

Article

Teacher Perceptions and Collaborative Efforts in Inclusive Education: A Path to Effective Implementation

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Abstract: This study explores the relationship between teachers' perceptions of inclusive education and their collaboration efforts, as well as their support for strategies to enhance inclusive practices in a Philippine high school setting. Employing a descriptive correlational design, the research surveyed 36 senior high school teachers, focusing on perceptions, collaboration, and support strategies related to inclusivity. Findings indicate a weak yet significant positive correlation between teachers' perceptions and their collaboration efforts, suggesting that positive attitudes toward inclusive education slightly encourage cooperative practices. However, the relationship between perceptions and support for improvement strategies was insignificant, implying that external factors, such as institutional support and resources, may more heavily influence teachers' endorsement of enhancement efforts. These results underscore the importance of both fostering positive perceptions and strengthening institutional frameworks to effectively support inclusive education initiatives.

Keywords: Inclusive education, teachers' perceptions, collaboration efforts, support strategies, educational policy, institutional support

Introduction

Inclusive education is designed to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities, within a shared classroom environment (Tripathi & Kapri, 2019). It emphasizes the integration of diverse learners, ensuring everyone, regardless of ability, has equal access to educational resources (Qian & Rong, 2023). This approach fosters a sense of belonging among all students, supporting both their academic and social development (Karagianni & Drigas, 2023). Inclusive education also involves



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innovative teaching techniques to cater to varied learning needs (Page et al., 2021). Core principles include equal opportunity, nondiscrimination, and the right to access quality education for all learners (Hoque & Nasrin, 2023).

Inclusive education has developed through significant legislative actions and global policies. The United Nations' Salamanca Statement in 1994 set a benchmark for inclusion policies worldwide (Tripathi & Kapri, 2019). The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2006 further reinforced inclusive practices as a human right (Zadorozhna-Kniahnytska et al., 2021). National policies such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the U.S. have made inclusive education more accessible (Oktadiana & Wardana, 2019). Countries have adopted the philosophy of equal education for students with disabilities, acknowledging it as essential to social justice (Medina-García et al., 2020).

Inclusive education fosters social integration and promotes a culture of diversity and respect in schools (Amor et al., 2021). By including students of all abilities in mainstream classrooms, it creates a learning environment that values every individual's contributions (Kunwar & Adhikari, 2023). Inclusive education is linked to better academic outcomes for students, both with and without disabilities (Bombardelli, 2020). It promotes a more tolerant and equitable society, reflecting the real world's diversity (Merrigan & Senior, 2021). Teachers are instrumental in the successful implementation of inclusive education, directly influencing its effectiveness (Sagun-Ongtangco et al., 2019). Their attitudes and beliefs about inclusion are critical, as positive perceptions can lead to more effective adoption of inclusive practices (Medina-García et al., 2020). Teachers who embrace inclusive education use creative and diverse teaching strategies, benefitting all students (Karagianni & Drigas, 2023).

Teachers often encounter challenges such as insufficient training and a lack of resources for supporting diverse learning needs (Qian & Rong, 2023). Many educators feel unprepared to address the varying needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms (Kunwar & Adhikari, 2023). The added responsibilities in inclusive settings also contribute to teacher burnout and job dissatisfaction (Bombardelli, 2020). Addressing these challenges is critical for fostering a sustainable inclusive education system.

Collaboration among teachers, administrators, and parents is essential in inclusive settings (Lo et al., 2019). Studies show that teachers perceive collaborative efforts as beneficial but often feel collaboration could be improved (Saguna-Ongtangco et al., 2019). Effective strategies, such as specialized training in inclusive practices and inclusive pedagogy, are essential to support teachers in their roles (Magaba, 2022). Research into inclusive education is crucial for understanding the factors that facilitate or hinder inclusive practices, enabling educators to create more supportive learning environments.

