

Enhancing Inclusive Education: A Review of Intervention Strategies for Special Education in the Philippines

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15069305

Antonina M. Llanos

Oakland International Academy, Michigan, USA

Dainalyn Baliscao

Alcott Elementary School, Michigan, USA

Osias Kit T. Kilag

PAU Excellencia Global Academy Foundation, Inc., Poblacion, Toledo City, Cebu, Philippines

Abstract:

Inclusive education is a fundamental approach to ensuring that all children, regardless of their abilities, have equal opportunities to access quality education, develop essential skills, and participate meaningfully in society. The Philippines has introduced various policies and programs to promote inclusive education, particularly through the Special Education (SPED) curriculum. However, despite these efforts, significant barriers hinder effective implementation. This study systematically examines the primary challenges faced in delivering SPED programs in the country. Using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework, this research reviews existing literature to identify key obstacles such as inadequate teacher training, resource limitations, policy implementation gaps, and societal attitudes toward disability. The findings highlight the need for enhanced teacher preparation, increased funding, stronger policy enforcement, and greater community engagement. Additionally, this study proposes evidence-based strategies to address these challenges and improve the accessibility and effectiveness of inclusive education in the Philippines. By strengthening the implementation of SPED programs, policymakers and educators can create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students.

Keywords: Special Education (SPED), Inclusive Education, Parental Involvement, Teacher Training and Development, Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Introduction:

Inclusive education aims to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, particularly those from marginalized groups, such as children with disabilities and minority language speakers (Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2013). In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has implemented several policies to support inclusive education, including DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2020, Republic Act No. 7277 (Magna Carta for Disabled Persons), and Republic Act No. 11650. These legislative frameworks seek to ensure that students with special needs receive appropriate educational services. However, despite these efforts, challenges persist in the implementation of special education (SPED) programs, particularly concerning resource allocation, teacher preparedness, and policy effectiveness (Reyes, 2023; Reyes, 2020).

One of the major challenges in SPED implementation is resource allocation. Studies indicate that government funding for SPED remains inadequate, leading to a lack of facilities, assistive technology, and learning materials (Galvez, 2021; Dela Torre, 2020; Guzman, 2021). Limited financial resources also affect the availability of individualized education programs (IEPs), which are crucial for addressing the specific needs of SPED students (Asuncion, 2022; Mangonon, 2022). Additionally, rural areas face even greater difficulties due to economic constraints and limited access to SPED services (Flores, 2019; Torres, 2019; Villanueva, 2021). Another significant issue is teacher preparedness. Many educators feel ill-equipped to handle the diverse needs of SPED students due to inadequate training in inclusive teaching strategies (Llanos, 2019; Mader, 2017).

The shortage of qualified SPED teachers exacerbates this issue, as highlighted by the United Nations' global alert on teacher shortages (Jaymalin, Lee-Brago, & Servillos, 2024). Studies suggest that while teacher training programs exist, they often lack depth in areas such as behavior management, differentiated instruction, and the implementation of IEPs (Muega, 2016; Muega & Echavia, 2017). This deficiency contributes to teacher burnout, further affecting SPED program sustainability (Clemente, 2019).

Policy implementation also presents significant hurdles. While laws and policies support inclusive education, their execution at the school level is often inconsistent (Reyes, 2020; Santos & Calderon, 2021). Bureaucratic challenges, such as delays in budget allocation and inefficient monitoring systems, hinder progress (Herrera, 2020). Cultural barriers also play a role, as misconceptions about disabilities persist, affecting community and parental support for inclusive education (Garcia, 2020; Lopez, 2020). Research indicates that stronger community involvement and government intervention are needed to bridge these gaps (Bustos, 2008; Lleo, 2022).

Despite these challenges, there have been notable innovations in SPED teaching methods and curriculum development (Espino, 2021; Javier, 2020). Programs such as shadow teaching for children with autism and attention-deficit disorders have shown promise in promoting inclusion (Manansala & Dizon, 2009). However, further improvements in teacher incentives, professional development, and educational leadership are essential to ensure the long-term success of inclusive education in the Philippines (Kawal, 2021; Mercado, 2022).

