

Article

Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education: An Empirical Investigation in Schools of Bohol

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Abstract: This study explores teachers' perceptions of inclusive education and examines their relationship with collaboration efforts and strategies to improve inclusion in Philippine schools. Utilizing a descriptive correlational research design, the study surveyed 30 teachers across four elementary schools in the Bohol Division, focusing on their views on inclusive practices, collaboration, and resource adequacy. Findings indicate that teachers generally perceive inclusive education positively, particularly regarding the benefits and rights of students with special needs in mainstream classrooms. However, challenges were noted in collaborative efforts and the sufficiency of resources, with role ambiguity and limited support identified as barriers. Correlational analysis revealed no significant relationships between teachers' perceptions and both collaboration efforts and strategies, suggesting that systemic and institutional factors may play a more critical role in shaping inclusive practices. These findings highlight the need for clearer role definitions, enhanced support systems, and professional development to optimize inclusive education outcomes and foster a more supportive environment for all learners.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Teacher Perceptions, Inclusive Education Strategies, Collaboration Efforts

Introduction

Inclusive education has emerged as a cornerstone of educational reform, emphasizing the right of all students to learn together in a shared environment, regardless of their individual challenges or abilities (Smith et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2019). Defined as an approach that seeks to provide equitable educational opportunities for all,



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inclusive education requires schools to accommodate diverse learning needs within the general education system (Ainscow, 2021). This shift towards inclusivity represents a broader understanding that educational systems must adapt to the varied needs of students, rather than expecting students to adapt to a one-size-fits-all model (UNICEF, 2020). The evolution of inclusive education has been greatly influenced by key international policies, such as the Salamanca Statement of 1994 and the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all by 2030 (UNESCO, 2019). Organizations like UNESCO and UNICEF have been instrumental in promoting inclusive education globally, working to ensure that countries implement policies that advocate for inclusivity in classrooms (Garcia & Ruiz, 2021). In many countries, educational policies have been reformed to provide teachers with the necessary resources and training to implement inclusive practices effectively (Brown et al., 2023). These global efforts underscore the need for inclusive education to be recognized as both a fundamental right and a means to build more cohesive, empathetic societies (Jones & Marshall, 2022).

Inclusive education benefits all students by fostering a learning environment that celebrates diversity and encourages empathy, cooperation, and social interaction (Harris & Lee, 2019). For students with disabilities, it provides opportunities for peer interaction and participation in mainstream educational activities, which can enhance self-esteem and social skills (Smith & Nguyen, 2021). Studies have shown that inclusive classrooms improve academic outcomes for all students, as diverse learning needs encourage the use of varied instructional strategies that benefit everyone (Adams & Klein, 2022). Moreover, inclusive education promotes critical thinking and problem-solving skills as students learn to understand different perspectives and work collaboratively (Thompson et al., 2023). For students without disabilities, inclusive settings offer a unique chance to learn compassion and adaptability, preparing them for a diverse world beyond the classroom (Johnson & Patel, 2020). Additionally, inclusive education has been linked to positive school culture and climate, as it fosters an environment of acceptance and respect (Lee & Smith, 2023).

Inclusive education is a powerful tool for promoting social justice and equity, ensuring that all children, regardless of ability, are valued members of their community (Anderson et al., 2021). By addressing the marginalization of students with disabilities, inclusive education fosters a more equitable society in which every individual has access to the resources and support they need to succeed (Perez & Gomez, 2022). Such educational practices break down societal barriers and challenge discriminatory attitudes, paving the way for more inclusive communities (O'Neill & Casey, 2020). Beyond addressing inequality, inclusive education also promotes a sense of belonging among students, which has been shown to improve overall mental and

emotional well-being (Rodriguez et al., 2021). Moreover, inclusive education strengthens community ties as families and educators work together to support all learners, creating a culture of cooperation and mutual support (Williams & Park, 2023). However, achieving these outcomes requires concerted efforts to address challenges such as lack of resources, insufficient teacher training, and societal attitudes that still stigmatize disability (Jackson et al., 2022).

Teachers are central to the successful implementation of inclusive education, as they are responsible for adapting curriculum, instruction, and assessment to meet the diverse needs of students (Brown & Allen, 2023). Their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions directly impact the inclusivity of classroom environments, influencing student engagement and learning outcomes (Taylor et al., 2021). Research shows that teachers who view inclusive education positively are more likely to implement strategies that accommodate diverse learners, while those with reservations may resist such practices (Mitchell & Clarke, 2020). Teachers not only facilitate learning but also model acceptance and respect, setting the tone for an inclusive classroom culture (Evans et al., 2022). In settings where teachers are equipped and motivated to embrace inclusivity, students demonstrate greater social cohesion and academic achievement (Nguyen & Zhang, 2019). However, the success of inclusive practices often hinges on the professional development opportunities available to teachers and the resources they can access (Johnson et al., 2023).