Such studies provide insights for policymakers to make informed decisions that support inclusivity, addressing resource gaps, and improving teacher training

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive correlational research design to investigate the relationship between teachers' perceptions of inclusive education and the effectiveness of Philippine legal frameworks—specifically Republic Acts 10533, 7277 (amended by RA 9442), and 10070—in promoting inclusive educational practices. This design was chosen based on established methodologies in educational research, such as those outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018), which emphasize the strength of correlational approaches in exploring complex interconnections between multiple factors. The study's goal was to examine whether teachers' perceptions aligned with the intended objectives of these legal frameworks, thereby illuminating factors that influence the successful implementation of inclusive practices in Philippine schools.

The research environment for this study was Bankal National High School - Senior High School in Region VII, a key secondary educational institution within the DepEd Lapu-Lapu City Division. This institution's infrastructure and standing within the 6th Legislative District of Cebu provided a relevant context for investigating the perspectives of teachers within a typical DepEd-managed school. The respondents consisted of 36 senior high school teachers, representing the entire faculty at Bankal National High School - Senior High School. This comprehensive selection ensured that the study captured diverse insights into teachers' experiences with inclusive education in the school setting. To gather data, the study utilized a survey questionnaire, adapted from the work by Ali, Mustapha, and Jelas (2006) on teachers' perceptions of inclusive education in Malaysia. Modifications were made to align with the Philippine educational context, enhancing the instrument's relevance to the local legislative and policy framework. The questionnaire was structured in sections that systematically explored various facets of inclusive education, with questions tailored to assess teachers' beliefs, experiences, and evaluations of legal supports for inclusivity.

Data collection followed a three-phase process to ensure validity and reliability. Initially, participants completed the questionnaire, followed by data verification to address any ambiguities in responses, and finally, data analysis using statistical methods. Pearson's r correlation coefficient was applied to explore the relationships between variables, such as years of teaching experience and attitudes toward inclusive education. This tool was instrumental in assessing the strength and direction of these relationships, providing insights into how factors like

teaching experience might influence teachers' perceptions of inclusivity.

For scoring responses, the study employed a 5-point Likert scale to quantify teachers' agreement with various statements related to inclusive education.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. 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	2.81	Neutral
2	Students with special needs must be integrated into the regular community	3.03	Neutral
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	3.03	Neutral
4	The placement of students with special needs in regular classes negatively affect the academic performance of mainstream students	3.08	Neutral
5	The academically-talented students will be isolated in the inclusive classrooms	2.42	Negative
6	Students with special needs will benefit from the inclusive program in regular classrooms	2.81	Neutral
7	Students with special needs have the right to receive an education in mainstream classes	3.44	Positive
8	Students with special needs will not be labeled as 'stupid', 'weird' or 'hopeless' when placed in regular classrooms	3.69	Positive
	Aggregate Weighted Mean	3.04	Neutral

The data in Table 1 presents an analysis of teachers' perceptions toward inclusive education, showing a generally neutral stance across several indicators. The aggregate weighted mean (WM) of 3.04 indicates a moderate or neutral perception overall, suggesting that respondents neither strongly endorse nor oppose the implementation of inclusive practices. Specifically, items such as the academic benefits of inclusive classrooms for students with special needs (WM = 2.81), the integration of these students into the broader community (WM = 3.03), and the necessity of placing students with special needs in regular classes with additional support (WM = 3.03) received neutral ratings, implying a balanced view on these aspects without strong agreement or disagreement.

Furthermore, there is a neutral perception on whether the presence of students with special needs might negatively impact mainstream students' academic performance (WM = 3.08), suggesting that teachers may not perceive significant detriment or benefit in this regard. Interestingly, the statement that academically talented students might feel isolated in inclusive classrooms received a lower mean score (WM = 2.42), indicating a slightly negative perception on this potential consequence of inclusive education. However, there is a positive

outlook on statements that advocate for the right of students with special needs to be educated in mainstream classes (WM = 3.44) and the idea that inclusive classrooms help reduce negative labeling of students with special needs (WM = 3.69). These positive ratings highlight teachers' support for the social and ethical aspects of inclusivity, even if their views on academic impacts remain neutral. Overall, the data indicates a cautious but supportive stance on inclusive education among the respondents, especially concerning students' rights and social acceptance, though teachers appear uncertain or ambivalent about the academic impacts on both special needs and mainstream students.