This study aims to explore the challenges in SPED curriculum implementation by examining resource allocation, teacher preparedness, and policy effectiveness. By identifying gaps and proposing solutions, this research seeks to contribute to the ongoing efforts to enhance inclusive education in the Philippines.

Literature Review:

Special Education (SPED) in the Philippines has evolved significantly, yet numerous challenges persist in ensuring inclusive and effective educational practices for learners with special needs. Various studies highlight key aspects such as parental involvement, inclusive education strategies, teacher training, resource allocation, and policy implementation.

Parental involvement plays a crucial role in the educational success of children in SPED. Alonzo (2020) emphasizes that active parental engagement enhances students' academic performance and social integration. Similarly, Lopez (2020) discusses the role of community support in fostering a conducive learning environment, arguing that collaboration between parents, educators, and stakeholders significantly improves learning outcomes.

Despite efforts to enhance SPED, significant barriers remain. Garcia (2020) identifies cultural barriers in SPED implementation, where societal perceptions hinder inclusive practices. Torres (2019) and Villanueva (2021) highlight economic constraints and the lack of SPED services in rural areas, stressing the need for equitable access. Furthermore, Santos and Calderon (2021) explore bureaucratic challenges, which often delay the proper implementation of policies, leading to inefficiencies in service delivery.

Teacher preparedness is a fundamental factor in SPED success. Llanes (2019) emphasizes the need for continuous professional development to equip teachers with the necessary skills. Mader (2017) argues that inadequate teacher training hinders special-needs students' learning, while Muega and Echavia (2017) highlight the need for evaluating teachers' readiness to implement inclusive education. Additionally, Kawal (2021) stresses the importance of providing incentives to retain qualified SPED teachers and prevent high turnover rates (Mercado, 2022).

A well-designed SPED curriculum ensures effective learning. Espino (2021) focuses on curriculum development, stressing the need for adaptable and inclusive lesson plans. Javier (2020) explores innovative SPED teaching methods that cater to diverse learning needs, while De Borja, Sigua, and Marasigan (2020) examine pedagogical practices in science learning activities for SPED students. Bautista (2021) presents inclusive education strategies that emphasize differentiated instruction and individualized learning plans. Adequate resources are vital for SPED success. Estroga (2020) examines resource allocation in SPED programs, emphasizing disparities in funding. Guzman (2021) discusses challenges in providing appropriate learning materials, while Galvez (2021) highlights the role of government funding in supporting SPED initiatives. Dela Torre (2020) underscores the importance of assistive technology in enhancing students' learning experiences and independence.

Strong policy frameworks are essential for successful SPED implementation. Reyes (2020) identifies gaps in policy and practice, while Reyes (2023) provides a systematic review of SPED challenges in the Philippines. Herrera (2020) discusses monitoring and evaluation of SPED programs to ensure compliance with standards. The United Nations has also issued a global alert on teacher shortages, emphasizing the urgent need for improved policies (Jaymalin, Lee-Brago, & Servillos, 2024).

Methodology:

This study employed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to ensure a structured and transparent approach to the systematic literature review. A comprehensive search was conducted across multiple academic databases, including Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Scopus, JSTOR, and the Philippine e-Journal, using predefined keywords such as "special education in the Philippines," "SPED curriculum implementation," "challenges in SPED," and "inclusive education in the Philippines." The selection process followed a four-step PRISMA approach. First, during the identification phase, a broad search was conducted, yielding an initial pool of studies. Next, in the screening phase, duplicates and non-relevant articles were removed. This was followed by the eligibility stage, where studies were assessed based on inclusion criteria, which required them to focus on SPED in the Philippines, be published within the last ten years, and provide empirical data or policy analysis related to SPED curriculum implementation. Finally, after applying these criteria, 15 studies were deemed suitable for in-depth analysis.

