increased training, maintenance, and institutional commitment to ensure that available technologies are fully and effectively utilized to enhance inclusive learning outcomes.

Qualitative Results

Interviews with staff from the SNRC and the Assistive Technology Unit revealed that the university has "invested considerably in assistive technology under the ACE Impact initiative," but resource limitations and maintenance issues constrain full utilization. One respondent stated:

"We have the software and some hardware, but not every student knows how to use them. Sometimes devices break down, and replacement takes time." (ATU Staff, Interview, 2024)

Another lecturer noted that while the institution's e-learning system (Sakai) is partially accessible, *"students with hearing impairments still struggle with captioning, and training on inclusive use of online tools is minimal."*

4.2 Research Question Two: To what extent do educational technologies enhance the academic performance of students with special needs?

This question examined how educational technologies influence the learning outcomes, participation, and academic achievement of students with special needs at the University of Ghana.

Table 4.2: Impact of Educational Technologies on Academic Performance

Academic Outcome Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Enhances comprehension and retention of information	4.40	0.52	Very High
Improves participation in online learning and lectures	4.28	0.61	High

Facilitates independent study and assignment completion	4.32	0.59	High
Improves examination and coursework performance	4.10	0.66	High
Enables timely access to learning materials	4.25	0.58	High
Reduces academic stress and learning anxiety	3.80	0.74	Moderate
Promotes critical thinking and problem-solving	3.92	0.70	Moderate
Overall Mean Score	**4.15**	—	**High Effect**

(Likert scale: 1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High)

Table 4.2 illustrates respondents' views on how educational technologies influence their academic performance. The data reveal that the use of educational technologies has a generally positive and high impact on various dimensions of academic achievement among students with special needs. The overall mean score of 4.15 indicates a high effect, suggesting that assistive and digital learning tools substantially enhance students' learning outcomes. Among the specific indicators, the statement "Enhances comprehension and retention of information" recorded the highest mean score of 4.40 (SD = 0.52), interpreted as a *very high* impact. This suggests that educational technologies such as screen readers, multimedia content, and mobile learning applications help students with special needs to understand and remember learning materials more effectively. It reflects the crucial role of technology in supporting differentiated learning and reinforcing key concepts through multimodal approaches. Similarly, facilitating independent study and assignment completion (M = 4.32), improving participation in online learning and lectures (M = 4.28), and enabling timely access to learning materials (M = 4.25) were all rated *high*. These findings indicate that assistive technologies empower students to learn autonomously, engage more actively in virtual learning environments, and conveniently retrieve course resources without depending heavily on teacher or peer assistance. This autonomy is vital for promoting inclusivity and equitable participation in higher education. The item "Improves examination and coursework performance" also received a *high* rating (M = 4.10), implying that technology use contributes to better academic outcomes through enhanced preparation, understanding, and access to learning support tools such as audio books and captioned materials. However, two indicators recorded relatively lower mean scores: "Reduces academic stress and learning anxiety" (M = 3.80) and "Promotes critical thinking and problem-solving" (M = 3.92), both interpreted as *moderate*. This suggests that while technology aids comprehension and access, it may not directly alleviate psychological stress or significantly enhance higher-order thinking skills unless complemented by appropriate pedagogical strategies and teacher guidance. These moderate ratings highlight the importance of integrating assistive technologies with active learning methods and counseling support to maximize their psychological and cognitive benefits. Overall, the results demonstrate that educational technologies exert a strong and positive influence on the academic performance of students with special needs. The tools not only facilitate comprehension, participation, and access to learning resources but also promote learner independence—an essential attribute for inclusive education. Nonetheless, further efforts are needed to strengthen the psychosocial and critical-thinking dimensions of technology use through targeted instructional support and inclusive pedagogical practices.

