

## **Projecting Characteristics to Commitment in Inclusive Education**

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### **Abstract**

Inclusion provides that equal access to quality education is a fundamental right granted to everyone, regardless of the differences, features, and characteristics. Undoubtedly, teachers play an indispensable role in the success of such an educational mantra. This research assessed the competency of the regular public elementary school teachers handling inclusive classes, and the benefits of inclusive education during the school year 2017 to 2018 in Cebu City to propose an appropriate and relevant development plan. There were 63 respondents who were identified using cluster sampling and were asked to answer the adapted survey questionnaire. The data gathered were organized and treated statistically using frequency count, percentage, weighted mean, Pearson r, and multiple regressions. Findings showed that most of the respondents were females whose fields of specialization were not aligned with special education and were not exposed to relevant training in inclusion. Moreover, the respondents perceived themselves to be highly competent in handling inclusive classes; and viewed inclusive education to be highly beneficial for the learners with and without special needs. There was a significant relationship between the teachers' competence in handling inclusive classrooms and the benefits of education. Lastly, there was no significant relationship between the respondents' profile and their perceived competence. Thus, it is highly recommended that the proposed teachers' development plan of this study be adopted, implemented, and monitored to continuously enhance the teachers' competence in implementing inclusion for the benefit of the students with or without special needs.

### **Keywords**

Special Education; Inclusive Education; Inclusion; Descriptive-Correlation Method; Cebu City; Philippines

## Introduction

Human rights have consistently been an important concern in the international arena, with nongovernmental organizations and governments all over the world actively working to protect these rights regardless of the characteristics that everyone possesses. However, certain groups of people continue to face exclusion because of their unique characteristics, such as gender, socioeconomic status, culture, religious background, and disabilities. Education, a fundamental human right, is designed as a tool to combat isolation and discrimination against the weaker sectors of society (Peters, 2003). Thus, UNESCO (2005) emphasized equal access to high-quality education to all which respects every individual with diverse characteristics. Philippines is one of those countries that abide by this principle observed worldwide by stipulating in its constitution this basic right of every individual. Every Filipino child has the right to an equal opportunity to be educated in school, as stated in the Philippine Constitution of 1987. However, some children have learning difficulties that can interfere with teachers' instruction when they are present in the classroom. Children with disabilities were considered undesirable and separated from regular children due to their lack of knowledge and limitations, which is why their education was conducted in special schools (Kusuma & Ramadevi, 2013). As a result, many Special Education (SPED) Centers were established in the Philippines to provide learners with disabilities with access to education. Learners with disabilities are assigned to specialized programs so that instructions can be delivered to them more effectively.

Inclusion or inclusive education has been advocated for many years in the Philippines, and it has been strengthened by the passage of a law protecting disabled people. Republic Act no. 7277 also known as the "Magna Carta for Disabled Persons" states that "the State shall facilitate the integration of disabled persons into the mainstream of society and shall advocate for and encourage respect for disabled persons". Hence, the State "shall ensure that disabled persons are provided with access to quality education and ample opportunities to develop their skills. It shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all disabled persons". As the implementing agency, the Department of Education (DepEd) is responsible for bringing this program to all schools. This resulted in the issuance of DepEd Order No. 72 series of 2009, which "guarantees the right of children with special needs to receive appropriate education within the regular or inclusive classroom setting." However, schoolteachers who have not been trained to work with students with special needs find it difficult to teach these children. Because of their lack of knowledge and skills in dealing with these types of students, the presence of these students in regular classrooms will be a burden on them.

Various training and seminars were held by DepEd -Cebu City to raise teacher awareness of the concept of inclusive education and how to manage learners with special needs in an inclusive classroom. However, teachers are concerned about the sufficiency of the training provided to them. Teachers should be prepared to deal with any disability that a student may have in the classroom. Teachers, on the other hand, must consider that every child has the right to an education, regardless of his or her socioeconomic status. Teachers who are aware of the benefits of inclusive education for students with special needs may develop a favorable

attitude toward this program. According to Zulfija, Indira, and Elmira (2013), one important factor in achieving inclusive education is teachers' competency in working with children with special needs. Teachers in the field of inclusive education should have new abilities to conceptualize strategies, the ability to determine the importance of individuals in implementing the activities required during the delivery of instruction to children with disabilities, and be accountable for the outcomes of instruction that are perceptible on the children. Furthermore, when working in inclusive classrooms, teachers should be knowledgeable about the behavior and characteristics of children with disabilities to develop appropriate strategies and improve one's skills in creating an environment that promotes learning (Bukvic, 2014).