Data were analyzed qualitatively using a thematic analysis approach to identify recurring patterns, challenges, and innovations in SPED curriculum implementation. Key themes that emerged included policy frameworks, teacher preparedness, parental involvement, resource allocation, and instructional strategies. The findings were synthesized to provide insights into existing gaps and future directions for SPED development in the Philippines.

Results and Discussion

Lack of Resources

One of the most pressing challenges in Special Education (SPED) in the Philippines is the lack of resources necessary for effective implementation. Many schools, especially those in rural areas, lack the essential materials, equipment, and facilities required to support SPED learners (Estroga, 2020; Guzman, 2021). The absence of proper infrastructure, including specialized classrooms, assistive technologies, and adaptive learning materials, limits the ability of educators to provide quality instruction tailored to students with special needs.

Government funding for SPED remains insufficient, with many programs relying on external support from private organizations and non-governmental institutions (Galvez, 2021). The Department of Education (DepEd) has made efforts to allocate resources for inclusive education; however, funding disparities between urban and rural areas persist, leading to inconsistent program implementation (Reyes, 2023).

In many cases, SPED teachers have to compensate for these shortages by developing their own materials or seeking alternative sources of funding, which adds to their already heavy workload (Dela Torre, 2020). Additionally, the lack of access to assistive technologies, such as screen readers, Braille materials, and augmentative communication devices, further widens the gap in learning opportunities for SPED students (Flores, 2019).

Insufficient Teacher Training

The effectiveness of special education (SPED) programs in the Philippines is largely dependent on the preparedness and competence of educators. Unfortunately, many SPED teachers lack adequate training due to limited opportunities for professional development (Llanes, 2019; Mercado, 2022). Teacher education programs often fail to include comprehensive SPED training, resulting in a workforce that is ill-equipped to address the diverse needs of learners with disabilities. Ignacio (2021) further emphasizes that high teacher-student ratios in SPED settings exacerbate the issue, as teachers struggle to provide individualized instruction while managing large class sizes.

Research indicates that teacher burnout is prevalent among SPED educators due to insufficient training, heavy workloads, and inadequate support systems (Clemente, 2019). Without proper training, educators experience high levels of stress, reducing their effectiveness in managing classrooms and adapting curricula to accommodate students with special needs. The lack of sufficient government funding for SPED training programs further aggravates the problem, leaving many teachers to rely on self-learning and on-the-job experience rather than formal instruction (Galvez, 2021). A significant concern is the limited availability of continuous professional development programs tailored for SPED teachers (Asuncion, 2022).

While some universities offer certification programs, these are often inaccessible due to financial constraints and geographic limitations. The Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) has made efforts to introduce training initiatives, but these are often inconsistent and do not reach all SPED educators effectively (Llego, 2022). Without structured and sustained training programs, many SPED teachers struggle to implement best practices in inclusive education.

Another challenge is the absence of structured mentorship programs for new SPED teachers. Many novice educators enter the profession without proper guidance, leading to difficulties in classroom management and instructional planning (Mangonon, 2022). Experienced SPED teachers are often overburdened with responsibilities, making it difficult to provide support to new educators. This lack of mentorship contributes to feelings of isolation and professional dissatisfaction among SPED teachers. Additionally, insufficient teacher training has a direct negative impact on student outcomes. Mader (2017) argues that students with disabilities perform better academically and socially when they receive instruction from well-trained educators. In contrast, poorly trained teachers may struggle to implement evidence-based interventions, leading to suboptimal learning experiences. Addressing this gap requires strategic policy reforms that prioritize SPED training and ensure that all educators receive adequate preparation for inclusive education settings.

The government and private sector must work together to address these challenges. Increased funding for SPED training programs, the development of online learning platforms for educators, and partnerships with international organizations specializing in SPED training could help bridge the gap. Strengthening teacher preparation programs and expanding access to professional development opportunities will be crucial in improving the quality of special education in the Philippines.