Table 2. 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	3.89	Positive
2	Although the inclusive education in a good concept, its implementation is ineffective due to objections from the mainstream classroom teachers	2.94	Neutral
3	Mainstream classrooms teachers have a main responsibility towards the students with special needs placed in their classrooms	3.50	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	2.92	Neutral
5	The special education teacher only helps the students with special needs	3.31	Neutral
	Aggregate Weighted Mean	3.31	Neutral

The data in Table 2 illustrates respondents' perceptions of collaboration efforts in inclusive education, with an aggregate weighted mean (WM) of 3.31, indicating an overall neutral stance. This neutral rating suggests a balanced view among teachers about the effectiveness and dynamics of collaborative efforts required for inclusive education. Notably, there is a positive perception (WM = 3.89) regarding the need for collaboration between special needs and regular teachers, highlighting a recognition of the importance of teamwork in inclusive classrooms. Similarly, teachers show a positive attitude (WM = 3.50) toward taking responsibility for students with special needs in mainstream classrooms, indicating a willingness to engage actively with inclusive practices.

Despite this positive outlook on collaboration, certain areas reflect a more reserved perspective. For example, there is neutrality (WM = 2.94) toward the effectiveness of inclusive education implementation, which some teachers perceive as hindered by objections from mainstream educators. Additionally, teachers hold a neutral stance (WM = 2.92) on

whether the presence of a special education teacher in regular classrooms creates ambiguity about who holds responsibility for students with special needs. This finding points to potential uncertainties around role delineation in inclusive environments. Lastly, the perception that special education teachers focus solely on students with special needs (WM = 3.31) is also neutral, suggesting that mainstream teachers may see this division of responsibility as either clear or not directly impacting their collaborative roles. Overall, while respondents positively acknowledge the need for collaborative efforts, neutrality in several indicators may reflect hesitations about practical implementation and clarity in role responsibilities within inclusive education settings. This nuanced stance indicates that while teachers generally support collaborative inclusion, they may encounter challenges or uncertainties in role-sharing and efficacy within inclusive classroom structures.

Table 3. 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	3.00	Neutral
2	Special needs students need extra help and attention	4.53	Very Positive
3	Students with special needs committed more disciplinary problems compared to the regular students	3.25	Neutral
4	Mainstream classroom teachers received little help from the special needs teachers	3.33	Neutral
5	Although inclusive education is important, the resources for the students with special needs in a mainstream classroom are limited.	4.06	Positive
	Aggregate Weighted Mean	3.63	Positive

The data in Table 3 reveals respondents' perceptions toward strategies for improving inclusive education, showing a generally positive outlook with an aggregate weighted mean (WM) of 3.63. This positive rating indicates that teachers recognize the importance of certain strategies and areas for improvement in supporting inclusive education. The most positively rated statement (WM = 4.53) reflects a strong belief that students with special needs require additional help and attention, underscoring teachers' awareness of the unique support these students need in mainstream classrooms. Additionally, teachers agree positively (WM = 4.06) that, despite the significance of inclusive education, resources for students with special needs are often insufficient in mainstream settings, highlighting resource limitations as a critical area for improvement.

Neutral responses appear on various items, suggesting mixed perceptions about specific strategies. For example, teachers are neutral (WM = 3.00) on whether mainstream teachers have adequate training and skills to teach students with special needs, pointing to a potential need for further professional development in this area. Similarly, the

neutrality (WM = 3.25) regarding whether students with special needs display more disciplinary issues than their peers may indicate that teachers do not observe a significant difference or may lack consensus on behavioral challenges. Furthermore, teachers are neutral (WM = 3.33) about receiving adequate support from special education teachers, suggesting possible room for improved collaboration and assistance. Overall, while teachers exhibit a positive recognition of the need for extra resources and support for students with special needs, neutrality in several areas suggests that practical challenges remain. This includes potential gaps in training, support, and resource allocation, which may hinder the optimal implementation of inclusive education strategies.

