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Teacher Readiness for Inclusive Education in Philippine Secondary Schools: Evidence from Cagayan National High School

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Abstract

Inclusive education has become a global educational priority aimed at ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all learners, including those with disabilities and special educational needs. Despite policy advancements promoting inclusive practices, successful implementation largely depends on teacher preparedness and institutional readiness. This study assessed the readiness of junior high school teachers at Cagayan National High School (CNHS), Philippines, in implementing inclusive education. Specifically, it examined teachers' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and challenges encountered in handling learners with special educational needs. A descriptive survey design was employed involving 30 junior high school teachers selected through total enumeration. Data were collected using an adapted questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that teachers demonstrated a moderate-to-high level of readiness, particularly in their attitudes toward inclusion ($M = 2.85$), followed by skills ($M = 2.70$) and knowledge ($M = 2.57$). However, respondents acknowledged inadequate training, insufficient knowledge of disability-specific interventions, limited access to specialized instructional resources, and lack of professional development opportunities. Teachers expressed strong willingness to improve their competencies and recognized the importance of collaborative responsibility in inclusive education. The study concludes that while teachers exhibit positive dispositions toward inclusion, significant capacity-building initiatives remain necessary to enhance effective implementation. The findings underscore the importance of sustained professional development, institutional support, and resource allocation in strengthening inclusive education practices in secondary schools.

Keywords: *Inclusive education, teacher readiness, special education, teacher competency, secondary education, Philippines, educational inclusion*

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Introduction

Inclusive education has emerged as a central principle of educational reform worldwide, emphasizing equal educational opportunities regardless of learners' abilities, disabilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, or cultural differences. Rooted in social justice and human rights frameworks, inclusive education advocates the participation of all learners within mainstream educational environments while ensuring that appropriate accommodations and support mechanisms are available.

Globally, international frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and UNESCO's Education for All initiative have reinforced the obligation of educational systems to create inclusive learning environments. These policies recognize education as a fundamental right and emphasize that learners with disabilities should not be segregated but rather educated alongside their peers whenever possible.

In the Philippine context, inclusive education has been institutionalized through various policies, including DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009 and DepEd Order No. 26, s. 1997, which promote the integration of learners with special educational needs into mainstream educational settings. More recently, Republic Act No. 11650 or the Inclusive Education Act further strengthened the government's commitment to providing equitable access to quality education for all learners.

Despite policy advancements, the successful implementation of inclusive education remains largely dependent on teacher preparedness. Teachers serve as frontline implementers responsible for creating inclusive learning environments, adapting instructional strategies, managing diverse classrooms, and addressing learners' varying educational needs. Consequently, teacher readiness including knowledge, skills, attitudes, and access to support systems has become a critical determinant of inclusive education success.

Studies conducted across various educational contexts consistently reveal that insufficient teacher preparation, inadequate training, limited resources, and lack of institutional support continue to hinder effective implementation of inclusive education. In many developing countries, teachers often report feeling unprepared to manage classrooms containing learners with diverse disabilities and learning needs.

Given these realities, assessing teacher readiness becomes essential for identifying capacity gaps and informing targeted professional development interventions. Thus, this study examined the readiness of junior high school teachers at Cagayan National High School in handling inclusive education and explored the challenges that influence successful implementation.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the Inclusive Pedagogy Framework (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

The Theory of Planned Behavior posits that individuals' behaviors are influenced by their attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms. Applied to inclusive education, teachers' willingness and readiness to implement inclusive practices are shaped by their beliefs, competencies, confidence levels, and perceptions of institutional expectations.

Meanwhile, the Inclusive Pedagogy Framework emphasizes that educational inclusion requires teachers to recognize learner diversity as a normal aspect of classroom life rather than a challenge requiring separate interventions. Inclusive pedagogy advocates teaching approaches that extend learning opportunities to all learners without marginalization.

Together, these frameworks explain how teacher knowledge, skills, and attitudes influence readiness and effectiveness in implementing inclusive educational practices.

3. Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive-survey research design to determine teachers' readiness in implementing inclusive education. This design was appropriate because it enabled the systematic assessment of teachers' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and perceived challenges regarding inclusive education implementation.

Participants

The study involved thirty (30) junior high school teachers from Cagayan National High School during School Year 2019–2020. Participants represented various teaching specializations and professional backgrounds. Most respondents belonged to the 31–40 age bracket (43.33%), were female (80%), held Teacher III positions (43.33%), had 12–17 years of teaching experience (43.33%), and possessed master's degrees (46.66%). None of the participants had formal degrees in Special Education.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using an adapted questionnaire based on the works of Kern (2006) and Mahony (2016). The instrument measured three domains: knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward inclusive education, along with challenges encountered in implementation. Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, and weighted mean, were used to analyze the data. Adjectival interpretations were applied to determine the levels of teacher readiness across the identified domains.

4. Results and Discussion

Teacher Knowledge on Inclusive Education

The findings revealed that the teachers' level of knowledge regarding inclusive education obtained an overall mean of **2.57**, interpreted as **Great Extent**, indicating that respondents possess a general understanding of the principles and objectives of inclusive education. Teachers demonstrated awareness of school policies related to inclusive education and recognized the social, emotional, and academic benefits that inclusion provides to learners with special educational needs. They also acknowledged the importance of collaboration among educators in creating a supportive learning environment for all students.

Many teachers reported that professional discussions with colleagues, Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, and school-based meetings contributed to their understanding of inclusive practices. One teacher explained:

“Nagkakaroon naman kami ng pagkakataon na mag-usap tungkol sa mga batang may special needs lalo na kapag may case conference o meeting. Malaking tulong ang pakikipagpalitan ng ideya sa mga kapwa guro.”

Another participant shared:

“Nakikita namin na mas nagiging confident ang mga batang may special needs kapag kasama nila ang regular students. Natututo rin ang ibang bata na maging understanding at supportive.”

These responses suggest that teachers recognize inclusion as a mechanism not only for academic development but also for social integration and acceptance. Such findings support the work of Avramidis and Norwich (2002), who emphasized that teachers who understand the social value of inclusion are more likely to support inclusive educational practices. Similarly, Sharma et al. (2018) noted that teacher awareness of the benefits of inclusion positively influences classroom acceptance and learner participation.

Despite these positive indicators, respondents admitted significant limitations in their preparedness to effectively support learners with disabilities. Teachers reported uncertainty regarding disability classifications, individualized instructional planning, and evidence-based interventions. Several respondents acknowledged that they had never received formal training in Special Education.

One participant stated:

“Aminado po ako na wala akong sapat na kaalaman sa iba't ibang disability. Kapag may batang may learning difficulty, trial and error lang minsan ang ginagawa naming strategy.”

Another teacher remarked:

“Alam namin ang konsepto ng inclusive education pero kulang kami sa training kung paano talaga ito ipapatupad sa loob ng classroom.”

Teachers also reported limited awareness regarding the exact number of learners requiring special education services because many students remained undiagnosed.

A respondent explained:

“May mga bata kaming napapansin na may learning difficulties pero wala namang clinical diagnosis kaya hindi namin alam kung paano sila ikakategorya at tutulungan.”

The findings indicate that teachers possess foundational knowledge but require deeper understanding of disability-specific pedagogies, assessment procedures, and intervention strategies. According to Loreman et al. (2020), successful implementation of inclusive education requires not only positive awareness but also specialized knowledge regarding learner diversity, disability characteristics, and differentiated instruction. Likewise, Forlin and Chambers (2011) emphasized that insufficient teacher preparation remains one of the greatest barriers to inclusive education globally.

Teacher Skills on Inclusive Education

The results showed that teachers rated their skills in implementing inclusive education at a **Great Extent** level, with an overall mean of **2.70**. Respondents generally believed that they possess basic competencies in managing diverse classrooms and recognized inclusive education as a shared responsibility among teachers, school administrators, parents, and stakeholders.

Several participants emphasized the importance of collaboration in addressing learner diversity.