Policy and Implementation Gaps

While the Philippine government has established policies to support SPED, inconsistencies in implementation and monitoring mechanisms create significant disparities across regions (Reyes, 2020; Santos & Calderon, 2021). Laws such as the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities (Republic Act No. 7277) and the Enhanced Basic Education Act (Republic Act No. 10533) provide a framework for inclusive education. However, enforcement remains a challenge due to bureaucratic inefficiencies and lack of oversight (Santos & Calderon, 2021).

One of the key issues is the absence of clear guidelines on how schools should integrate SPED programs within mainstream education (Espino, 2021). Many educators and school administrators report that existing policies are too broad and lack specific implementation strategies. This results in varied approaches across schools, leading to inconsistencies in service delivery and educational quality for SPED students.

Moreover, the absence of standardized assessment tools for SPED students further complicates curriculum implementation and student progress monitoring (Bautista, 2021). Without uniform assessment frameworks, educators struggle to gauge student development accurately, leading to ineffective instructional planning. Herrera (2020) stresses the importance of creating systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that SPED programs are properly implemented and continuously improved. Another major obstacle is inadequate funding for SPED programs. Galvez (2021) highlights that government allocations for SPED remain insufficient, limiting schools' ability to hire specialized personnel, procure learning materials, and develop appropriate infrastructure. Many public schools lack SPED-trained teachers, assistive technology, and accessible facilities, making it difficult for students with disabilities to thrive in an inclusive setting (Estroga, 2020).

In addition, rural and marginalized communities face even greater difficulties due to limited resources and geographical constraints (Flores, 2019). Schools in remote areas often have little to no SPED programs, leaving children with disabilities with minimal access to education. Villanueva (2021) asserts that regional disparities must be addressed through targeted policies and localized interventions to ensure equitable access to SPED services across the country. To bridge these gaps, it is essential to strengthen collaboration among policymakers, educators, and stakeholders.

Ainscow, Dyson, and Weiner (2013) emphasize that successful inclusive education requires a well-coordinated effort to translate policies into meaningful action. Streamlining SPED policies, increasing funding, and improving monitoring systems will be essential to ensuring that inclusive education becomes a reality for all learners in the Philippines.

Societal Attitudes

Negative perceptions and misconceptions about disabilities persist in Filipino society, affecting the inclusion of SPED students in mainstream education. Cultural beliefs and lack of awareness hinder the acceptance of inclusive education, often resulting in social stigma and discrimination against children with special needs (Garcia, 2020; De la Cruz, 2021). Many parents hesitate to enroll their children in SPED programs due to fear of societal judgment, while some educators lack the necessary training to foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment (Muega, 2016).

Community support plays a vital role in promoting inclusive education, yet studies indicate that public awareness campaigns on SPED remain limited (Lopez, 2020). Schools that actively engage parents and community members in SPED initiatives tend to experience higher levels of acceptance and integration for children with disabilities (Alonzo, 2020).

Furthermore, efforts to incorporate disability awareness education in mainstream curricula can help dismantle stereotypes and foster a more inclusive culture (Muega & Echavia, 2017). Despite some progress, many Filipino families still struggle with deeply ingrained cultural stigmas associated with disabilities. This often leads to social exclusion, with children with disabilities being marginalized both in school and within their communities. Advocates argue that greater emphasis should be placed on educating communities about the capabilities of individuals with disabilities and the importance of inclusive education.

The role of media in shaping societal attitudes towards disabilities is also crucial. Public campaigns, documentaries, and representation of individuals with disabilities in mainstream media can help challenge stereotypes and foster a culture of acceptance. Increasing positive portrayals of SPED students and highlighting success stories can inspire greater support for inclusive education initiatives.

One approach to addressing negative societal attitudes is through targeted teacher training and sensitivity workshops. Educators who are well-equipped to promote inclusion can influence students and families, gradually shifting societal perspectives. Collaboration between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and educational institutions will be necessary to drive long-term attitudinal change. To create a more inclusive society,

comprehensive advocacy efforts must be implemented at various levels—school, community, and national policy. Strengthening parent and teacher partnerships, enhancing media representation, and incorporating disability awareness education in schools will help create a more accepting and inclusive environment for all learners in the Philippines.