This study is based primarily on Vygotsky's theory of learning and sociocultural theory. This theory examines society's significant contributions to human development. This theory also emphasizes the interaction between developing people and the culture in which they live. Bandura's (1977) theory on self-efficacy stated that self-efficacy has a more direct influence on behavior than self-concept. Teachers' self-efficacy is defined as the teachers' belief in his or her own ability to organize and execute courses of action necessary to successfully complete a specific task in a specific context. It has been shown to have a positive effect on students' progress. Teachers' self-efficacy affects students' academic achievement. To summarize, teachers' self-efficacy appears to be the most important factor influencing one's confidence in applying their knowledge/skills in various situations.

According to Zulfija et al. (2013), teachers have a negative attitude toward inclusive education due to a lack of knowledge about children with disabilities and a lack of special skills for their training. A substantial amount of research has revealed that enrolling children with and without special needs in the same classroom benefits both children. However, these benefits may be realized if these classrooms are managed by competent teachers. According to Kusuma and Ramadevi (2013), teacher competency is defined as the ability to effectively handle the interaction within the classroom that is appropriate to the activities and considers the different learning needs of the learners.

Schools are required to accept children regardless of their socioeconomic status or learning abilities, such as children with special needs who are mainstreamed in regular classrooms. However, most teachers are not prepared to work with children who have special needs. Regular teachers' competence in handling inclusive classrooms becomes an issue for them. This study aims to propose a teacher capability development program to provide teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to deal with children enrolled in inclusive classrooms.

## Methodology

This research utilized descriptive – correlational research design which aimed to assess the competency of the regular public elementary school teachers handling inclusive classes and the benefits of inclusive education using the adapted survey questionnaire. Cluster sampling was used to determine the 63 respondents of the study within the identified public elementary

schools in Cebu City. Data gathered were organized and treated statistically using frequent count, percentage, weighted mean, Pearson r, and multiple regression.

## Result and Discussion

### Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the data gathered as to the age and gender of the respondents. As presented in the table, 62 out of the 63 respondents were female teachers who comprise 98.41 percent of the total respondents. On the contrary, only one or 1.59 percent of the respondents were male teachers. With regards to the female teachers, 18 or 28.57 percent of the respondents were of age bracket from 31 – 38 years old which comprises most of the female respondents. There were 14 or 22.22 percent of them who are aged from 23 – 30 years old and 10 or 15.87 percent of the respondents were aged from 39 – 46 years old. Twelve or 19.05 percent of the respondents were 47 – 54 years old while eight or 12.70 percent of them aged from 55 – 62 years old. In general, respondents are 40 years old on average. This could imply that most of the teachers have extensive teaching experience.

**Table 1. Age and Gender of the Respondents**

Age (in years)	Male		Female		Total	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
55 – 62	--	--	8	<b>12.70</b>	8	<b>12.70</b>
47 – 54	--	--	12	<b>19.05</b>	12	<b>19.05</b>
39 – 46	1	<b>1.59</b>	10	<b>15.87</b>	11	<b>17.46</b>
31 – 38	--	--	18	<b>28.57</b>	18	<b>28.57</b>
23 – 30	--	--	14	<b>22.22</b>	14	<b>22.22</b>
<b>Total</b>	<i>1</i>	<b>1.59</b>	62	<b>98.41</b>	63	<b>100.00</b>
<i>Ave</i>	39.0		40.0		40.0	

The highest educational attainment of the respondents is one of the variables considered in this study. According to Table 2, 46 of the 63 respondents have a master's degree, while 17 (or 26.98 percent) have a bachelor's degree. However, none of the respondents have received a doctorate. According to the data presented, most respondents pursued additional studies, implying that they wished to gain more academic knowledge to aid them in their teaching profession.

**Table 2. Respondents' Highest Educational Attainment**

Educational Attainment	<i>f</i>	%
Doctoral Degree	--	--
Master's Degree	46	<b>73.02</b>
Bachelor's Degree	17	<b>26.98</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>100.00</b>

According to Fennema and Franke (2006), highly qualified teachers present their lessons in an engaging manner, allowing students to gain a better understanding and mastery of the subject matter.

The teachers' teaching experience cannot be overlooked in this study because it will aid in the development of the teachers' teaching skills. As a result, taking this variable into account will aid in the conduct of this study.

