

World Journal on Education and Humanities Research*Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International*

Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp. 103-222

*Received, May 2024; Revised May-June 2024;**Accepted July 2024*

Article

Empowering Inclusive Education: Unveiling the Proficiency of Teachers

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Abstract: This study examines the relationship between teachers' knowledge of inclusive education and their skills in managing inclusive classrooms. The survey assessed teachers' knowledge across 17 items and their skills across 7 items, using a 5-point Likert scale. Results indicate that teachers possess a high level of knowledge about inclusive education, with an aggregate weighted mean of 4.40, categorized as highly knowledgeable. Their skills in handling inclusive classes are also strong, with an aggregate weighted mean of 4.03, indicating they are generally skillful. A statistically significant moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.517$, $p = 0.001$) was found between teachers' knowledge and their skills, suggesting that increased knowledge of inclusive education is associated with enhanced skills in classroom management. These findings highlight the need for continuous professional development to further improve teachers' effectiveness in inclusive educational settings.

Keywords: Inclusive education, knowledge and skills, inclusive classroom, Basic Education Teachers

Introduction

Inclusive education refers to the educational practice where students of all abilities are educated together in general education classrooms (Khazanchi & Khazanchi, 2021). This approach is fundamental in promoting equality and providing all students with equitable learning opportunities (Monteiro & Ikegami, 2023). Implementing inclusive education can lead to a more cohesive society by fostering mutual respect and understanding among students from diverse backgrounds (Schwab et al., 2019). The importance of inclusive education is increasingly recognized in contemporary educational

settings, where diversity in student populations is more pronounced (Casserly et al., 2019). As schools strive to meet the needs of all students, the role of educators in supporting inclusive education becomes crucial (Mortier, 2020).

The global commitment to inclusive education is underscored by several international agreements and policies (Schuster et al., 2019). For instance, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) mandates the right to inclusive education for individuals with disabilities (Byrne, 2019). Similarly, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, seek to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (Wulff, 2020). Numerous countries have also enacted national policies and legislation to advance inclusive education. These international and national frameworks emphasize the necessity of eliminating educational barriers and fostering inclusive learning environments. Organizations such as UNESCO and UNICEF are actively involved in advocating for and supporting the global implementation of inclusive education (Graham et al., 2020).

The literature reveals significant disparities in implementation across different regions and countries (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). While some countries have made substantial progress in adopting inclusive practices, others lag due to various socio-economic, cultural, and political challenges (Wang, 2019). Research indicates that students with disabilities, minority groups, and those from low socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to receive inclusive education (Byrne, 2019). Additionally, there is a lack of standardized measures to assess the effectiveness of inclusive education practices, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and policies to address the unique challenges faced by different communities (Kioupi & Voulvoulis, 2019). The ongoing efforts to improve inclusive education must consider these disparities to ensure equitable access for all students (Franco & Derbyshire, 2019). Comprehensive strategies involving stakeholders at all levels are essential to bridging the gaps in inclusive education.

Teachers play a pivotal role in fostering an inclusive classroom environment. Their attitudes, beliefs, and teaching practices significantly influence the success of inclusive education (San Martin et al., 2021). Effective inclusive teaching requires educators to adapt their instructional strategies to meet the diverse needs of all students (Hellmich et al., 2019). Research shows that teachers who receive adequate training in inclusive practices are more confident and effective in implementing them (Ismailos et al., 2019). Collaboration with special education professionals, parents, and the community also enhances the effectiveness of inclusive education (Schwab & Alnahdi, 2020). Despite the critical role of teachers, many educators report feeling unprepared and unsupported in inclusive settings. Addressing these challenges is crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Despite the recognized importance of inclusive education, there is a limited understanding of the specific knowledge and skills teachers need to effectively implement inclusive practices. Teacher training programs often show inconsistencies regarding inclusivity, leading to varied levels of preparedness among educators. Many programs do not adequately cover inclusive education principles or practical strategies for managing diverse classrooms. Teachers also face difficulties in balancing the needs of all students while ensuring that each student receives appropriate attention and instruction. Additionally, there are inconsistencies in the policies and standards for inclusive education across different educational systems (Wilson et al., 2019). These issues highlight the need for comprehensive and consistent teacher training programs that focus on inclusive education. Enhancing the preparation and support for teachers is vital for overcoming these challenges and promoting successful inclusive practices.