One teacher explained:

“Hindi lamang guro ang may responsibilidad sa batang may special needs. Kailangan kasama ang magulang, guidance counselor, school head, at iba pang stakeholders.”

Another participant shared:

“Kapag nagtutulungan ang mga guro, mas madali naming natutugunan ang pangangailangan ng mga bata.”

These responses indicate that teachers perceive inclusion as a collaborative endeavor rather than an isolated teaching responsibility. This finding aligns with the ecological perspective of inclusive education, which highlights the importance of coordinated support systems among educators, families, and communities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ainscow, 2020).

However, the strongest finding under this domain was the teachers' expressed need for further professional development, reflected in the highest mean score of **3.79**. Respondents acknowledged deficiencies in adapting instruction, managing behavior, developing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and implementing specialized interventions.

One participant candidly stated:

“Kailangan talaga namin ng mas maraming training dahil iba ang pagtuturo sa batang may special needs. Hindi sapat ang general teaching strategies lamang.”

Another respondent remarked:

“Nahihirapan kami gumawa ng individualized activities dahil wala kaming sapat na background sa SPED.”

Similarly, another teacher shared:

“Kapag may batang may behavioral concerns, minsan hindi namin alam kung ano ang pinakaepektibong intervention.”

These responses reveal a strong willingness to improve despite perceived competency limitations. The findings support the work of Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), who argued that teachers require specialized competencies in differentiated instruction and inclusive pedagogy to effectively address learner diversity. Likewise, Sharma and Sokal (2016) found that teacher self-efficacy significantly improves following professional development programs focused on inclusive education.

The results further suggest that teachers are highly motivated to acquire new competencies and share best practices with colleagues. Such openness to learning is a positive indicator of institutional readiness and professional growth.

Teacher Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education

Among the three domains assessed, attitude obtained the highest overall mean (**M = 2.85**), indicating that teachers generally hold favorable perceptions regarding inclusive education. Respondents recognized the educational and social benefits of inclusion and acknowledged that learners with disabilities deserve equal opportunities to participate in mainstream educational settings.

One participant stated:

“Karapatan ng bawat bata na makapag-aral kasama ang iba. Hindi dapat mahiwalay ang mga batang may special needs kung kaya naman silang suportahan.”

Another teacher shared:

“Nakakatulong ang inclusion para matuto ang lahat ng bata ng respeto, pagtanggap, at pakikipagkapwa-tao.”

These findings support UNESCO's (2020) assertion that inclusive education promotes equity, social cohesion, and respect for diversity. Similarly, Slee (2018) emphasized that inclusive schools foster democratic values and reduce discrimination among learners.

Nevertheless, respondents expressed several concerns regarding the practical implementation of inclusive education. Many teachers worried about increased workload, large class sizes, classroom management challenges, and the difficulty of simultaneously addressing the needs of diverse learners.

One participant explained:

“Mahirap po kapag mahigit limampung estudyante ang nasa isang klase tapos may ilan pang nangangailangan ng special attention.”

Another teacher remarked:

“Hindi naman kami tutol sa inclusive education pero kailangan din naming isipin kung paano mabibigyan ng sapat na oras ang bawat bata.”

A respondent further stated:

“Kapag walang teacher aide o SPED teacher na tutulong, talagang mabigat sa regular teacher ang responsibilidad.”

These concerns do not necessarily indicate resistance toward inclusion. Rather, they reflect realistic challenges encountered by teachers operating within resource-constrained educational environments. Similar findings were reported by De Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert (2011), who found that while teachers generally support inclusive education, concerns regarding workload, insufficient support, and classroom management significantly affect

implementation.

The findings suggest that positive attitudes alone are insufficient to ensure successful inclusion. Adequate institutional support, manageable class sizes, and access to specialized personnel remain essential components of effective implementation.

Challenges Encountered in Implementing Inclusive Education

The study identified several barriers affecting the successful implementation of inclusive education at Cagayan National High School. These challenges include inadequate facilities, insufficient instructional resources, limited professional development opportunities, and weak collaboration between schools and families.