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes play a decisive role in determining the effectiveness of inclusive education within classrooms (Taylor et al., 2023). Educators who believe in the potential benefits of inclusive practices are more likely to develop flexible teaching methods that address individual student needs (Stevens & Chang, 2019). Conversely, teachers who hold negative attitudes toward inclusion may perceive students with disabilities as burdensome, which can lead to exclusionary practices (Garcia & Moore, 2020). These beliefs are often shaped by a combination of personal experiences, professional training, and support from school leadership (Wong & Martinez, 2022). In fact, studies have found that positive attitudes correlate with higher levels of teacher efficacy and student achievement (O'Brien & Lewis, 2021). Without adequate training and support, however, teachers may feel ill-prepared to handle the demands of an inclusive classroom, reinforcing negative perceptions (Clark et al., 2023). Therefore, understanding and addressing the root causes of these attitudes is essential for promoting more inclusive practices (Foster & Baker, 2020).

Despite advancements, significant gaps remain in understanding teachers' perceptions of inclusive education. One gap lies in gauging the overall perception level of teachers regarding inclusivity, especially as it pertains to practical classroom implementation (Brown & Walker, 2022). For instance, it is crucial to assess how teachers view collaboration in inclusive settings, as

collaboration with other educators, parents, and specialists is essential for effective inclusion (Jones & Adams, 2023). Another gap is in understanding teachers' views on specific strategies for improving inclusive education, such as differentiated instruction and classroom modifications (Harris et al., 2021). While studies have explored general attitudes, few have delved into teachers' perceptions of these collaborative and strategic aspects, which are pivotal for success (Mitchell & Evans, 2019). Addressing these gaps is essential for informing professional development programs and policy reforms aimed at enhancing teachers' preparedness for inclusive education (Nguyen et al., 2024).

This study on teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education offers numerous benefits for educators, policymakers, and communities. It provides insights into teachers' needs and challenges, enabling administrators to tailor professional development programs to address specific areas of concern. Understanding these attitudes is also vital for policy development, as it helps identify systemic barriers that may hinder effective inclusion. For educators, the findings could highlight areas where additional resources or training are needed, fostering a more supportive environment for inclusive practices.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive correlational research design to explore the relationships between teachers' perceptions of inclusive education and the effectiveness of Philippine legal frameworks, specifically Republic Acts (RA) 10533, 7277 as amended by 9442, and 10070, in promoting inclusive practices in schools. The study was conducted in four elementary schools within the Bohol Division, each providing a distinct context for assessing inclusive education. The respondents were teachers actively involved in implementing inclusive education across selected schools within Region VII. To collect data, a survey questionnaire adapted from the study by Manisah Mohd Ali, Ramlee Mustapha, and Zalizan Mohd Jelas (2006) was used. This adaptation ensured the instrument's relevance to the Philippine educational context. The questionnaire was structured into sections assessing various aspects of inclusive education, including teachers' general perceptions, collaboration efforts, and strategies to improve inclusive practices. The scoring procedure for the questionnaire involved a 5-point Likert scale to quantify teachers' agreement with various statements, facilitating a detailed analysis of their attitudes. Responses were rated as follows: 5 for *Strongly Agree* (SA), 4 for *Agree* (A), 3 for *Neutral* (N), 2 for *Disagree* (D), and 1 for *Strongly Disagree* (SD). This scale allowed for a nuanced assessment, with "Strongly Agree" indicating robust support for inclusive education, and "Strongly Disagree" indicating significant reservations. For the collaboration and strategy sections, the same 5-point scale assessed teachers' views on

teamwork between general and special needs educators and the effectiveness of strategies used in inclusive education. This structured scoring approach provided a clear, quantifiable measure of perceptions, enabling the study to examine correlations between teachers' attitudes and the practical impact of legal frameworks on inclusive education practices.

Results and Discussion

The profile of the teachers in this study reveals a predominantly female group, with all 30 respondents being women, distributed across various age ranges. The largest age group falls between 24-33 years, accounting for 40% of the sample, while 23.33% are aged 44-53, 20% are aged 34-43, and 16.67% are over 53 years old. Regarding their field of specialization, the majority (83.33%) are in General Education, with smaller representations in fields such as Math, HELE (Home Economics and Livelihood Education), TLE (Technology and Livelihood Education), Filipino, and Educational Management, each constituting 3.33% of the group. In terms of educational attainment, 80% have units towards a Master's degree, 3.33% hold a Doctorate or Master's degree, and 10% possess a Bachelor's degree. The teachers' length of service varies, with 43.33% having over 16 years of experience, while 26.67% have 6-10 years, 20% have 1-5 years, and 10% have 11-15 years of teaching experience. This diverse profile provides insight into the depth of experience and educational backgrounds that these educators bring to inclusive education practices in their respective schools.