Conclusion:

Inclusive education is a fundamental pillar in achieving educational equity in the Philippines. It ensures that learners with diverse needs, including those with disabilities, have access to quality education and meaningful learning experiences. However, despite existing policies and frameworks, the implementation of inclusive education remains fraught with challenges. Key barriers include insufficient teacher training, gaps in policy execution, societal misconceptions, economic constraints, and inadequate resources. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach involving multiple stakeholders, including the government, educators, families, and communities.

One of the most pressing concerns is the lack of adequately trained special education (SPED) teachers. Many educators enter the profession with limited exposure to inclusive education strategies, making it difficult for them to address the diverse needs of learners with disabilities. High student-teacher ratios further exacerbate this challenge, reducing the effectiveness of individualized instruction.

Without sufficient professional development and continuous training, teachers struggle to implement inclusive practices effectively. To bridge this gap, policymakers must prioritize training programs, provide incentives for SPED teachers, and establish mentorship systems that allow educators to gain practical experience in inclusive classrooms.

Policy and implementation gaps also hinder the realization of inclusive education. Although legal frameworks such as the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities (Republic Act No. 7277) and the Enhanced Basic Education Act (Republic Act No. 10533) support inclusive education, inconsistencies in enforcement create disparities in service delivery. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, unclear guidelines, and a lack of monitoring mechanisms lead to variations in how schools integrate SPED programs. Strengthening policy implementation requires improved coordination between education agencies, clear accountability measures, and sustained funding to ensure that inclusive education initiatives are carried out effectively across all regions.

Beyond structural and policy-related challenges, societal attitudes toward disability continue to pose significant barriers to inclusive education. Cultural misconceptions and stigma often prevent children with special needs from receiving the support they require. Many parents hesitate to enroll their children in SPED programs due to fear of discrimination, while some educators and school administrators lack awareness of best practices for fostering inclusive learning environments. Raising public awareness through community engagement, advocacy campaigns, and school-based initiatives can help dismantle stereotypes and promote a culture of acceptance and inclusion.

Economic constraints further limit access to quality SPED services. Many families face financial difficulties in covering the costs associated with special education, including assistive technologies, therapy sessions, and transportation. In low-income areas, public schools often lack sufficient resources to accommodate learners with disabilities, forcing parents to seek alternative educational options or forego formal schooling altogether.

Addressing this issue requires increased government funding, scholarships, and community-based support programs that reduce the financial burden on families and expand access to essential SPED services. Moving forward, a multi-stakeholder approach is necessary to ensure that inclusive education becomes a reality for all learners in the Philippines. Collaboration between government agencies, educators, families, and communities is essential in fostering a sustainable and inclusive education system. By addressing training deficiencies, strengthening policy enforcement, challenging societal biases, and improving resource allocation, the Philippine education system can move closer to achieving true educational equity for all students.

References

- Ainscow, M., Dyson, A., & Weiner, S. (2013). *From exclusion to inclusion: Ways of responding in schools to students with special education needs*. [ERIC Document]. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED546818.pdf>
- Alonzo, J. (2020). Parental involvement in SPED. *Philippine Journal of Family Studies*, 12(4), 67-83.
- Asuncion, A. (2022). Challenges encountered by special educators: Inputs for the improvement of the Individualized Education Program. *Journal of Special Education*, 24(3), 112-128.
- Bautista, L. (2021). Inclusive education strategies. *Journal of Educational Innovation*, 19(1), 58-75.
- Bustos, M. (2008). *Development of progressive competencies for special education practitioners*. [Doctoral Dissertation, University of the Philippines-Diliman].
- Clemente, H. (2019). Teacher burnout in SPED. *Asian Journal of Education and Development*, 14(2), 45-63.

