

Article

The Landscape of Inclusive Education: Teacher Perceptions in Identified Schools of Naga, City Cebu

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Abstract: This study explored teachers' perceptions of inclusive education and their correlation with collaboration efforts and strategies for improvement in selected schools. Using a descriptive correlational research design, data were gathered from teachers through a structured questionnaire. The findings revealed generally positive perceptions of inclusive education, with a moderate positive correlation between these perceptions and both collaboration efforts and strategies for improvement. Teachers showed strong support for collaboration between special needs and mainstream educators, but challenges such as resource limitations and unclear roles were noted. Additionally, while teachers recognized the importance of strategies to improve inclusive education, concerns about inadequate training and support persisted. The study emphasizes the need for enhanced professional development, better resource allocation, and clearer communication of roles and responsibilities to improve the implementation of inclusive practices. These insights offer valuable guidance for policymakers and educators aiming to strengthen inclusive education in schools.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Teacher Perceptions, Collaboration Efforts, Improvement Strategies, Professional Development

Introduction

Inclusive education is a global priority in modern educational frameworks, aimed at providing equitable learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds (UNESCO, 2020). The Salamanca Statement of 1994 and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2006 laid the foundation for inclusive education as a human rights issue (UNESCO, 2021). Around the world, countries have adopted inclusive policies to ensure



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that students with special needs are integrated into mainstream classrooms (Ainscow & Miles, 2019). These initiatives are crucial in addressing disparities in education systems, allowing for diversity in learning environments (Smith, 2020). Evidence from global studies suggests that inclusive education leads to better social outcomes for students with disabilities, as it fosters a culture of acceptance and collaboration (Florian, 2021). Moreover, inclusive education contributes to overall societal growth by promoting tolerance and reducing discrimination (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2023). As a result, it plays an integral role in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, which seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all (United Nations, 2022).

The evolution of inclusive education policies has undergone significant shifts, with early models focusing on segregated special education before gradually transitioning to integrated and inclusive models (Rouse, 2020). In the past, students with disabilities were often isolated from their peers in special schools, but global policy trends now advocate for inclusion within mainstream classrooms (Slee, 2019). For instance, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the United States and similar frameworks worldwide have established the legal basis for inclusive education (Liasidou, 2020). Currently, inclusive education emphasizes the role of teachers as central figures in promoting inclusive practices (Avramidis & Norwich, 2022). Teachers are now expected to collaborate with special educators, utilize differentiated instructional strategies, and adapt their teaching styles to meet diverse learners' needs (Sharma & Loreman, 2023). As educational settings become increasingly diverse, teacher training programs globally focus on developing the capacity of educators to foster inclusive learning environments (Forlin, 2022). The shift from a medical model, which viewed disabilities as deficits, to a social model of disability, which emphasizes societal barriers, has also reshaped inclusive education practices (Göransson & Nilholm, 2021).

The successful implementation of inclusive education largely depends on the perceptions and attitudes of teachers (Schwab & Alnahdi, 2021). Teachers' beliefs about their own competence and the value of inclusion significantly influence their willingness to adopt inclusive practices (Zan & Done, 2020). Positive perceptions towards inclusive education result in more collaborative and innovative teaching approaches, while negative perceptions may lead to resistance or ineffective implementation (Hodkinson, 2021). Understanding teacher perceptions is critical because they directly affect classroom practices, shaping how well inclusive education policies are actualized (Loreman, 2020). Furthermore, teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are influenced by factors such as their experiences, training, and institutional support (Avramidis et al., 2019). As research highlights, teacher perceptions can either enhance or hinder efforts to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students (Lambe & Bones, 2023).

Therefore, exploring and addressing these perceptions is essential to developing more effective professional development programs aimed at supporting inclusive education (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2022).

Despite the global promotion of inclusive education policies, there remains a significant gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities (Mitchell, 2020). Many teachers report challenges in implementing inclusive practices due to inadequate resources, lack of training, and insufficient support (Norwich & Black, 2021). Teacher perceptions often reflect these challenges, as educators may feel unprepared or overwhelmed by the demands of inclusion (Takala et al., 2019). In regions like the Philippines, where educational reforms are ongoing, the successful implementation of inclusive education is highly dependent on addressing these practical concerns (Valenzuela et al., 2023). Teachers in these settings often face large class sizes, limited access to instructional materials, and a lack of specialized training, all of which hinder the realization of inclusive ideals (Manalo & David, 2022). Bridging the gap between policy and practice requires a nuanced understanding of the local educational landscape and the specific barriers teachers face in their daily work (Magallanes & Bernal, 2021). This study focuses on understanding the perceptions of teachers in inclusive educational settings in Cebu, contributing to the broader discourse on inclusive education within the regional context.

