Article

An Empirical Study on Teachers' Perceptions Towards Inclusive Education

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Abstract: This study explores the relationship between teachers' perceptions of inclusive education and the effectiveness of collaboration efforts and strategies to improve inclusive practices within educational institutions. The research reveals that teachers generally hold positive perceptions towards inclusive education, recognizing its benefits for students with special needs. There is a significant association between positive perceptions and the effectiveness of collaboration among educators, as well as the acceptance of strategies designed to enhance inclusion. However, challenges such as resource limitations and role clarity were also identified, suggesting areas for improvement. The findings underscore the importance of fostering positive attitudes among teachers to support successful collaboration and the implementation of inclusive education strategies, which are crucial for the effective realization of inclusive education policies.

Introduction

Inclusive education refers to an educational approach that values diversity and ensures that all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, have equal access to quality education within mainstream classrooms (Bombardelli, 2020). Globally, inclusive education has gained significant traction, driven by international policies like the Salamanca Statement and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which emphasize the right to inclusive education (Alshalhoub, 2019). Countries worldwide are progressively adopting inclusive education policies, though the degree of implementation varies significantly depending on local contexts

(Danau, 2023). Understanding teachers' perceptions is crucial because teachers are central to the successful implementation of these inclusive practices (She et al., 2023). Teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and preparedness can either facilitate or hinder the adoption of inclusive education, making it essential to explore and address their views (Triviño-Amigo et al., 2022). Global trends highlight that countries like South Africa and Saudi Arabia, among others, are moving towards more inclusive educational systems, although challenges remain, particularly in aligning teacher perceptions with policy goals (Engelbrecht, 2020). This makes the understanding of teachers' perceptions a critical component in evaluating the effectiveness of inclusive education policies.

Teachers' perceptions are critical to the success of inclusive education because they directly influence the implementation of inclusive practices in the classroom (Krischler et al., 2019). Positive attitudes and beliefs about inclusive education can lead to more effective teaching strategies and greater willingness to adapt to the needs of all students (Noreen et al., 2019). Conversely, negative perceptions can result in resistance to inclusion and the exclusion of students with diverse needs from meaningful participation in the classroom (Bayram & Öztürk, 2020). Teachers who feel inadequately prepared or supported may struggle to implement inclusive practices, leading to suboptimal educational outcomes for students with special needs (Shutaleva et al., 2023). Moreover, teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy and the availability of resources significantly impact their attitudes towards inclusion (Werner et al., 2021). In many cases, the success of inclusive education initiatives depends not only on policy directives but also on the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of the teachers who are tasked with implementing them (Paseka & Schwab, 2019). Therefore, fostering positive teacher perceptions through targeted training and support is essential for the success of inclusive education.

Given the pivotal role that teachers' perceptions play in the success of inclusive education, there is an urgent need to study these perceptions in depth (Aubakirova & Bakbergen, 2022). Research into teachers' attitudes towards inclusion can reveal barriers to effective implementation, such as lack of training, inadequate resources, or resistance to change (Specht et al., 2022). Understanding these barriers allows for the development of targeted interventions to address them, thereby improving the overall effectiveness of inclusive education policies (Hagiwara et al., 2019). Furthermore, studying teachers' perceptions can help identify the specific support needs that teachers have in order to feel confident and capable of delivering inclusive education (Šūmane & Aboltina, 2020). This knowledge is crucial for policymakers and educational leaders as they seek to design professional development programs that adequately prepare teachers for the challenges of inclusive education (Kobuladze & Berandze, 2021). Moreover, research into teachers' perceptions can also contribute to the

development of more inclusive school cultures by promoting a better understanding of diversity and inclusion among all school staff (Abrol, 2023). This, in turn, can lead to more positive educational outcomes for students with diverse needs.

Existing research highlights that teachers' perceptions of inclusive education are complex and influenced by multiple factors, including personal beliefs, professional experience, and the level of support they receive (Werner et al., 2021). Studies have shown that teachers who perceive themselves as well-prepared and supported are more likely to have positive attitudes towards inclusive education (Triviño-Amigo et al., 2022). Research in various contexts, such as South Africa and Saudi Arabia, suggests that while teachers generally support the idea of inclusion, their perceptions are often influenced by the availability of resources and the level of training they have received (Engelbrecht, 2020). Furthermore, studies indicate that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion can vary significantly depending on their experiences with diverse student populations (Paseka & Schwab, 2019). For instance, teachers who have had positive experiences with inclusive education are more likely to advocate for its broader implementation (Kefallinou et al., 2020). However, research also shows that many teachers feel unprepared to implement inclusive practices effectively, which can lead to negative perceptions and resistance (Bayram & Öztürk, 2020). Therefore, there is a need for ongoing research to further explore the factors that influence teachers' perceptions and to develop strategies to address any negative attitudes or beliefs.

