



Public Schools Adaptability on Inclusive Education

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Abstract:

This study examines the adaptability of public schools in Bacolod City in implementing inclusive education utilizing a mixed-method approach involving exploratory sequential design. This study intended to answer the issues concerns and adjustments in the implementation of inclusive education in the Schools Division Office of Bacolod City and to determine the level of adaptability of public schools in inclusive education based on the parameters in Department of Education order no 44, series of 2021. The survey involved 197 respondents, including school heads, SPED coordinators, and receiving teachers, and collected data from 43 school heads, 28 SPED coordinators, and 111 receiving teachers from various schools. Qualitative analysis uncovered three significant themes related to the challenges faced by public schools, including teacher competence, resource inadequacy, and assessment practices. Despite these challenges, adjustments made by public schools primarily revolved around modifications to the learning process and collaboration with significant stakeholders. Quantitative analysis reveals a high level of adaptability in various aspects of inclusive education except for certain areas such as resource room services and educational placement which obtained low mean scores in adaptability. Based on these findings, policy recommendations were proposed for enhanced resource allocation for special education services, comprehensive teacher training and recruitment of Special Education teachers, improvement of assessment practices, promotion of collaboration, and continuous monitoring and evaluation.

Keywords: adaptability, inclusive education, public schools

Introduction:

Inclusive education has been established to meet the learning needs of children with special needs and to overcome the barriers posed by these learners (Hayes & Bulat, 2022). According to UNESCO (2020), inclusive education is a procedure for attending to and meeting the variety of demands of all students by raising learning involvement and lowering exclusion from and within education. The United Nations strives to achieve inclusive, equitable, high-quality education learning for everyone in a global context (United Nations, 2020).

The Philippine government supports this global goal through Republic Act 11650, which mandates that all schools nationwide ensure inclusive education for learners with disabilities (Philippine News Agency, 2022). The Department of Education (DepEd) strategizes an inclusive program through DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009, which locates learners with a disability, establishes continuous needs assessment, provides program options, modifies curriculum, and involves parents. Moreover, DepEd offers educational programs and services for these learners in the K-12 Basic Education Program through DepEd Order No. 044, s. 2021. According to DepEd data as of mid-March of 2022, there were 1265,598 learners with disabilities enrolled in public schools for the school year 2021-2022. This was 65% lower than the 360,879 recorded for the school year 2019-2020. According to a recent PhilStar report, enrollment has significantly declined among learners with disabilities in mainstream public schools. However, the Division of Bacolod City is actively working to support these students, with 872 learners with disabilities currently enrolled in the 43 schools that receive funding from the Special Education Support Fund. Division Memo No. 429, s2023 outlines the allocation of Php 1,948,900 to these schools, which will go towards formal assessments and rehabilitation by medical or allied medical specialists and the acquisition of specialized materials, equipment, and devices for instructional purposes. Much has been presented regarding the financial support given to public schools, which arouses the researcher's interest in knowing how adaptable public schools in the Division of Bacolod City are in addressing the diverse needs of learners.

Objectives of the Study

This study examined the adaptability of public schools towards inclusive education in the Division of Bacolod City for School Year 2023-2024.



Literature Review

This study was grounded in Lev Vygotsky's Social Constructivism Theory which emphasized the collaborative nature of much learning. Theoretically, constructivism focuses on creating cognitive tools that reflect the wisdom of the culture in which they are used and the insights and experiences of learning. Constructivism involves understanding the importance of the social dimensions during the learning process through observation, treatment, interpretation, and information adaptation in building cognitive structure.

Because learning and interaction between children, peers, parents, and teachers impact cognitive development, Vygotsky (1962) highlighted the social element of learning. According to Al-Shammari et al. (2019), constructivism-based inclusive education practices are practical applications in inclusive education settings. These entail instructional approaches and tactics to support learners in actively exploring complicated issues. To avoid overwhelming kids with the requirement for memorization, teachers of students with special needs should prioritize the information that is most pertinent to the essential concepts being discussed. Graphic organizers and self-monitoring have been recommended to educate the subject matter while fostering confidence and achievement (Lenjani, 2018).