Equipping teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills for inclusive education can profoundly impact student outcomes and the overall educational environment. Well-prepared teachers are better able to create inclusive classrooms where all students feel valued and supported. This, in turn, can lead to improved academic achievement, social skills, and emotional well-being for all students (Laranjeira et al., 2022). Teachers who are confident in their ability to implement inclusive practices are more likely to engage in innovative and effective teaching methods. Additionally, a well-prepared teaching workforce can contribute to a more inclusive school culture, promoting acceptance and understanding among students (Saxena, 2020). However, current research indicates gaps in general education teachers' knowledge and skills towards inclusive education. Studies have shown that many teachers lack a deep understanding of inclusive education principles and practical strategies for implementation (Ferreira, 2022). Addressing these gaps through targeted professional development and training programs is essential. Enhancing teachers' knowledge and skills will help educational systems move closer to achieving the goals of inclusive education.

Future research should focus on exploring general education teachers' knowledge and skills towards inclusive education, particularly their understanding and implementation of inclusive practices. Investigating the level of knowledge among teachers regarding inclusive education can provide insights into the effectiveness of current training programs. Additionally, research should examine the extent of teachers' skills in handling inclusive classrooms and the impact of these skills on student outcomes. Identifying the specific areas where teachers feel least prepared can help design targeted professional development initiatives. Research should also explore the barriers and facilitators to effective inclusive education from the teachers' perspective. Overall, a comprehensive research agenda is needed to address the gaps in knowledge and

practice and support the continuous improvement of inclusive education.

Methodology

The study employs a descriptive-correlational research design as outlined by Oh and Pyrczak (2023) to identify and elucidate the relationships and mutual influences among various educational variables. Specifically, it investigates the correlation between teachers' understanding of inclusive education and their proficiency in managing inclusive environments. To achieve this, the research utilizes a modified version of the questionnaire originally developed by Pasha, Yousaf, and Ijaz (2021), adapted to more precisely capture data relevant to the study's objectives. The survey, which will be administered to all teachers in the day and night programs at Talamban National High School, comprises 17 items assessing knowledge of inclusive education and 7 items evaluating skills in managing inclusive settings. Responses will be gathered using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 'Not knowledgeable' to 'Highly knowledgeable,' based on predefined scoring criteria. This methodology ensures a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape of inclusive education practices among educators at the selected site, strictly adhering to the Data Privacy Act to maintain respondent confidentiality.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Age and Gender of the Respondents

Age (in years)	Female		Male		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
44-53	3	7.69	1	2.56	4	10.26
34-43	12	30.77	2	5.13	14	35.90
24-33	19	48.72	2	5.13	21	53.85
Total	34	87.18	5	12.82	39	100.00

The data on the age and gender distribution of teacher respondents reveals a notable predominance of female teachers. Among the 39 respondents, 87.18% (34) are female, while only 12.82% (5) are male. The age distribution shows that the largest group of respondents falls within the 24-33 age range, accounting for 53.85% (21) of the total, with 19 females and 2 males. The next largest age group is 34-43, representing 35.90% (14) of the respondents, with 12 females and 2 males. The smallest group is the 44-53 age range, comprising 10.26% (4) of the respondents, with 3 females and 1 male. This distribution highlights a significant gender imbalance, with a majority of younger female teachers making up the largest proportion of the teaching staff.