Despite the growing body of research on teachers' perceptions of inclusive education, significant gaps remain. One major gap is the lack of longitudinal studies that track changes in teachers' attitudes over time, particularly in response to professional development or changes in policy (Specht et al., 2022). Additionally, there is a need for more research that examines the specific factors that contribute to negative perceptions of inclusive education, such as stress, workload, or lack of support (Arnaiz Sánchez et al., 2019). Another gap in the literature is the limited research on how cultural and societal factors influence teachers' perceptions of inclusion, particularly in non-Western contexts (Aubakirova & Bakbergen, 2022). Furthermore, while there is some research on the impact of teacher training on perceptions of inclusive education, there is a lack of studies that explore the long-term effectiveness of such training programs (Kobuladze & Berandze, 2021). Additionally, the existing literature often fails to adequately address the perspectives of teachers working in different educational stages, such as primary versus secondary education (Triviño-Amigo et al., 2022). Finally, there is a need for more research that considers the intersectionality of teachers' identities, such as gender, race, and

socioeconomic status, and how these factors may influence their perceptions of inclusive education (Krischler et al., 2019). Focusing on these areas, research can provide valuable insights that directly benefit teachers by enhancing their professional growth and effectiveness, while also supporting schools in creating inclusive, supportive, and high-performing educational environments.

Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive correlational research design to investigate the interplay between teachers' perceptions of inclusive education and the effectiveness of key Philippine legal frameworks—RA 10533, RA 7277 as amended by RA 9442, and RA 10070—in fostering inclusive practices within educational institutions. Conducted at Lipata Central Elementary School in Minglanilla, Cebu City, the research involved a targeted group of educators selected for their direct engagement with inclusive education. The study's primary data collection tool was a survey questionnaire, which was adapted from the established work by Ali, Mustapha, and Jelas (2006) on teachers' perceptions of inclusive education in Malaysia, ensuring relevance to the Philippine context. The questionnaire comprised sections on demographic details, perceptions of inclusive education, and practical experiences with collaboration and strategies for inclusive education. To analyze the collected data, the study employed statistical techniques including frequency counts, simple percentages, weighted means, and Pearson's r correlation coefficient. Frequency counts and simple percentages were used to describe the demographic profile of respondents and their general perceptions, while weighted means provided an average measure of agreement with statements on inclusive education. Pearson's r was utilized to examine the strength and direction of correlations between variables, such as the relationship between teaching experience and attitudes towards inclusion. This comprehensive methodological approach allowed for an in-depth analysis of how educators' perceptions align with legislative goals, thereby offering insights into the effectiveness of inclusive education policies in the Philippine context and identifying factors that influence their successful implementation.

The scoring procedure for the perception towards inclusive education section of the questionnaire involved a 5-point Likert scale. The scale was structured as follows very positive (5) as the highest and very negative (1) as the lowest. The scores for each item were then aggregated to calculate the weighted mean, which reflected the overall tendency of the respondents' attitudes towards each aspect of inclusive education. This scoring procedure enabled a nuanced analysis of the teachers' perceptions, identifying both strengths and areas for

improvement in the implementation of inclusive education practices as aligned with the legislative frameworks. This comprehensive methodological approach provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of inclusive education policies in the Philippines, contributing to the broader understanding of the factors that influence their successful implementation.

Results and Discussion

The data in Table 1 presents the age and gender distribution of respondents, revealing a notable disparity in gender representation across different age groups. The majority of respondents are female, comprising 93.06% (67 out of 72) of the total sample, while males

Table 1. Age and Gender of the Respondents

Age (in years)	Female		Male		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
above 54	8	11.11	0	0.00	8	11.11
45-54	23	31.94	2	2.78	25	34.72
35-44	21	29.17	2	2.78	23	31.94
25-34	15	20.83	1	1.39	16	22.22
Total	67	93.06	5	6.94	72	100.00

represent only 6.94% (5 out of 72). Among females, the largest age group is 45-54 years, accounting for 31.94% of the total respondents, followed by those aged 35-44 years at 29.17%. Females aged 25-34 and above 54 years represent 20.83% and 11.11% of the total, respectively. In contrast, male respondents are sparsely distributed, with 2.78% each in the 45-54 and 35-44 age groups, and 1.39% in the 25-34 age group. Notably, there are no male respondents above 54 years. This data highlights a significant gender imbalance, with female respondents overwhelmingly represented across all age categories.