While much research has been conducted on inclusive education, there are notable gaps regarding the profile and perceptions of teachers in specific educational contexts. This study seeks to address several key research questions: (1) What is the profile of the respondents in terms of age, gender, educational attainment, field of specialization, and length of service; (2) What is the level of perception of the respondents towards inclusive education, particularly in relation to their instructional practices; (3) How do respondents perceive collaboration efforts in inclusive education and the strategies to improve these efforts; (4) Is there a significant relationship between teachers' perceptions towards inclusive education and their views on collaboration and strategies for improvement. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing effective policies and interventions that support teachers in inclusive settings.

This research aims to provide valuable insights into the perceptions of teachers in special education (SPED) schools, contributing to the broader field of inclusive education. The findings will be particularly beneficial for SPED schools, as they can inform the development of more targeted training programs, resource allocation strategies, and policy reforms. Understanding the specific challenges and needs of teachers in these settings, educational leaders can implement more effective support systems that promote inclusive practices. Additionally, the study's findings will have implications for teacher education programs, offering recommendations for preparing future educators to embrace and succeed in inclusive classrooms.

Ultimately, the research will contribute to the continuous improvement of inclusive education policies and practices, ensuring that students with diverse needs receive the support necessary for their academic and social development.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive correlational research design to investigate the relationship between teachers' perceptions of inclusive education and the efficacy of Philippine legal frameworks, specifically RA 10533 (Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013), RA 7277 (Magna Carta for Disabled Persons), as amended by RA 9442, and RA 10070 (Establishment of Institutional Mechanisms for Persons with Disabilities). This design enabled the analysis of how teacher perceptions aligned with the goals of these legislative measures and their impact on the implementation of inclusive education. The Input-Process-Output (IPO) model was utilized as a conceptual framework. This model allowed for systematic investigation, with inputs comprising demographic data (age, gender, educational attainment, field of specialization, and years of service) and teachers' perceptions of inclusive education. The process examined teachers' collaboration efforts and strategies, while outputs reflected the correlations between perceptions and legislative objectives. The study was conducted in selected public schools in the Philippines, targeting teachers involved in the practice and implementation of inclusive education. A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents with relevant experience in inclusive education, ensuring they could provide insightful data. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, divided into sections covering demographic profiles, perceptions towards inclusive education, and collaboration and strategies. The data were analyzed using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient to determine the relationships between variables, particularly between teacher perceptions and legislative outcomes. This statistical method was chosen to explore potential trends and identify significant associations, thus offering a deeper understanding of the factors.

Results and Discussion

Table 2
Age and Gender of the Respondents

Age (in years)	Female		Male		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
above 53	1	3.33	0	0.00	1	3.33
44-53	6	20.00	1	3.33	7	23.33
34-43	8	26.67	0	0.00	8	26.67
24-33	12	40.00	2	6.67	14	46.67
Total	27	90.00	30	100.00	30	100.00

The study's findings revealed key demographic characteristics of the respondents that have important implications for the implementation of inclusive education. A significant portion of the teaching workforce, 46.67%, was aged between 24 and 33 years, indicating a relatively young demographic. This was followed by 26.67% of teachers in the 34 to 43 age range and 23.33% between 44 to 53 years old, with only 3.33% of respondents being over 53 years old. In terms of gender, the respondents were predominantly female, with 90% identifying as female and only 10% as male. This notable gender imbalance highlights the predominance of women in the teaching profession in the selected schools. The predominance of younger teachers suggests a greater openness to adopting innovative teaching methods, including inclusive practices, as younger educators may be more adaptable and flexible. Meanwhile, the gender imbalance may influence the perspectives and approaches to inclusive education, potentially necessitating gender-sensitive professional development. Additionally, the variation in ages and, by extension, experience levels points to the need for differentiated training programs, where younger teachers might benefit from mentorship and older teachers from training in contemporary inclusive education methods. These demographic insights offer a foundational understanding of the context in which inclusive education is being implemented and provide a basis for developing targeted support and professional development strategies for educators.