Table 2. Highest Educational Attainment of the Respondents

Educational Attainment	f	%
Doctorate Graduate	1	2.56
With Doctorate Units	1	2.56
Master's Graduate	4	10.26
With Master's Units	26	66.67
Bachelor's Degree	7	17.95
Total	39	100.00

The data on the highest educational attainment of teacher respondents indicates a diverse range of qualifications among the teaching staff. The majority, 66.67% (26 out of 39), have completed some coursework towards a master's degree but have not yet graduated. A smaller portion, 10.26% (4), have obtained a master's degree, and 17.95% (7) hold a bachelor's degree. Only 2.56% (1) of the respondents have attained a doctorate degree, and an equal percentage are currently pursuing doctoral units. This distribution suggests that while a significant number of teachers are engaged in advanced studies, there is a considerable emphasis on continuing education beyond the bachelor's level. The data reflects a commitment to professional development, with many educators striving for higher qualifications.

Table 3. Length of Service of the Respondents

Length of Service (in years)	f	%
16 and above	4	10.26
11-15	5	12.82
6-10	12	30.77
1-5	18	46.15
Total	39	100.00

The data on the length of service of teacher reveals that a significant portion of the teaching staff consists of relatively newer teachers. The largest group, representing 46.15% (18 out of 39), has been teaching for 1-5 years. This is followed by 30.77% (12) of teachers who have served for 6-10 years. Those with 11-15 years of service make up 12.82% (5) of the respondents. The smallest group, comprising 10.26% (4) of the respondents, has been in service for 16 years or more. This distribution highlights a predominance of teachers with less than a decade of experience, indicating a youthful and possibly dynamic teaching workforce at the school.

The data on the level of knowledge of respondents towards inclusive education reveals that teachers at Talamban National High School possess a high level of understanding regarding inclusive education practices. The aggregate weighted mean of 4.40 indicates that, overall, teachers are highly knowledgeable about inclusive education. Specific indicators such as the need for special training for teachers (WM = 4.74),

the use of different teaching methods to meet the needs of disabled students (WM = 4.69), and the encouragement of cooperative learning (WM = 4.69) received the highest ratings.

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

S/N	Indicators	WM	Verbal Description
1	I have clear concepts of the term "Inclusion".	4.28	Highly Knowledgeable
2	Every child regardless of disabilities has the right to be educated in the regular class.	4.41	Highly Knowledgeable
3	Students with special needs can best be served in the general education classroom.	3.67	Knowledgeable
4	The inclusion of students with special needs in the class can be beneficial for students without disabilities.	3.62	Knowledgeable
5	Students with special needs benefit both academically and socially from being placed in an inclusive setting.	3.95	Knowledgeable
6	Inclusive teaching is a successful education system to address learners' needs.	4.26	Highly Knowledgeable
7	Inclusive teaching requires collaboration among teachers (General & special).	4.54	Highly Knowledgeable
8	Successful implementation of inclusive education requires special training for teachers.	4.74	Highly Knowledgeable
9	Teachers should use different methods of teaching to satisfy the needs of disabled students.	4.69	Highly Knowledgeable
10	Teachers should have opportunities to adapt the syllabus and teaching materials while teaching in inclusive classes.	4.54	Highly Knowledgeable
11	The teacher should encourage cooperative learning to make all students support each other.	4.69	Highly Knowledgeable
12	The teacher must design the individualized education plan (IEP) for children with special needs.	4.38	Highly Knowledgeable
13	Inclusive teaching makes the teacher feel more responsible for students with special needs.	4.62	Highly Knowledgeable
14	Teacher should manage the classroom layout and setting plan for the children with special needs.	4.56	Highly Knowledgeable
15	Teachers should use differentiated instruction in an inclusive classroom.	4.64	Highly Knowledgeable
16	Teachers should collaborate with other professionals in designing individualized educational plans (IEP) for students with disabilities.	4.64	Highly Knowledgeable
17	Teaching strategies (Task Analysis, shaping, Chaining Prompting, Fading) should be used in an inclusive classroom.	4.51	Highly Knowledgeable
Aggregate Weighted Mean		4.40	Highly Knowledgeable

Additionally, teachers demonstrated a strong understanding of the importance of collaboration among general and special education teachers (WM = 4.54) and the necessity of adapting syllabi and teaching materials for inclusive classes (WM = 4.54). The lowest-rated indicators, though still reflecting a knowledgeable level, pertained to the benefits of inclusion for students without disabilities (WM = 3.62) and the service of students with special needs in general education classrooms (WM = 3.67). These results suggest that while teachers are well-versed in many aspects of inclusive education, there is room for further enhancement in understanding the broader benefits of inclusion for all

students. Overall, the high ratings across most indicators reflect a strong foundation in inclusive education among the teaching staff.