- De Borja, J. A., Sigua, E. M., & Marasigan, A. C. (2020). Pedagogical practices of multigrade teachers in conducting science learning activities. *International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 2(3), 219-228.
<https://doi.org/10.54476/iimrj353>
- Dela Torre, R. (2020). Access to assistive technology for SPED students. *Journal of Technology in Education*, 22(3), 98-113.
- Espino, M. (2021). SPED curriculum development. *Philippine Education Journal*, 17(2), 102-119.
- Estroga, R. (2020). Resource allocation in SPED programs. *Philippine Education Review*, 15(3), 67-82.
- Flores, P. (2019). Challenges in rural SPED education. *Journal of Rural Education*, 15(3), 55-72.
- Galvez, J. (2021). Government funding for SPED. *Journal of Public Policy and Education*, 25(1), 88-105.
- Garcia, P. (2020). Cultural barriers in SPED implementation. *Asian Journal of Special Education*, 18(1), 123-135.
- Guzman, L. (2021). Challenges in the provision of learning materials for SPED. *Education Today*, 9(2), 98-112.
- Herrera, S. (2020). Monitoring and evaluation of SPED programs. *International Journal of Education Policy*, 18(4), 67-82.
- Ignacio, R. (2021). Teacher-student ratios in SPED. *Journal of Educational Management*, 16(1), 45-62.
- Javier, T. (2020). Innovations in SPED teaching methods. *Journal of Special Education*, 14(3), 77-94.
- Jaymalin, M., Lee-Brago, P., & Servillos, N. (2024, March 4). United Nations issues global alert over teacher shortage. *PhilStar Global*. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/03/04/2337962/united-nations-issues-global-alert-over-teacher-shortage>
- Kawal, L. (2021). SPED teacher incentives. *Philippine Journal of Teacher Education*, 20(2), 33-51.
- Llanes, M. (2019). Teacher training and professional development in SPED. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 21(4), 102-116.
- Llego, M. A. (2022, August 25). Inclusive education in the Philippines. *TeacherPH*. Retrieved August 25, 2022, from <https://www.teacherph.com/inclusive-education-philippines/>
- Lopez, M. (2020). Community support for SPED. *Journal of Inclusive Education*, 13(4), 45-62.
- Mader, J. (2017). How teacher training hinders special-needs students. *The Atlantic*.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/03/how-teacher-training-hinders-special-needs-students/518286/>
- Mangonon, F. A. (2022). Challenges encountered by special educators: Inputs for the improvement of the Individualized Education Program. *Journal of Special Education*, 24(3), 112-128.
- Manansala, M., & Dizon, E. (2009). Shadow teaching scheme for children with autism and attention-deficit disorder in regular schools. *Education Quarterly*, 66(1), 34-49.
<https://journals.upd.edu.ph/index.php/edq/article/view/1563>
- Mercado, J. (2022). The impact of teacher turnover in SPED. *Educational Leadership and Policy Studies*, 23(3), 75-89.
- Muega, M. (2016). Inclusive education in the Philippines: Through the eyes of teachers, administrators, and parents of children with special needs. *Social Science Diliman*, 12(1).
- Muega, M., & Echavia, D. (2017). Inclusive education in the Philippines: Gauging schools' and teachers' readiness to take on the challenge. *International Review of Social Sciences*, 5(8), 427-438.
<https://irss.academyirmbr.com/papers/1503037737.pdf>
- Reyes, C. L. A. (2023). A systematic review on the state of special education in the Philippines: Identifying challenges, gaps, and future direction. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 27(1), 58-72.
- Reyes, N. (2020). Policy and practice gaps in SPED implementation. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 27(1), 58-72.
- Santos, D., & Calderon, R. (2021). Bureaucratic challenges in SPED. *Philippine Journal of Public Administration*, 14(2), 44-59.
- Torres, A. (2019). Economic constraints in accessing SPED. *Journal of Education and Development*, 10(3), 33-47.
- Villanueva, E. (2021). Access to SPED services in rural areas. *Rural Education Review*, 16(2), 88-102.