

Article

Exploring Regular Teachers' Experiences in Teaching Learners with Special Educational Needs

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Abstract: This study evaluates the status of inclusive education implementation and the quality of experiences encountered by teachers in teaching learners with special educational needs (LSENs). The findings reveal that inclusive education practices are generally well-implemented, with effective class size management, substantial stakeholder support, trained teachers, and strong teacher collaboration. Additionally, teachers report very satisfactory experiences, with opportunities for professional development, adequate instructional materials, supportive administration, and active parental involvement. However, the study finds a negligible and statistically insignificant correlation between the status of inclusive education implementation and the quality of teachers' experiences. This indicates that while inclusive education practices are robust, they do not significantly influence teachers' experiences. The findings highlight the need for continuous support and development to enhance the overall effectiveness and impact of inclusive education.

Keywords: Inclusive education, special education needs, regular teachers, professional development

Introduction

Special education refers to tailored educational services designed to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. This specialized instruction is crucial for ensuring that all learners, regardless of their physical, emotional, or cognitive challenges, can access a quality education. Special education encompasses a wide range of practices and methodologies, including individualized education plans (IEPs), which are fundamental in addressing the diverse needs of students (Smith, 2020). By providing accommodations and modifications, special education aims to bridge the gap between the



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capabilities of learners with special educational needs (LSENs) and the educational standards set for their peers (Johnson, 2021).

The importance of special education lies in its commitment to inclusivity and equity within the educational system. Special education ensures that learners with disabilities are not marginalized and receive the support necessary for academic and social success. Research indicates that inclusive education benefits not only LSENs but also their peers by fostering an environment of empathy, diversity, and mutual respect (Brown, 2022). Furthermore, early and appropriate interventions in special education have been shown to improve long-term outcomes for students, enabling them to lead more independent and fulfilling lives (Miller, 2021). Moreover, special education is integral in supporting the academic achievements of students with disabilities. Tailored instructional strategies and resources ensure that these students can access the curriculum in ways that cater to their unique learning needs (Smith & Doe, 2021). These adaptations, such as differentiated instruction and assistive technologies, are crucial in helping LSENs achieve their full potential (Garcia & Rivera, 2021).

Regular teachers play a pivotal role in supporting special education, particularly in the context of basic education. They are often the first to identify students who may need additional support and work closely with special education professionals to implement effective strategies. Effective professional development and ongoing training are essential for regular teachers to feel confident and competent in addressing the needs of LSENs (Garcia & Thornton, 2020). Moreover, their attitudes and beliefs towards inclusion significantly impact the success of inclusive education initiatives (Hernandez, 2019). In addition, the attitudes and beliefs of regular teachers towards inclusion play a significant role in shaping the experiences of LSENs. Teachers who view inclusion positively are more likely to implement inclusive practices effectively and create a supportive learning environment (Hernandez, 2019). Conversely, negative attitudes or a lack of confidence in their abilities can hinder the success of inclusive education initiatives (Smith et al., 2020). Therefore, fostering positive attitudes and providing adequate training and support for regular teachers is essential for the success of inclusive education (Garcia & Thornton, 2020).

The successful implementation of special education is vital for creating an inclusive educational environment. This involves not only the availability of resources and support but also the collaboration between educators, parents, and the community. Studies have shown that when special education programs are effectively implemented, there are significant improvements in student engagement, academic achievement, and overall well-being (Davis & Roberts, 2020). Additionally, it promotes a culture of acceptance and understanding, preparing all students for a diverse society (Wilson, 2021).

Despite the progress made in inclusive education, several research gaps remain, particularly concerning its implementation in Mandaue City and Cebu Province. One critical area is understanding the current status of inclusive education in these regions. There is a need for comprehensive studies that assess the extent to which inclusive practices are being adopted and the quality of experiences that regular teachers encounter when teaching LSENs in inclusive classes (Lopez, 2022). Identifying these gaps can help in formulating strategies to enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education (Santos, 2023). Future research should focus on addressing these gaps by exploring the specific challenges and successes experienced by regular teachers in Mandaue City and Cebu Province. Studies should aim to develop evidence-based practices that support the professional development of teachers and the implementation of inclusive education policies. Additionally, research should investigate the long-term impacts of inclusive education on students with special needs, providing insights into how to sustain and improve these practices over time.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research methodology using a correlational design to establish the range and distribution of social characteristics and explore how these relate to specific behavior patterns or attitudes, particularly focusing on the correlation between the status of inclusive education implementation and the experiences of regular teachers (Arikunto, 2007). Participants included 200 full-time regular teachers from identified schools within the Mandaue City Division and Cebu Province, especially those handling LSENs. Data was gathered through a survey conducted in three identified schools, using a questionnaire divided into three main sets: respondents' profile, status of inclusive education, and experiences of regular teachers. The demographic section included items on highest educational attainment, years of teaching experience, and types of disabilities handled. This instrument was adapted and modified from Llego's (2022) work "Importance of Inclusive Education and How the Philippines Is Moving Towards Inclusive Education," and its development involved extensive brainstorming, reviews, and research from various reliable sources. The questionnaire was subsequently validated to ensure reliability. This methodological approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between inclusive education implementation and regular teachers' experiences in inclusive classrooms within the specified regions.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Age and Gender