Table 5. Extent of Respondents' Skills towards Handling Inclusive Classes

S/N	Indicators	WM	Verbal Description
1	I can use different approaches (e.g. Response to intervention & inquiry-based learning) for the support of students with diverse learning needs.	4.15	Skillful
2	I am prepared to use reinforcement strategies in an inclusive classroom.	4.05	Skillful
3	I can provide an alternate explanation for example when students are confused.	4.28	Highly Skillful
4	I am confident in designing learning tasks for the individual needs of students with disabilities.	3.74	Skillful
5	I can use a variety of assessment strategies (e.g., portfolio, assessment, modified tests, performance-based assessment, etc.).	4.08	Skillful
6	I am prepared to deal with students who are behavioral problems in an inclusive classroom.	3.77	Skillful
7	I am confident in my ability to get students to work together in pairs or small groups with peers	4.10	Skillful
Aggregate Weighted Mean		4.03	Skillful

The data on the extent of respondents' skills in handling inclusive classes indicates that teachers generally feel confident and capable in managing inclusive educational environments. The aggregate weighted mean of 4.03 categorizes them as skillful overall. Among the specific skills assessed, teachers rated their ability to provide alternate explanations when students are confused the highest, with a weighted mean of 4.28, indicating they are highly skillful in this area. Other notable skills include using different approaches to support diverse learning needs (WM = 4.15), working in pairs or small groups (WM = 4.10), and employing a variety of assessment strategies (WM = 4.08). Teachers also feel adequately prepared to use reinforcement strategies (WM = 4.05) and design learning tasks for students with disabilities (WM = 3.74). Their preparedness to handle students with behavioral problems received the lowest, yet still skillful, rating (WM = 3.77). These results suggest that while teachers possess a solid foundation of skills necessary for inclusive teaching, there is a slight variability in their confidence levels across different aspects of managing inclusive classrooms. Overall, the data reflects a competent teaching staff with the necessary skills to support an inclusive educational environment effectively.

Table 6. Test of Relationship between the Respondents' Knowledge and Skills towards Handling Inclusive Classes

Variables	r-value	Strength of Correlation	p - value	Decision	Remarks
Knowledge and Skills	0.517*	Moderate Positive	0.001	Reject Ho	Significant

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

The test of the relationship between the respondents' knowledge and skills towards handling inclusive classes reveals a moderate positive correlation, with an r -value of 0.517. This indicates that as teachers' knowledge about inclusive education increases, their skills in managing inclusive classrooms also improve. The p -value of 0.001, which is less than the significance level of 0.05, leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0). This signifies that the observed correlation is statistically significant. Therefore, the results demonstrate that there is a meaningful and positive relationship between the level of knowledge teachers have about inclusive education and their proficiency in implementing inclusive practices. This underscores the importance of enhancing teachers' knowledge to improve their practical skills in managing inclusive educational settings effectively.

Conclusion

The study reveals that teachers possess a high level of knowledge about inclusive education, with an aggregate weighted mean of 4.40, categorizing them as highly knowledgeable. Key areas of strength include understanding the need for special training for teachers, employing various teaching methods to meet the needs of disabled students, and encouraging cooperative learning. The assessment of their skills in handling inclusive classes shows that they are generally skillful. Notably, they are highly skillful in providing alternate explanations to students and confident in getting students to work together in pairs or small groups. The test of the relationship between knowledge and skills indicates a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.517$) that is statistically significant ($p = 0.001$), suggesting that as teachers' knowledge of inclusive education increases, so do their skills in managing inclusive classrooms. These findings underscore the importance of continuous professional development to enhance both the knowledge and practical skills of teachers in inclusive education, ultimately leading to more effective and supportive learning environments for all students.

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