Table 3
Highest Educational Attainment of the Respondents

Educational Attainment	f	%
With Doctorate Units	2	6.67
Master's Graduate	3	10.00
With Master's Units	22	73.33
Bachelor's Degree	3	10.00
Total	30	100.00

The findings revealed that the majority of respondents (73.33%) had earned units towards a master's degree, indicating a strong commitment to further education among the teaching staff. Additionally, 10.00% of the respondents had completed a master's degree, and 6.67% had earned units towards a doctorate. This high level of academic attainment suggests that many teachers are likely well-versed in contemporary educational theories and practices, including those related to inclusive education. The presence of teachers with advanced degrees also points to the potential for adopting sophisticated pedagogical strategies and leading professional development initiatives aimed at enhancing inclusive education practices. Teachers with higher qualifications may have a more comprehensive understanding of inclusive education, fostering positive attitudes and confidence in implementing inclusive strategies. In contrast, those with only a bachelor's degree may have less exposure

to specialized training, highlighting the need for targeted professional development programs to bridge gaps and ensure all teachers are equipped to support inclusive education. Overall, the well-educated workforce reflects a strong foundation for effective inclusive practices, provided that continuous support and development are maintained.

Table 4
Field of Specialization of the Respondents

Field of Specialization	f	%
Administration and Supervision	1	3.33
Social Studies	1	3.33
English	6	20.00
Guidance and Counseling	1	3.33
Filipino	3	10.00
Math	6	20.00
Science	3	10.00
Biology	1	3.33
Special Education	1	3.33
Business Administration	1	3.33
HE	3	10.00
MAPEH	1	3.33
No Response	2	6.67
Total	30	100.00

The findings entail that the most common specializations among the respondents were English and Math (20% each), followed by Filipino, Science, and Home Economics (10% each). Other specializations such as Special Education, Social Studies, and Guidance and Counseling were less common, each representing 3.33%. Additionally, 6.67% of respondents did not specify their specialization. This diversity in academic expertise suggests that teachers bring varied perspectives to inclusive education, which could enhance its implementation. However, teachers specializing in content-heavy subjects like English, Math, and Science may require additional training to adapt their methods for inclusive classrooms, while those with specializations in areas like Special Education and Guidance could take on leadership roles in mentoring their peers. The presence of vocational subjects like Home Economics and Business Administration also highlights the importance of integrating practical skills into the inclusive education framework.

Table 5
Length of Service of the Respondents

Length of Service (in years)	f	%
16 and above	2	6.67
11-15	3	10.00
6-10	15	50.00
1-5	10	33.33
Total	30	100.00

The study revealed that the majority of respondents (50%) had 6 to 10 years of teaching experience, indicating a workforce dominated by mid-career professionals. Additionally, 33.33% had 1 to 5 years of service, 10.00% had 11 to 15 years, and 6.67% had 16 years or more of experience. This distribution suggests that most teachers are in a phase of professional growth, combining substantial experience with openness to new methodologies, making them well-positioned to adopt inclusive education practices. Early-career teachers bring enthusiasm and recent training but may need more practical support, while veteran teachers offer stability and mentorship but may require encouragement to embrace newer practices. The diversity in teaching experience highlights the need for differentiated professional development tailored to the unique needs of each group, ensuring that all teachers, regardless of their experience, are supported in implementing inclusive education effectively.

Table 6
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	3.23	Neutral
2	Students with special needs must be integrated into the regular community	3.43	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	3.63	Positive
4	The placement of students with special needs in regular classes negatively affects the academic performance of mainstream students	3.23	Neutral
5	The academically-talented students will be isolated in the inclusive classrooms	2.80	Neutral
6	Students with special needs will benefit from the inclusive program in regular classrooms	3.43	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	4.07	Positive
Aggregate Weighted Mean		3.47	Positive

Legend: 4.21-5.00-Very Positive; 3.41-4.20-Positive; 2.61-3.40-Neutral; 1.81-2.60- Negative; 1.00-1.80- Very Negative

The data revealed an overall positive perception of inclusive education among the respondents, with an aggregate weighted mean of 3.47. Several indicators, with weighted means ranging from 3.43 to 4.07, demonstrated that teachers supported the inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream classrooms and recognized the benefits of such programs. However, some indicators received neutral responses, with weighted means between 2.80 and 3.23, suggesting uncertainty about the academic impact on both special needs and mainstream students. These neutral perceptions highlight areas where additional teacher training and resources may be necessary to address concerns and enhance confidence in inclusive education. Overall, the positive attitudes of the respondents indicate a readiness to embrace inclusive

practices, and with continued support, teachers are likely to implement these practices successfully, fostering a more equitable learning environment.