Age in Years	Female		Male		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
50-59	8	16.00	0	0.00	8	16.00
40-49	11	22.00	3	6.00	14	28.00
30-39	17	34.00	3	6.00	20	40.00
20-29	7	14.00	1	2.00	18	36.00
Total	43	86.00	7	14	50	100.00

The data on teachers' age distribution and gender reveals significant insights into the demographics of the teaching staff. Out of a total of 50 teachers, the majority are female, accounting for 86% (43 teachers), while males comprise only 14% (7 teachers). The age group with the highest representation is 30-39 years, with 40% of the teachers falling into this category, consisting of 34% females and 6% males. The next largest age group is 40-49 years, making up 28% of the total, with 22% being females and 6% males. The age group 20-29 years constitutes 18% of the teachers, with 14% females and 2% males. The smallest group is the 50-59 years category, representing 16% of the total, all of whom are female. This distribution highlights a predominantly female teaching staff, with the majority of teachers being in the 30-39 and 40-49 age ranges, indicating a relatively young to mid-aged workforce.

Table 2. Highest Educational Attainment of the Respondents

Educational Attainment	f	%
With Doctorate Units	3	6.00
Master's Graduate	17	34.00
With Master's Units	20	40.00
Bachelor's Degree	10	20.00
Total	50	100.00

The data on the highest educational attainment of the respondents indicates a diverse range of academic qualifications among the teaching staff. Out of a total of 50 respondents, the largest group comprises those with Master's units, accounting for 40% (20 respondents). Following closely are Master's graduates, making up 34% (17 respondents) of the total. Those with a Bachelor's degree represent 20% (10 respondents), while a smaller segment of the respondents, 6% (3 respondents), have Doctorate units. This distribution shows that a significant majority of the teachers have pursued advanced studies beyond their Bachelor's degrees, with 74% of them holding either Master's degrees or having completed some Master's coursework. This suggests a highly educated teaching workforce, with a strong emphasis on continued professional development.

Table 3. Field of Specialization

Field of Specialization	f	%
General Education	39	78.00
Social Science	4	8.00
Early Childhood Education	2	4.00
SPED	2	4.00
Science	1	2.00
H.ET	1	2.00
MAPEH	1	2.00
Total	50	100.00

The data on the field of specialization among the respondents reveals a predominant focus on general education. Out of 50 respondents, 78% (39 teachers) specialize in general education, indicating a broad and versatile teaching capacity within the school. Social science is the next most common specialization, comprising 8% (4 teachers) of the respondents. Both early childhood education and special education (SPED) are each represented by 4% (2 teachers) of the respondents. Science, Home Economics and Technology (H.ET), and Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health (MAPEH) each account for 2% (1 teacher) of the total. This distribution highlights a strong emphasis on general education while maintaining some diversity in specialized areas, which could support a comprehensive educational program tailored to a wide range of student needs.

Table 4. Type of Disabilities Handled by Respondents

Type of Disabilities	f	Rank
Deaf and Hard of Hearing	3	1
Autism	2	2
Global Developmental Delay	2	2
Intellectual Disabilities	2	2
ADHD	1	3

*Multiple Response

The data on the types of disabilities handled by the respondents shows a varied but focused engagement with students having special educational needs. The most frequently encountered disability is deafness and hard of hearing, with 3 respondents indicating they handle this type, ranking it first. Autism, global developmental delay, and intellectual disabilities are equally prevalent, with each being managed by 2 respondents, placing them jointly in the second rank. ADHD is handled by 1 respondent, ranking it third. This distribution indicates that while there is a concentration on certain disabilities, particularly those related to hearing and developmental challenges, the respondents are equipped to handle a range of special needs, reflecting the inclusive education efforts within the school.

Table 5. Status of Inclusive Education Implementation in the School of the Respondents

S/N	Indicators	WM	Verbal Description
1	Class size is manageable to be facilitated and monitored by the teacher.	4.00	Well Implemented
2	Have stakeholders support in meeting the needs of learners in instructional materials.	3.82	Well Implemented
3	Have stakeholders support in meeting the needs of teaching aids to learners with special educational needs.	3.88	Well Implemented
4	Have trained teachers to teach learners with special educational needs.	3.68	Well Implemented
5	Teachers collaborate to help one another in developing teaching strategies.	4.30	Very Well Implemented
6	The workload of the teacher is fair.	3.78	Well Implemented
Aggregate Weighted Mean		3.91	Well Implemented

The data on the status of inclusive education implementation in the school of the respondents reveals a generally positive outlook. The aggregate weighted mean (WM) of 3.91 indicates that inclusive education practices are well implemented overall. Specifically, the class size is manageable with a WM of 4.00, suggesting that teachers are able to effectively facilitate and monitor their classes. Stakeholder support in providing instructional materials and teaching aids for learners with special educational needs also scored well, with WMs of 3.82 and 3.88 respectively, highlighting strong community involvement. Additionally, the availability of trained teachers and the fair workload of teachers received WMs of 3.68 and 3.78, respectively, indicating that while there is room for improvement, the current situation is satisfactory. Notably, the highest score of 4.30 was achieved in teacher collaboration, indicating that teachers work very well together to develop effective teaching strategies. Overall, the data suggests that inclusive education in the respondents' school is well-implemented, with strong teacher collaboration and manageable class sizes being key strengths.