Table 2. Highest Educational Attainment of the Respondents

Educational Attainment	f	%
With Doctorate Units	3	4.17
Master's Graduate	7	9.72
With Master's Units	47	65.28
Bachelor's Degree	15	20.83
Total	72	100.00

Table 2 provides an overview of the highest educational attainment among the respondents, showing that the majority have pursued advanced studies beyond a bachelor's degree. Specifically, 65.28% of the respondents have completed some units towards a master's degree, making this the most common level of education. A smaller percentage, 9.72%, have fully graduated with a master's degree, while 4.17% have undertaken doctoral units. In contrast, 20.83% of respondents hold only a bachelor's degree. Overall, the data indicates that a significant portion of the respondents has engaged in graduate-level education, with the

majority being at the stage of working towards or having completed master's degrees.

Table 3. Length of Service of the Respondents

Length of Service (in years)	f	%
16 and above	32	44.44
11-15	13	18.06
6-10	16	22.22
1-5	11	15.28
Total	72	100.00

Table 3 details the length of service among the respondents, illustrating a wide range of experience levels. The largest group of respondents, 44.44%, have served for 16 years or more, indicating a significant portion of the sample has substantial experience in their field. Those with 6-10 years of service make up 22.22% of the respondents, while 18.06% have 11-15 years of service. The smallest group, 15.28%, consists of respondents with 1-5 years of service. Overall, the data suggests that the majority of respondents are seasoned professionals with more than a decade of experience, with nearly half having served for over 16 years.

Table 4. Level of Perception of the Respondents towards Inclusive Education

S/N	Indicators	WM	Verbal Description
1	Students with special needs are academically better in inclusive classrooms	3.46	Positive
2	Students with special needs must be integrated into the regular community	3.78	Positive
3	In order to achieve the highest level of inclusion, it is necessary for students with special needs to be placed in regular classes with back up support	3.82	Positive
4	The placement of students with special needs in regular classes negatively affects the academic performance of mainstream students	3.08	Neutral
5	The academically-talented students will be isolated in the inclusive classrooms	2.63	Neutral
6	Students with special needs will benefit from the inclusive program in regular classrooms	3.76	Positive
7	Students with special needs have the right to receive an education in mainstream classes	3.93	Positive
8	Students with special needs will not be labeled as 'stupid', 'weird' or 'hopeless' when placed in regular classrooms	3.97	Positive
Aggregate Weighted Mean		3.55	Positive

Table 4 presents the respondents' perceptions towards inclusive education, showing an overall positive attitude. The aggregate weighted mean of 3.55 indicates that, on average, respondents have a favorable view of inclusive education. The highest level of agreement

is observed in the perception that students with special needs will not be labeled negatively when placed in regular classrooms, with a weighted mean of 3.97, suggesting strong support for inclusive practices that reduce stigma. Additionally, the belief that students with special needs have the right to receive education in mainstream classes is highly supported, with a mean of 3.93. There is also strong agreement that students with special needs benefit from inclusive programs (3.76) and should be integrated into the regular community (3.78). However, some neutrality is expressed regarding the potential negative effects of inclusive education, such as concerns that it may negatively impact the academic performance of mainstream students (3.08) or isolate academically-talented students (2.63). Despite these concerns, the overall perception remains positive, with respondents recognizing the benefits of inclusive education for students with special needs and their right to be educated in mainstream environments.

Table 5. Level of Perception of the Respondents towards Collaboration Efforts in Inclusive Education

S/N	Indicators	WM	Verbal Description
1	Special needs teachers and regular teachers need to work together in order to teach students with special needs in inclusive classrooms	4.22	Very Positive
2	Although the inclusive education in a good concept, its implementation is ineffective due to objections from the mainstream classroom teachers	3.40	Neutral
3	Mainstream classrooms teachers have a main responsibility towards the students with special needs placed in their classrooms	3.93	Positive
4	The presence of a special education teacher in the regular classrooms could raise difficulties in determining who really is responsible for the special students	3.33	Neutral
5	The special education teacher only helps the students with special needs	3.14	Neutral
Aggregate Weighted Mean		3.61	Positive

Table 5 reflects the respondents' perceptions towards collaboration efforts in inclusive education, revealing generally positive views with some reservations. The aggregate weighted mean of 3.61 suggests a favorable overall perception of collaboration in inclusive settings. The highest agreement is with the statement that special needs teachers and regular teachers need to work together to effectively teach students with special needs in inclusive classrooms, with a weighted mean of 4.22, indicating a "Very Positive" attitude toward collaborative efforts. Respondents also positively view the responsibility of mainstream teachers towards students with special needs in their classrooms, with a mean of 3.93. However, there is a more neutral stance on issues such as the potential for confusion over responsibilities between special

education and regular teachers (3.33), and the belief that the special education teacher only assists students with special needs (3.14). The statement that the implementation of inclusive education may be ineffective due to objections from mainstream teachers also received a neutral response (3.40), indicating some concern about practical challenges in collaboration. Overall, while respondents generally support collaborative efforts in inclusive education, there are some concerns about role clarity and the effectiveness of implementation.