**Table 3. Respondents' number of years of teaching**

No. of Years	<i>f</i>	%
31 – 38	4	<b>6.35</b>
24 – 30	7	<b>11.11</b>
18 – 23	9	<b>14.29</b>
12 – 17	14	<b>22.22</b>
6 – 11	14	<b>22.22</b>
5 and below	15	<b>23.81</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As reflected, 15 or 23.81 percent of the respondents have 5 years of teaching experience and below. Even though there were respondents with less teaching experience, many of them had a considerable quality exposure to teaching that will help equip the respondents with strategies for dealing with diverse students. Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2007) discovered that teaching experience has a significant relationship with student performance in their study.

### Competency of the Respondents

Regular classes that cater to children with special needs are known as inclusive classes. These classes should be taught by teachers who are experienced in working with children who have special needs and are mainstreamed in these classrooms. Table 4 contains statements describing the perception of the respondents on their competence in handling inclusive classes.

**Table 4. Teachers' Perceived Competence in Handling Inclusive Classes**

Indicators		◆	Verbal Description
1	Modifying my teaching strategies to cater to children with special needs.	4.38	Highly Competent
2	Handling behavior of learners with special needs in an inclusive classroom	4.13	Competent
3	Implementing the process on how to handle a class catering to a learner with special needs.	4.11	Competent
4	Using assistive technology for learners with special needs	4.05	Competent
5	Using appropriate assessment tools for learners with special needs	4.13	Competent
6	Motivating learners with special needs to participate in class activities	4.38	Highly Competent
7	Catering to the needs of the learners with disability	4.22	Highly Competent
8	Providing interventions of any learner with special needs	4.16	Competent
9	Identifying the strengths and weaknesses of learners with special needs	4.33	Highly Competent
10	Providing atmosphere that is friendly to both learners with and without special needs	4.46	Highly Competent
11	Collaborating strategies and techniques in handling learners with special needs with my colleagues	4.08	Competent
12	Coordinating with well-trained teachers with regards to the strategies I apply inside the classroom to address the needs of the learners	4.40	Highly Competent
13	Establishing a partnership with parents to monitor the progress of the child	4.59	Highly Competent
14	Preparing anecdotal records of the learners with special needs	4.41	Highly Competent
15	Pursuing advanced studies to enrich my knowledge on handling learners with special needs	4.08	Competent
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>		<b>4.26</b>	<b>Highly Competent</b>

The overall weighted mean of 4.26 indicates that respondents regarded themselves as highly competent in dealing with inclusive classes. According to Savage and Erten (2015), teachers who have more experience with inclusive classrooms have a more positive attitude. Evidence indicates that to be effective, teachers must be knowledgeable about best practices in teaching and adapted instruction for children with special needs, where a positive attitude is most important in creating an effective inclusive classroom. Furthermore, Berry (2010) discovered in her study on inclusive education that there are three types of teachers: eager but anxious beginners, who are mostly preservice teachers with positive attitudes but are concerned about

their efficacy in inclusion; positive doers, who are most experienced teachers who struggle with the challenges of inclusion but maintain their positive attitudes; and resisters, who are most experienced teachers who are resistant to inclusion.

### Benefits of Inclusive Education

Implementing inclusive education benefits learners, such as children with special needs. This study examines teachers' perceptions of the benefits of inclusive education for children who do not have special needs.

**Table 5. Benefits of Inclusive Education to Children Without Special Needs**

Indicators		◆	Verbal Description
1	Establish meaningful friendships with children with special needs	4.51	Highly Beneficial
2	Increase their appreciation and acceptance of individual differences	4.52	Highly Beneficial
3	Improve their self-esteem in peer-tutoring situations	4.51	Highly Beneficial
4	Learn to value children with diverse abilities in inclusive classrooms	4.57	Highly Beneficial
5	Be prepared for adult life in an inclusive society	4.16	Beneficial
6	Have opportunities to master activities by practicing and teaching others	4.27	Highly Beneficial
7	Enjoy improved technologies and instructional resources for everyone	4.38	Highly Beneficial
8	Increased their understanding and acceptance of diversity	4.37	Highly Beneficial
9	Learn to respect for other people	4.75	Highly Beneficial
10	Learn additional skills such as Braille or sign language	4.29	Highly Beneficial
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>		<b>4.43</b>	<b>Highly Beneficial</b>

The overall weighted mean of 4.43 indicates that teachers believe inclusive education is extremely beneficial to children who do not have special needs. According to McMillan (2008), inclusive education benefits not only children with disabilities but also their non-disabled peers, as children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms outperform their non-disabled peers academically and socially than those children in non-inclusive settings.