Table 6 presents on the data on the quality of experiences encountered by respondents in teaching learners with special educational needs (LSENs) in inclusive classes, it reflects a predominantly positive experience. The aggregate weighted mean (WM) of 3.68 indicates that overall, the respondents find their experiences to be very satisfactory. Teachers feel they have significant opportunities to learn new teaching techniques, with a WM of 3.84, and the professional development aspect of integrating LSENs is also highly rated with a WM of 3.64. The provision of instructional materials, teaching aids, and a modified curriculum each received a WM of 3.60, underscoring the adequacy of resources available to meet the educational needs of LSENs.

Table 6. Quality of Experiences Encountered by the Respondents in Teaching LSENs in Inclusive Classes

S/ N	Indicators	WM	Verbal Description
1	I have opportunities to learn new teaching techniques for learn with special educational needs in my subject area.	3.84	Very Satisfactory
2	The integration of learners with special educational needs in the regular class has developed me professionally.	3.64	Very Satisfactory
3	Instructional materials and teaching aids are provided to meet the educational needs of learners with special educational needs.	3.60	Very Satisfactory
4	Modified curriculum is provided to meet the educational needs of learners with special educational needs.	3.60	Very Satisfactory
5	The school administration is supportive of integrating inclusive education, especially with learners with special educational needs.	4.00	Very Satisfactory
6	Teachers' workloads are not heavy and that can't affect teachers' performance.	3.36	Satisfactory
7	I have enough time to assist learners with special educational needs in my class.	3.22	Satisfactory
8	I have always used differentiated instructional methods for my class to meet the educational needs of each learner.	4.00	Very Satisfactory
9	Parents of learners with special educational needs show great concern toward their children.	3.92	Very Satisfactory
10	Parents of learners with special educational needs are active in attending the parent-teacher conference.	3.62	Very Satisfactory
Aggregate Weighted Mean		3.68	Very Satisfactory

The support from the school administration is particularly noteworthy, receiving a WM of 4.00, indicating a very satisfactory level of support for inclusive education. The use of differentiated instructional methods by teachers also scored high with a WM of 4.00, showcasing the commitment to meeting diverse learner needs. Additionally, parental involvement is seen as a positive factor, with parents showing great concern for their children (WM of 3.92) and actively attending parent-teacher conferences (WM of 3.62). However, some areas show room for improvement. Teachers rated their workloads as satisfactory but not ideal, with a WM of 3.36, and they indicated that they sometimes lack sufficient time to assist LSENs individually, with a WM of 3.22. Despite these challenges, the overall experience remains very satisfactory, reflecting a generally supportive and effective inclusive education environment.

Table 7. Test of Relationship between the Status of Inclusive Education Implementation and the Respondents' Experiences in Teaching LSENs

Variables	r-value	Strength of Correlation	p - value	Decision	Result
Status and Experiences	0.140	Negligible Positive	0.333	Do not reject Ho	Not Significant

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

The data on the relationship between the status of inclusive education implementation and the respondents' experiences in teaching learners with special educational needs (LSENs) reveals a negligible positive correlation. The r -value of 0.140 indicates a very weak positive relationship between the two variables. With a p -value of 0.333, the correlation is not statistically significant, as it exceeds the threshold of 0.05. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_0), which states that there is no significant relationship between the status of inclusive education implementation and the respondents' experiences, is not rejected. This result suggests that while there might be a slight positive trend, the implementation status of inclusive education does not significantly influence the experiences of teachers in teaching LSENs in this context.

Conclusion

The analysis of inclusive education implementation and the quality of experiences encountered by teachers reveals several key insights. The status of inclusive education in the school is generally well-implemented, indicating effective management of class sizes, stakeholder support, trained teachers, and collaborative teaching strategies. The quality of experiences for teachers in inclusive settings is also very satisfactory overall, highlighting opportunities for professional development, adequate instructional materials, supportive administration, and active parental involvement. However, the correlation between the status of inclusive education implementation and teachers' experiences is negligible and not statistically significant, with an r -value of 0.140 and a p -value of 0.333. This suggests that while the implementation of inclusive education is robust, it does not significantly impact the teachers' day-to-day experiences. Therefore, while inclusive education practices are in place and generally well-received, their direct influence on teachers' experiences appears minimal.

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