Botha and Kourkoutas (2018) followed the development of novel techniques that support children with behavioral challenges and the support they receive by using a constructivist perspective. The following best practices—peer tutoring and cooperative learning—would benefit students in a constructivist, inclusive educational environment. Students can interact with one another and actively study in a practical context through peer tutoring and cooperative learning. Al-Shammari et al. (2019) state that kids learn best through experience and application in a constructivist inclusive classroom.

Research Methodology

This section presented the research methodology, which includes the research design, research locale, study respondents, sampling technique, data gathering instruments, validity, and reliability of the instrument, data gathering, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study used a mixed-method research design. This mixed method falls explicitly under the exploratory sequential design. The exploratory design uses a two-phase design; the results of the first method, which is the qualitative data, can help develop or inform the second method, which generates quantitative data. Quantitative data offers a level of precision that qualitative data cannot provide, and qualitative data cannot provide insights that cannot be captured through quantitative data (Hassan, 2022). This research design was used in the study because conducting a qualitative data gathering first, such as an interview, can gain access to the respondents' world of experience and where their consciousness exists. The in-depth interview was employed to gain a better understanding and insights about the issues and adjustments in inclusive education among the respondents. The results of the qualitative analysis became the basis of the researcher to craft the quantitative instrument that can gather quantifiable data needed to determine the level of adaptability of public schools in inclusive education.

Respondents of the Study

The data sources came from the three groups of respondents: the school heads, SPED coordinators, and receiving teachers. For the quantitative part, 197 respondents participated in the survey, which consisted of 43 school heads, 28 from elementary and 15 from junior and senior high schools, 43 SPED coordinators, 28 from elementary and 15 from junior and senior high schools, and 111 receiving teachers, 77 from elementary and 34 from junior and senior high schools.

For the qualitative part, six school heads, 6 SPED coordinators, and 6 receiving teachers were interviewed based on the following inclusion criteria: First, respondents were from the Special Education Support Fund recipient schools. Second, these respondents have learners with special education needs enrolled in their classes. Third, they have been a school head, a SPED coordinator, and a receiving teacher for at least a year. Fourth, they are willing to participate in the study.

Sampling Technique

Before selecting the sample, the researchers surveyed the number of receiving teachers in the whole division since there is no record of the number of teachers having learners with special needs in their classes. Only several school heads and SPED coordinators were available. For the survey, the school heads, SPED coordinators, and receiving teachers were selected using a total enumeration sampling decision since the population is manageable, hence, it is to take all the available respondents.



Data Gathering Instruments

The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview questionnaire for the qualitative research with the selected school heads, SPED coordinators, and receiving teachers. This comprised reflective questions that gave the researcher a deep understanding and insights into issues, concerns, and adjustments in responding to inclusive education.

After the interview, a survey was conducted by administering a researcher-made survey questionnaire to the study's respondents composed of 42 items constructed based on the qualitative results and the provisions of DepEd Order No. 44, series of 2021. The survey questionnaire has six parameters: Assessment Services, Adaptation of the K-12 Curriculum, Development of Individual Educational Plans, Resource Room Services, Educational Placement, and Program Delivery. The instrument used a 5-point Likert scale as follows.