Inclusive education also benefits children with special needs because they are given the opportunity to learn in a more realistic classroom environment where they can interact with their peers who are regular learners.

**Table 6. Benefits of Inclusive Education to Children with Special Needs**

Indicators		◆	Verbal Description
1	Demonstrate high levels of social interaction with non-disabled peers in inclusive setting when compared with segregated setting.	4.13	Beneficial
2	Improve social competence and communication skills	4.30	Highly Beneficial
3	Establish friendship with peers	4.56	Highly Beneficial
4	Be assisted in the development of General Knowledge	4.22	Highly Beneficial
5	Succeed on the main motto of inclusive education i.e., 'learn to live together'	4.33	Highly Beneficial
6	Have greater access to general curriculum	4.11	Beneficial
7	Benefit on peer role models for academic, social and behavior skills	4.21	Highly Beneficial
8	Have increased achievement of Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals	4.08	Beneficial
9	Enjoy increased parental participation	4.49	Highly Beneficial
10	Have higher expectations	4.03	Beneficial
11	Improve confidence and display qualities of self- efficacy	4.27	Highly Beneficial
12	Enjoy assistance from peers on class activities	4.40	Highly Beneficial
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>		<b>4.26</b>	<b>Highly Beneficial</b>

In general, the overall weighted mean of 4.26 indicates that respondents believe inclusive education is extremely beneficial to children with special needs. Teachers' perceptions are consistent with the findings of Henninger and Gupta (2014), who hypothesized that children with disabilities who are included in high-quality classrooms with their typically developing peers stand to benefit across developmental domains. Furthermore, Kavales and Forness (2000) proposed that including children with disabilities in regular classrooms increases the likelihood that they will be socially accepted by their peers because the more regular children have contact with their peers with disabilities, the more likely they will develop tolerance and a greater acceptance of other people's differences.

The relationship between teacher competence and the benefits of inclusive education was tested using a two-tailed test at the 0.05 level of significance. The calculated r-value of 0.614 indicates a moderately positive relationship between teacher competence and the benefits of inclusive education. It was then tested for the significance of its correlation, yielding a computed p-value of less than 0.05 (p 0.05), indicating that the null hypothesis is rejected.



**Table 7. Test of Significant Relationship between Teachers' Perceived Competence and Benefits of Inclusive Education**

Variables	Significance level	Pearson r	p - value	Decision	Remarks
Teachers' Perceived Competence and Benefits of Inclusive Education	0.05 (two-tailed)	0.614	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant

The correlation between the teachers' competence and the benefits of inclusive education was found to be a moderate positive correlation which implies that as the teachers perceived themselves to be competent in handling inclusive classes the perceived benefits of inclusive are also high. Further, there was a significant relationship between their perceived competence and the benefits of inclusion.

The model summary of the regression analysis of the respondents' profile, such as age, highest educational attainment, and length of service, in relation to their perceived competence in handling inclusive classes the multiple regression results is 0.300, indicating that there is a negligible linear relationship between the observed and predicted values of the model.

**Table 8. Model Summary of the Regression Analysis**

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.300 <sup>a</sup>
R Square	0.090
Adjusted R Square	0.044
Standard Error	7.024
Observations	63

	Coef	Std Error	t Stat	P-value	Decision	Remarks
Intercept	62.695	4.603	13.621	.000	Reject Ho	Significant
Age	-.012	.160	-.074	.941	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Educational Attainment	.041	.134	.122	.729	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Length of Service	.032	.191	.168	.867	Accept Ho	Not Significant

The respondents' identified profiles were used to see if they were significant predictors of teachers' perceived competence in handling inclusive classes. The predictor variables were found to explain 4.4 percent of the variance in the values of teachers' competence. Furthermore, the model is not a reliable predictor of teachers' competence.

## Conclusion

Based on the study's findings, it can be concluded that teachers are very confident in their ability to handle inclusive classes, despite not having received inclusion training. Some of these teachers had been in the field for a long time and had come across cases of children with special needs who were enrolled in their class. They viewed these encounters as learning opportunities in dealing with such children. Their positive attitude toward the benefits of inclusive education matched their confidence in their ability to handle inclusive classes. However, these perceptions of their competence must be evaluated by experts to determine whether they used appropriate strategies in handling inclusive classes and, if so, whether the inappropriate intervention was observed. It should not be ignored that these teachers were not trained in special education, so their knowledge of dealing with children with special needs would need to be reinforced through training and seminars.

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