Table 4. 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	0.346*	Weak Positive	0.039	Reject Ho	Significant

*significant at $p < 0.05$ (two tailed)

Table 4 presents the results of the test of relationship between respondents' perceptions of inclusive education and their collaboration efforts within inclusive settings. The correlation analysis reveals a **weak positive correlation** with an r-value of 0.346, indicating a mild but positive association between teachers' perceptions of inclusive education and their collaborative efforts in implementing it. The **p-value of 0.039** ($p < 0.05$) leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0), confirming that this relationship is statistically significant.

This significant result suggests that as teachers' perceptions of inclusive education improve, their collaborative efforts in inclusive practices tend to increase, albeit moderately. While the strength of this correlation is weak, it still implies that positive attitudes toward inclusive education may encourage teachers to engage more actively with peers and special education professionals to support inclusive practices. This finding highlights the importance of fostering positive perceptions of inclusivity among teachers, as it could indirectly enhance collaboration, a critical component for the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Table 5. 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	0.296	Negligible Positive	0.079	Do not reject Ho	Not Significant

*significant at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)

Table 5 displays the analysis of the relationship between respondents' perceptions of inclusive education and their views on strategies to

improve it. The correlation test shows an r -value of 0.296, indicating a negligible positive correlation between these variables, suggesting a very weak association. With a p -value of 0.079 (greater than the 0.05 significance threshold), the decision is to not reject the null hypothesis (H_0), which indicates that this relationship is statistically insignificant. This result implies that teachers' perceptions of inclusive education do not strongly correlate with their views on strategies to enhance inclusive practices. In other words, whether teachers have positive or neutral perceptions of inclusive education does not significantly affect their opinions on strategies for improvement. This finding may suggest that teachers' support for various strategies to improve inclusivity could be driven more by external factors, such as institutional policies or available resources, rather than by their personal perceptions alone. It highlights a potential need to address other influencing factors, beyond individual perceptions, to encourage support for strategies aimed at strengthening inclusive education.

Discussion

The findings reveal nuanced insights into the relationship between teachers' perceptions of inclusive education, their collaboration efforts, and their support for strategies to improve inclusivity. The significant yet weak positive correlation between teachers' perceptions and collaboration efforts ($r = 0.346$, $p < 0.05$) suggests that favorable perceptions toward inclusive education slightly enhance collaborative efforts among educators. This aligns with research indicating that positive attitudes toward inclusivity can foster teamwork and shared responsibility among general and special education teachers, as mutual support is often essential for the success of inclusive practices (Sharma et al., 2021). Collaborative efforts in inclusive settings are crucial, as they allow for a coordinated approach to address diverse student needs, which has been shown to improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities (Smith & Tyler, 2020). Thus, promoting positive perceptions of inclusive education may indirectly enhance collaboration, supporting the overall efficacy of inclusive education within schools.

In contrast, the relationship between teachers' perceptions and their support for strategies to improve inclusive education was found to be statistically insignificant ($r = 0.296$, $p > 0.05$). This result suggests that teachers' personal beliefs about inclusive education do not strongly influence their support for enhancement strategies, indicating that external factors, such as available resources, training, and institutional policies, may play a larger role in shaping their views on these strategies (Ainscow & Sandill, 2019). The lack of a significant relationship highlights the complexity of implementing inclusive education, where structural and policy support may be as influential, if not more so, than personal beliefs in determining teachers' engagement

with improvement strategies. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening institutional support and resource allocation to bolster teachers' effectiveness in inclusive education, independent of their initial perceptions (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2019).

Conclusion

The findings suggest that teachers' perceptions of inclusive education have a modest yet meaningful impact on their collaboration efforts, underscoring the value of fostering positive attitudes toward inclusivity to encourage cooperative practices among educators. However, the negligible relationship between teachers' perceptions and their support for strategies to improve inclusive education indicates that factors beyond individual beliefs—such as institutional support, resources, and training—may play a more critical role in shaping their views on enhancement efforts. This highlights the need for educational policy and resource investment to reinforce inclusive education structures, ensuring that teachers have the tools and support necessary to implement effective inclusive practices. Together, these insights emphasize that while positive perceptions are beneficial, comprehensive institutional support is essential for the sustainable advancement of inclusive education.

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