Table 7
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	4.30	Very Positive
2	Although the inclusive education in a good concept, its implementation is ineffective due to objections from the mainstream classroom teachers	3.80	Positive
3	Mainstream classrooms teachers have a main responsibility towards the students with special needs placed in their classrooms	3.73	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	3.03	Neutral
5	The special education teacher only helps the students with special needs	3.40	Neutral
Aggregate Weighted Mean		3.65	Positive

Legend: 4.21-5.00-Very Positive; 3.41-4.20-Positive; 2.61-3.40-Neutral; 1.81-2.60- Negative; 1.00-1.80- Very Negative

The study revealed that respondents generally had positive perceptions of collaboration efforts in inclusive education, with a strong belief in the necessity of cooperation between special needs and regular teachers, as reflected by a weighted mean of 4.30 for collaboration importance. However, challenges were noted, such as objections from mainstream teachers, which slightly lowered the ratings for implementation (3.80 and 3.73). Neutral perceptions were observed regarding the roles of special education teachers (3.03 and 3.40), indicating uncertainty about responsibilities within inclusive classrooms. These findings suggest the need for ongoing professional development to strengthen collaboration, address implementation challenges, and clarify the roles and responsibilities of teachers to enhance inclusive education practices.

Table 8
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	3.20	Neutral
2	Special needs students need extra help and attention	4.50	Very Positive
3	Students with special needs committed more disciplinary problems compared to the regular students	3.53	Positive
4	Mainstream classroom teachers received little help from the special needs teachers	3.20	Neutral
5	Although inclusive education is important, the resources for the students with special needs in a mainstream classroom are limited.	4.07	Positive
Aggregate Weighted Mean		3.70	Positive

Legend: 4.21-5.00-Very Positive; 3.41-4.20-Positive; 2.61-3.40-Neutral; 1.81-2.60- Negative; 1.00-1.80- Very Negative

The data revealed that respondents generally had a positive perception of strategies to improve inclusive education, with an aggregate weighted mean of 3.70 and a moderate to strong positive correlation ($r = 0.64$) between perceptions of inclusive education and strategies for improvement. A very positive response was seen in the need for extra help for special needs students (4.50), while concerns about limited resources received positive but lower ratings (3.53 and 4.07). Neutral perceptions were observed regarding the adequacy of training and support for mainstream teachers (3.20). These findings suggest that while teachers recognize the importance of improving inclusive education, there are concerns about the availability of resources and the adequacy of training and support systems. The results highlight the need for enhanced training programs, better collaboration between mainstream and special needs teachers, and improved resource allocation to support inclusive education effectively.

Table 9
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	0.667*	Moderate Positive	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant

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

The study found a statistically significant positive relationship between teachers' perceptions of inclusive education and their views on collaboration efforts, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.667 and a p-value of 0.000, indicating a moderate positive correlation. This suggests that as teachers' perceptions of inclusive education become more favorable, their attitudes towards collaboration also improve. The findings imply that promoting positive attitudes toward inclusive education could enhance collaboration among teachers. Additionally, the results highlight the need for targeted professional development programs that focus on teamwork and collaboration, as well as the provision of adequate support systems to ensure effective cooperation between special needs and regular teachers. These insights are valuable for policymakers and school administrators aiming to foster a collaborative environment that supports the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Table 10
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	0.555*	Moderate Positive	0.001	Reject Ho	Significant

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

The data found a statistically significant positive relationship between teachers' perceptions of inclusive education and their views on strategies to improve it, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.555 and a p-value of 0.001, indicating a moderate positive correlation. This suggests that as teachers' perceptions of inclusive education become more positive, their support for and engagement with improvement strategies also increase. The findings highlight the importance of continuous professional development, adequate resource allocation, and fostering a supportive culture of collaboration to enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education strategies. Additionally, policymakers should consider these insights when designing policies aimed at improving inclusive education. Overall, promoting positive attitudes towards inclusive education could lead to more effective implementation of improvement strategies and create a more inclusive learning environment for all students.

Conclusion

Based on the study's findings, it is evident that teachers generally have positive perceptions of inclusive education and the strategies employed to improve it. The correlation between teachers' perceptions of inclusive education and their attitudes towards collaboration efforts and improvement strategies underscores the importance of fostering positive attitudes to enhance the effectiveness of inclusive practices. Teachers who value inclusive education are more likely to engage in collaboration and support strategies aimed at enhancing inclusivity. However, the study also identified areas requiring further attention, particularly in training, resource allocation, and clarifying the roles of special education teachers. The findings highlight the need for continuous professional development programs tailored to the varying levels of experience and expertise among teachers. These programs should focus on collaboration, effective teaching methods for inclusive classrooms, and providing adequate resources to support both mainstream and special needs teachers. Policymakers and school administrators should consider these insights to develop policies that foster a collaborative and supportive environment for inclusive education.

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