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	3.97	Positive
2	Students with special needs must be integrated into the regular community	4.03	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	3.83	Positive
4	The placement of students with special needs in regular classes negatively affect the academic performance of mainstream students	2.77	Neutral
5	The academically-talented students will be isolated in the inclusive classrooms	2.77	Neutral
6	Students with special needs will benefit from the inclusive program in regular classrooms	4.20	Positive
7	Students with special needs have the right to receive an education in mainstream classes	4.33	Very Positive
8	Students with special needs will not be labeled as 'stupid', 'weird' or 'hopeless' when placed in regular classrooms	4.77	Very Positive
Aggregate Weighted Mean		3.83	Positive

The level of perception of teachers towards inclusive education, as shown in Table 1, reflects a generally positive outlook. Teachers strongly believe that students with special needs have the right to receive education in mainstream classes, with this indicator receiving the highest weighted mean (WM) of 4.33, described as Very Positive. Similarly, the perception that inclusive education can prevent labeling and stigmatization of students with special needs scored a WM of 4.77, also categorized as Very Positive. Teachers also expressed positive perceptions toward the academic and social benefits of inclusion, agreeing that students with special needs are academically better in inclusive classrooms (WM = 3.97) and will benefit from inclusive programs (WM = 4.20). There is also agreement that integrating students with special needs into the regular community is important (WM = 4.03), and that they require backup support for successful inclusion (WM = 3.83). However, some areas elicited neutral responses, particularly regarding the impact of inclusive education on the academic performance of mainstream students and the potential isolation of academically talented students in inclusive classrooms (both with a WM of 2.77). The overall aggregate weighted mean of 3.83 reflects a Positive perception, indicating that teachers generally support inclusive education while holding some concerns regarding its implications for 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	4.70	Very Positive
2	Although the inclusive education in a good concept, its implementation is ineffective due to objections from the mainstream classroom teachers	3.53	Positive
3	Mainstream classrooms teachers have a main responsibility towards the students with special needs placed in their classrooms	4.13	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	2.50	Negative
5	The special education teacher only helps the students with special needs	2.67	Neutral
Aggregate Weighted Mean		3.51	Positive

The perception of teachers regarding collaboration efforts in inclusive education, as shown in Table 2, highlights a generally positive view with some reservations. Teachers overwhelmingly agree on the importance of teamwork between special needs teachers and regular teachers for effective inclusion, with this item receiving the highest weighted mean (WM) of 4.70, rated as Very Positive. There is also a positive acknowledgment that mainstream classroom teachers bear a primary responsibility towards students with special needs within

inclusive settings (WM = 4.13). However, while teachers view inclusive education as a positive concept, some believe that objections from mainstream teachers hinder its effective implementation (WM = 3.53). Notably, there are concerns about role clarity in classrooms where both regular and special education teachers are present, as indicated by a Negative perception (WM = 2.50) regarding the difficulty in determining responsibility for students with special needs. Additionally, there is a Neutral perception (WM = 2.67) regarding the special education teacher's role, suggesting that some teachers feel the special education teacher focuses solely on students with special needs rather than supporting the classroom as a whole. With an aggregate weighted mean of 3.51, rated as Positive, the findings reflect that teachers generally value collaborative efforts but recognize challenges related to role clarity and the attitudes of mainstream educators.

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	3.80	Positive
2	Special needs students need extra help and attention	4.73	Very Positive
3	Students with special needs committed more disciplinary problems compared to the regular students	3.40	Neutral
4	Mainstream classroom teachers received little help from the special needs teachers	2.73	Neutral
5	Although inclusive education is important, the resources for the students with special needs in a mainstream classroom are limited.	3.87	Positive
Aggregate Weighted Mean		3.71	Positive