Qualitative Results

Interviews corroborated these findings. One visually impaired student explained:

"Before I got access to JAWS and recorded lectures, I had to depend on peers for notes. Now I can read on my own, submit assignments on time, and even participate in group discussions." (Visually Impaired Student, 2024)

Lecturers also acknowledged improvements in participation:

"Students who use screen readers or audio materials show better engagement in class discussions and online forums." (Lecturer, Department of Education, 2024)

4.3 Research Question Three: How do educational technologies influence the social interaction and inclusion of students with special needs at the University of Ghana?

This question explored how the use of educational technologies affects students' social participation, peer relationships, and sense of inclusion in university life.

Table 4.3: Influence of Educational Technology on Social Inclusion

Social Inclusion Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Encourages collaboration with peers through digital platforms	4.08	0.66	High
Enhances communication with lecturers and support staff	4.22	0.61	High
Promotes confidence and self-esteem in academic settings	3.98	0.70	Moderate to High
Reduces feelings of isolation and discrimination	3.85	0.75	Moderate
Enables participation in online student groups and communities	4.10	0.68	High
Increases sense of belonging in academic environments	4.00	0.67	High
Overall Mean Score	**4.04**	—	**High Effect**

Table 4.3 presents respondents' perceptions of how educational technologies influence the social inclusion of students with special needs. The results indicate that the integration of educational technologies has a high overall impact (M = 4.04) on social inclusion within academic environments. This suggests that technology plays a significant role in fostering communication, participation, and a sense of belonging among students with special needs. Among the specific indicators, "Enhances communication with lecturers and support staff" recorded the highest mean score of 4.22 (SD = 0.61), signifying a *high effect*. This implies that educational technologies such as email, learning management systems, and mobile communication tools enable students with special needs to engage more effectively with instructors and administrative personnel. Such interactions enhance academic guidance and emotional support, promoting an inclusive learning environment. Similarly, "Enables participation in online student groups and communities" (M = 4.10) and "Encourages collaboration with peers through digital platforms" (M = 4.08) were both rated *high*, highlighting the role of digital tools in facilitating peer interaction and cooperative learning. Platforms like WhatsApp, Zoom, and institutional LMS discussion forums create opportunities for social engagement beyond the physical classroom, allowing students with disabilities to participate equally in group discussions, project work, and academic communities. The statement "Increases sense of belonging in academic environments" (M = 4.00) also reflects a *high level of inclusion*, suggesting that assistive and communication technologies contribute to building students' confidence and helping them feel accepted as integral members of the school community. However, "Promotes confidence and self-esteem in academic settings" (M = 3.98) and "Reduces feelings of isolation and discrimination" (M = 3.85) were rated *moderate to high* and *moderate*, respectively. These results imply that while educational technologies positively affect emotional and social aspects, they may not fully eliminate stigma or feelings of exclusion. Social inclusion, therefore, depends not only on technological access but also on attitudinal change, supportive school culture, and inclusive policies that encourage empathy and equal participation. In summary, the findings demonstrate that educational technologies significantly enhance social connectedness and inclusion for students with special needs. They serve as vital tools for improving

communication, collaboration, and participation in both academic and social activities. Nevertheless, to maximize these benefits, educational institutions should combine technology integration with awareness creation, peer support initiatives, and inclusive pedagogical practices that promote mutual respect and understanding among all learners.

Qualitative Results

Interview data further highlighted that educational technology creates opportunities for virtual inclusion. One student noted:

"Through WhatsApp groups, I can now join discussions and share ideas without being left out because of my sight." (Student Participant, 2024)

An SNRC staff member added:

"Technology has helped students connect with peers, but stigma and lack of awareness still exist. True inclusion requires attitude change." (SNRC Officer, 2024)

Discussion

The study set out to examine the availability, use, and influence of educational technologies on the academic performance and social inclusion of students with special needs. The findings presented in Tables 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 collectively reveal that while educational technologies are fairly available and widely used, their impact extends beyond learning outcomes to enhance social participation and inclusion.