Table 6. Level of Perception of the Respondents towards Strategies to Improve Inclusive Education

S/N	Indicators	WM	Verbal Description
1	Mainstream classroom teachers have the training and skills to teach special needs student	3.89	Positive
2	Special needs students need extra help and attention	4.24	Very Positive
3	Students with special needs committed more disciplinary problems compared to the regular students	3.46	Positive
4	Mainstream classroom teachers received little help from the special needs teachers	3.35	Neutral
5	Although inclusive education is important, the resources for the students with special needs in a mainstream classroom are limited.	3.92	Positive
Aggregate Weighted Mean		3.77	Positive

Table 6 presents the respondents' perceptions of strategies to improve inclusive education, indicating generally positive views with recognition of certain challenges. The aggregate weighted mean of 3.77 suggests an overall positive attitude towards the strategies discussed. The strongest agreement is on the need for extra help and attention for students with special needs, with a weighted mean of 4.24, reflecting a "Very Positive" perception. This highlights the respondents' acknowledgment of the additional support required for these students in inclusive settings. Respondents also believe that mainstream classroom teachers are reasonably equipped with the training and skills to teach special needs students, as indicated by a weighted mean of 3.89. However, there is some concern that resources for special needs students in mainstream classrooms are limited, with a positive but slightly lower weighted mean of 3.92. Additionally, while there is a positive perception that special needs students may have more disciplinary issues compared to regular students (3.46), this view is balanced by a neutral stance on the level of help mainstream teachers receive from special needs teachers (3.35). Overall, the data reflects a positive perception of the strategies to improve inclusive education, particularly in terms of recognizing the needs for additional support

and adequate teacher training, while also acknowledging the resource limitations and collaboration challenges in mainstream classrooms.

Table 7. Test of Relationship between the Respondents' Perception and Collaboration Efforts in Inclusive Education

Variables	r-value	Strength of Correlation	p - value	Decision	Remarks
Perception and Collaboration	0.581*	Moderate Positive	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant

*significant at p<0.05 (two-tailed)

Table 7 presents the results of a statistical test examining the relationship between respondents' perceptions and collaboration efforts in inclusive education. The analysis reveals a moderate positive correlation, with an r-value of 0.581, indicating that as perceptions towards inclusive education improve, so do the collaboration efforts among educators. The p-value is 0.000, which is below the significance threshold of 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (Ho). This suggests that the relationship between perception and collaboration is statistically significant. In summary, the data indicates that there is a meaningful and moderate positive association between how respondents perceive inclusive education and the effectiveness of collaboration efforts in implementing it, highlighting the importance of positive perceptions in fostering successful collaborative practices.

Table 8. Test of Relationship between the Respondents' Perception and Strategies to Improve Inclusive Education

Variables	r-value	Strength of Correlation	p - value	Decision	Remarks
Perception and Strategies	0.501*	Moderate Positive	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant

*significant at p<0.05 (two-tailed)

Table 8 presents the results of a statistical analysis testing the relationship between respondents' perceptions and the strategies to improve inclusive education. The results indicate a moderate positive correlation, with an r-value of 0.501. This suggests that as respondents' perceptions towards inclusive education become more positive, the strategies to enhance it are also perceived more favorably. The p-value is 0.000, which is below the significance level of 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (Ho). This signifies that the observed relationship is statistically significant. In conclusion, the data demonstrates that there is a significant and moderate positive correlation between positive perceptions of inclusive education and the effectiveness or acceptance of strategies aimed at improving it. This underscores the importance of fostering positive perceptions to support the successful implementation of these strategies.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that respondents generally hold positive perceptions towards inclusive education, recognizing its benefits for students with special needs. There is strong support for collaboration between special needs and mainstream teachers, which is seen as essential for effective inclusive education. However, concerns about the adequacy of resources and role clarity highlight areas for improvement. The data also shows that positive perceptions of inclusive education are significantly associated with stronger collaboration efforts and greater acceptance of strategies to enhance inclusion. Overall, fostering positive attitudes towards inclusive education appears crucial for improving both collaboration and the implementation of effective strategies.

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