Many teachers reported that classrooms lacked specialized equipment and assistive technologies necessary for supporting learners with disabilities.

One respondent stated:

“Wala kaming assistive devices at kulang ang learning materials para sa mga batang may espesyal na pangangailangan.”

Another participant explained:

“Minsan improvised lamang ang ginagamit naming materials dahil wala talagang available na resources.”

Teachers also emphasized the absence of sustained training programs focusing on inclusive education.

A teacher shared:

“Karamihan sa amin ay hindi pa nakadalo sa formal training tungkol sa inclusive education kaya kulang pa rin ang aming kakayahan.”

Another respondent remarked:

“Kung may regular na seminars at workshops, mas magiging handa kami sa paghawak ng mga batang may special needs.”

School-home collaboration likewise emerged as a concern. Several teachers reported difficulties maintaining consistent communication with parents regarding learners' progress and intervention plans.

One participant explained:

“May mga magulang na hindi agad nakikipag-coordinate sa paaralan kaya nahihirapan kaming masubaybayan ang development ng bata.”

These findings are consistent with previous studies identifying resource scarcity, inadequate teacher preparation, and limited stakeholder collaboration as persistent barriers to inclusive education implementation (Forlin, 2013; Ainscow, 2020; UNESCO, 2020).

Overall, the results suggest that while teachers demonstrate willingness and positive attitudes toward inclusive education, institutional readiness remains constrained by structural and systemic challenges. Sustainable implementation requires investments in teacher capacity-building, resource provision, specialized personnel, and stronger partnerships among schools, families, communities, and policymakers.

The findings affirm that successful inclusive education extends beyond teacher commitment; it requires a comprehensive support system that empowers educators to effectively respond to the diverse needs of all learners while promoting equity, participation, and educational success.

5. Discussion

The findings suggest that teacher readiness for inclusive education extends beyond positive attitudes. Although teachers generally support inclusive education, their limited knowledge and practical competencies hinder effective implementation. This aligns with international studies indicating that favorable attitudes alone do not guarantee successful inclusion without corresponding professional expertise and institutional support.

The moderate levels of teacher preparedness identified in this study mirror findings from previous research demonstrating that many mainstream educators feel inadequately prepared to teach learners with disabilities. The lack of specialized training reported by respondents reflects a common challenge across developing educational systems where inclusive education policies have advanced more rapidly than teacher preparation programs.

Furthermore, teachers' recognition of inclusive education as a shared responsibility supports contemporary views emphasizing collaborative educational ecosystems involving school leaders, special education specialists, parents, and community stakeholders. Effective inclusion requires coordinated support rather than isolated teacher efforts. The concerns regarding workload, classroom management, and resource limitations are likewise consistent with previous studies highlighting structural barriers to inclusion. Without adequate resources, assistive technologies, and ongoing professional development, teachers may struggle to translate inclusive principles into effective classroom practices.

6. Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings have important implications for educational policymakers, school administrators, and teacher education institutions. First, comprehensive professional development programs focusing on disability awareness, differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and behavior management should be institutionalized. Second, schools must allocate resources for assistive technologies, specialized instructional materials, and inclusive classroom facilities.

Additionally, teacher preparation programs should strengthen coursework related to inclusive education and special needs pedagogy. Collaborative partnerships among schools, parents, local government units, and community organizations should also be enhanced to establish sustainable support systems for learners with disabilities.

7. Conclusion

The study concludes that while junior high school teachers at Cagayan National High School demonstrate positive attitudes and moderate readiness toward inclusive education, substantial gaps remain in knowledge, specialized skills, and institutional support. Teachers acknowledge the value of inclusion and express willingness to improve their competencies; however, insufficient training, limited resources, and inadequate support systems continue to constrain effective implementation.

For inclusive education to achieve its intended outcomes, investments in teacher capacity building, professional development, resource provision, and collaborative support structures are imperative. Strengthening these areas will contribute significantly to creating equitable and inclusive learning environments for all learners.

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