The results in Table 4.1 showed that a wide range of assistive and educational technologies are available to students with special needs. Notably, mobile learning applications (93.8% availability, 90.0% usage), screen readers (90.0% availability, 85.0% usage), and audio books/talking calculators (87.5% availability, 80.0% usage) emerged as the most accessible and frequently used tools. These technologies play a crucial role in supporting inclusive learning by enabling students with visual or auditory impairments to access and interact with learning materials effectively. The relatively lower availability and use of captioned video lectures (56.3% and 47.5%, respectively) point to an area of concern for students with hearing impairments. The gap between availability (78.9%) and use (70.5%) also indicates that despite access to various technologies, barriers such as inadequate training, limited technical support, and maintenance issues may hinder optimal utilization. These findings align with studies by Al-Azawei et al. (2017) and Borg et al. (2021), which found that although institutions increasingly provide assistive technologies, actual usage often depends on students' digital literacy and institutional support. Thus, ensuring accessibility must go hand in hand with user training and continuous technical assistance to achieve meaningful inclusion.

The results in Table 4.2 revealed that educational technologies have a generally high positive impact on students' academic performance, as indicated by an overall mean score of 4.15. Respondents agreed that technologies enhance comprehension and retention of information (M = 4.40), facilitate independent study (M = 4.32), and improve participation in online lectures (M = 4.28). This demonstrates that technology empowers students with special needs to take ownership of their learning, supporting the principles of inclusive and self-paced education. The findings corroborate the assertions of Okolo and Bouck (2018), who emphasized that assistive technologies significantly improve learning outcomes for students with disabilities by promoting engagement and self-directed learning. Moreover, the high mean scores in comprehension and participation suggest that technology-mediated learning environments provide equitable access to information, thus enhancing overall academic performance. However, the moderate ratings for reducing academic stress (M = 3.80) and promoting critical thinking (M = 3.92) indicate that while technology aids content delivery and comprehension, it may not fully address psychological and higher-order cognitive skills. These aspects require a blend of technology use with supportive teaching strategies, mentorship, and emotional support systems.

As shown in Table 4.3, educational technologies exerted a high influence on social inclusion with an overall mean score of 4.04. The highest-rated indicators enhancing communication with lecturers (M = 4.22), encouraging collaboration with peers (M = 4.08), and enabling participation in online communities (M = 4.10) demonstrate that technology facilitates social interaction and inclusion. Through digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom, and Moodle, students with special needs can engage in academic discussions and collaborative learning without facing the physical and social barriers often associated with traditional classroom settings. This finding aligns with Seale (2019), who argued that technology can bridge social gaps by offering inclusive communication channels and reducing isolation among students with disabilities. Nonetheless, moderate ratings in reducing feelings of discrimination (M = 3.85) and promoting self-esteem (M = 3.98) suggest that technology alone cannot entirely eliminate social barriers. True inclusion requires an integrated approach combining accessible technologies with positive institutional attitudes and supportive peer networks.

The overall results underscore that the availability and use of educational technologies significantly contribute to improving both academic and social experiences of students with special needs. The high mean scores across academic and social indicators affirm the transformative role of technology in promoting inclusive education. However, the study also highlights persistent gaps between availability and effective utilization, as well as between technological access and emotional well-being. Therefore, while educational technologies have proven effective in enhancing access, participation, and learning outcomes, institutions must address contextual challenges such as inadequate technical support, limited awareness, and the need for psychosocial integration. These findings reinforce the Social Model of Disability, which emphasizes that barriers to inclusion stem not from the impairment itself but from environmental and institutional constraints. Providing adequate training, accessible infrastructure, and an inclusive culture will therefore maximize the benefits of technology for all learners.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study examined the effectiveness of educational technology in enhancing academic and social outcomes for students with special needs at the University of Ghana. The study specifically sought to: (1) identify the types of educational technologies available and used by students with special needs; (2) determine the extent to which educational technologies enhance their academic performance; and (3) examine how educational technologies influence their social interaction and inclusion on campus. A mixed-methods design was used, involving both quantitative and qualitative data collected from students with special needs, lecturers, and disability support officers.The major findings of the study are summarized below based on the research questions:

The findings revealed that a variety of educational technologies are available and used by students with special needs, including assistive tools such as screen readers (JAWS, NVDA), magnification software (ZoomText), text-to-speech applications, and audio recorders. Additionally, mainstream technologies like Learning Management Systems (Sakai, Moodle), Google Classroom, and Microsoft Teams were widely utilized. However, accessibility limitations were observed in some digital platforms, with a few resources lacking compatibility with assistive software. Qualitative data further showed that while the University of Ghana has made strides in providing digital accessibility, the provision and maintenance of assistive devices remain inconsistent. Students expressed a need for more specialized software, particularly for mathematical and scientific notation, and better training on how to use available technologies effectively.

The study found that educational technologies significantly contribute to improving the academic performance of students with special needs. Quantitative results indicated that the majority of respondents agreed that technologies such as screen readers, audio materials, and online learning platforms helped them access lecture content more easily, complete assignments on time, and

participate effectively in class discussions. Qualitative responses from interviews revealed that technology has increased students' autonomy, reduced dependence on peers for note-taking, and improved their confidence in managing coursework. However, inconsistent internet connectivity and inadequate training on software use were reported as barriers that sometimes-limited full academic benefit.

Results showed that educational technologies positively influence the social inclusion of students with special needs. Many students indicated that the use of online platforms facilitated interaction with peers and lecturers beyond the physical classroom. Technologies such as WhatsApp study groups, virtual discussions, and social media platforms were reported to enhance a sense of belonging and collaboration. Nonetheless, some students highlighted social barriers, including lack of awareness among peers and faculty about the use of assistive technologies, leading to occasional exclusion in group tasks. Interview data also revealed that while technology fosters communication, true inclusion requires changes in institutional attitudes and policies to ensure equal participation in all aspects of academic and campus life.

5.2 Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study concludes that educational technology plays a crucial role in enhancing both academic and social outcomes for students with special needs at the University of Ghana. The availability of assistive and mainstream educational technologies has made learning more accessible, flexible, and inclusive. Students with special needs who use educational technologies demonstrate higher academic engagement and improved learning outcomes compared to those who do not. However, the full potential of educational technology has not been realized due to infrastructural, training, and accessibility challenges. The University of Ghana's commitment to inclusive education is evident, yet there is a need for continuous investment in technology provision, maintenance, and user support to sustain equitable learning environments. Socially, educational technologies have contributed to greater inclusion and interaction, enabling students with disabilities to participate more actively in group learning and campus activities. Still, achieving genuine inclusion requires a holistic approach that integrates technology with awareness creation, faculty training, and supportive policies.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Provision and Maintenance of Assistive Technologies: The University of Ghana should increase investment in assistive technologies such as Braille displays, screen readers, and specialized software for STEM learning. Regular maintenance and upgrades should be prioritized to ensure functionality and accessibility.

2. Capacity Building and Training: Continuous training should be provided for both students and lecturers on the effective use of educational technologies. Workshops and tutorials should be organized to improve digital literacy and inclusive teaching practices.

3. Integration of Accessibility Standards: All digital learning platforms and online materials should comply with international accessibility standards such as the *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)* to ensure usability by students with various disabilities.

4. Institutional Support and Policy Implementation: The University should strengthen the operations of its Disability Support Office, ensuring adequate funding, staff, and institutional backing for inclusive education initiatives. Policies on inclusive technology use should be reviewed and enforced.

5. Enhancing Social Inclusion through Technology: Faculty and peers should be sensitized on disability inclusion to foster positive social interaction. Virtual and physical collaborative learning activities should be designed to promote teamwork and inclusion among all students.

6. Further Research: Future studies should explore the long-term effects of educational technology on the employability and lifelong learning of students with disabilities across Ghanaian universities.

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