Table 3 presents teachers' perceptions of strategies to improve inclusive education, indicating generally positive views with some concerns. Teachers strongly agree that special needs students require additional support, with this item achieving the highest weighted mean (WM) of 4.73, rated as Very Positive. They also positively acknowledge that mainstream classroom teachers possess the necessary training and skills to support special needs students (WM = 3.80). However, there are some reservations regarding the adequacy of support, as indicated by a neutral perception (WM = 2.73) towards the level of assistance mainstream teachers receive from special needs teachers, suggesting a perceived need for more collaborative support. Additionally, while teachers view inclusive education as significant, there is concern over the limited resources available for special needs students within mainstream classrooms (WM = 3.87). A neutral perception (WM = 3.40) was noted regarding the belief that students with special needs may display more disciplinary issues, reflecting ambivalence in how teachers view behavior management in inclusive settings. The aggregate weighted mean of 3.71, classified as Positive, demonstrates an overall supportive attitude toward improving inclusive education, emphasizing the importance of increased support and resources for

both teachers and students to optimize the effectiveness of inclusion 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	-0.009	Negligible Negative	0.963	Do not reject Ho	Not Significant

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

Table 4 presents the test of relationship between teachers' perceptions and their collaboration efforts in inclusive education, showing a negligible negative correlation with an R-value of -0.009. This indicates a very weak inverse relationship between perception and collaboration efforts, suggesting that changes in teachers' perceptions have almost no impact on collaboration efforts. The p-value of 0.963 is much higher than the significance level of 0.05, leading to the decision not to reject the null hypothesis (Ho). Therefore, the correlation between perception and collaboration efforts is not statistically significant. This result implies that, within this sample, teachers' perceptions of inclusive education do not meaningfully influence their collaboration with special education staff or other collaborative efforts in implementing inclusive practices.

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	0.309	Weak Positive	0.096	Do not reject Ho	Not Significant

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

Table 5 shows the test of relationship between teachers' perceptions and the strategies to improve inclusive education, indicating a weak positive correlation with an R-value of 0.309. This suggests a slight tendency for positive perceptions toward inclusive education to align with favorable views on strategies to enhance inclusion. However, the p-value of 0.096 is above the significance threshold of 0.05, leading to the decision not to reject the null hypothesis (Ho). Consequently, the correlation between perception and strategies is not statistically significant. This finding implies that, within this sample, teachers' perceptions of inclusive education do not have a statistically meaningful impact on their views about strategies for improving inclusive practices, indicating that other factors may influence attitudes toward these strategies independently of overall perception.

Discussion

The findings from this study offer valuable insights into teachers' perceptions of inclusive education, collaboration efforts, and strategies

to improve inclusive practices. Finding reveals an overall positive perception among teachers toward inclusive education, particularly regarding the rights and benefits of students with special needs. Teachers view inclusive education as beneficial for students with special needs, reflected in high ratings for statements supporting the integration of these students into mainstream classrooms (weighted means of 4.03 and 4.20, respectively). This aligns with previous research highlighting the positive impact of inclusive settings on social and academic outcomes for students with disabilities, who benefit from increased engagement and social interactions (Sharma et al., 2020; Smith & Brown, 2021). Teachers also recognize the importance of supportive classroom environments, as indicated by the "Very Positive" rating on the prevention of stigmatizing labels, which is consistent with findings that inclusive education helps reduce stigma and fosters a sense of belonging among diverse learners (Garrote et al., 2020).

However, despite these positive perceptions, there are concerns related to collaboration and strategy effectiveness. As shown in Tables 2 and 3, while teachers generally support collaboration efforts and strategies for inclusion, they also indicate challenges in these areas. For instance, regarding the role clarity of special education teachers suggests ambiguity around responsibility in inclusive classrooms. Research underscores that effective collaboration between general and special education teachers is essential but can be hindered by role confusion and inadequate support (Lindqvist et al., 2019). Additionally, the limited resources for special needs students in mainstream classrooms, reflects a common barrier to effective inclusion, where teachers feel unprepared or lack the necessary support to address diverse learning needs (Forlin & Sin, 2020). Furthermore, the lack of significant correlations suggests that teachers' perceptions of inclusive education do not directly influence collaboration efforts or strategic practices, potentially indicating that institutional and systemic factors play a more prominent role in shaping inclusive practices than individual perceptions alone (Ahsan et al., 2021). These findings emphasize the need for targeted professional development, clearer role definitions, and enhanced resources to ensure the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study reveals that teachers generally hold positive perceptions toward inclusive education, recognizing its benefits for students with special needs and supporting their right to be integrated into mainstream classrooms. However, the findings also highlight challenges in collaboration and strategy implementation, as role ambiguity and limited resources were noted as barriers to effective inclusive practices. The lack of significant correlations between teachers' perceptions and both collaboration efforts and strategies

suggest that individual beliefs may have limited impact on the practical aspects of inclusive education, pointing instead to the influence of broader institutional and systemic factors. These insights underscore the importance of enhancing support systems, clarifying roles, and providing adequate resources and training to empower teachers in fostering inclusive environments that fully meet the needs of all students.

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