Rating	Range	Descriptors	Interpretation
1	1.00 - 1.80	Fully Disagree	Least Adaptable
2	1.81 - 2.60	Disagree	Slightly Adaptable
3	2.61 - 3.40	Neither agree nor Disagree	Moderately Adaptable
4	3.41 - 4.20	Agree	Adaptable
5	4.21 - 5.00	Fully agree	Highly Adaptable

Data Gathering Procedure

First and foremost, approval letters on the conduct of the study, specifically in data gathering, were secured from the persons in authority, such as the Schools Division Superintendent through School Principals of the participating schools. Informed consent stating the title, purpose of the study, and ethical considerations was distributed to the school heads, SPED coordinators, and receiving teachers. Upon approval, the researcher conducted the in-depth interview with the selected respondents based on the agreed schedule. The interview was done in a face-to-face manner with the chosen conversation partners. An audio recording of the interview was secured with the respondents' consent. After the interview, the researcher's notes were presented to each participant for the conformity of the responses. The transcriptions became the basis for analysis to generate relevant themes.

After the generation of relevant themes, the survey questionnaire was administered. The survey was conducted online via a Google form for easy access and data consolidation. The raw data was then sent to the researcher's statistician for statistical treatment.

Data Analysis

For research questions 1 and 2, a thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to discover significant themes relating to the issues and adjustments in inclusive education. This included transcribing the data, bracketing and phenomenological reduction, reviewing the interview for the sense of the whole, delineating units of general meaning, delineating units of meaning relevant to the research questions, discovering an emerging cluster of meanings, eliminating redundancies, clustering units of relevant meaning, and determining themes from clusters of meaning. NVIVO software assisted the researchers in the coding and theming process.

For research question 3, which determines the level of adaptability of public schools in inclusive education in terms of different provisions stipulated in DepEd Order No. 44, series of 2021, the statistical tools used were mean and standard deviation. Data were treated using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Ethical Considerations

The respondents' voluntary engagement is very crucial. If they choose to, the respondents can withdraw their participation at any time since it is not compulsory. With the principle of informed consent, the researcher provided the respondents with enough details and assurances about their participation to enable them to fully understand the potential consequences of doing so and to freely decide whether or not to participate, free from undue influence. The respondents' identity was kept confidential throughout the study. After the study was conducted, all data gathered was disposed of properly. All borrowed ideas from other sources were paraphrased and cited according to the APA citing and referencing guide 7th edition to address academic integrity.

Table 1
 Distribution Table of the Respondents for the Survey

Category	N
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School Heads	
Elementary	28
High School	15
SPED Coordinators	
Elementary	28
High School	15
Receiving Teachers	
Elementary	77
High School	34
Total	197

Results and Discussion

This section presents the significant findings of the study based on quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Qualitative Analysis

A study conducted in-depth interviews with teachers, SPED coordinators, and school heads revealed that public schools face multidimensional issues in implementing inclusive education provisions, including teacher competence, inadequate resources, and assessing learners with special needs, as revealed by NVIVO software analysis.

Teacher's Competence

Public schools face challenges in handling learners with special needs due to lack of specialized teachers, but must accept the challenge to ensure student enrolment. School heads face challenges in accommodating students with special needs due to lack of trained teachers and curriculum adjustments, with SPED coordinators acknowledging the need for training.

Inadequacy of Resources

The study highlights the insufficient resources for learners with special needs, particularly in the Special Education Support Fund, posing challenges for schools and receiving teachers. Three school heads and two SPED coordinators highlighted resource issues in their schools, including limited space, budget delays, and inadequate funding for students with special needs. The results suggest schools need more time to implement inclusive education.

Assessment of Learners with Special Needs

Public schools struggle with assessment concerns for learners with special needs, often lacking budget and resources for specialized consultations, highlighting the need for improved inclusive education.

The study reveals challenges in implementing inclusive education in public schools, particularly for learners with special needs. School heads express concerns about proper assessment and referral, as there are limited psychiatric clinics and high costs. SPED coordinators also face difficulties in communicating with parents and making adjustments. The study suggests that proper assessment is crucial for these learners, but parents are often reluctant or uncooperative. Previous studies have also highlighted the need for funding for specialist doctors to assess these learners.

Modifications in Learning Process

The study highlights challenges in implementing inclusive education in public schools, particularly for learners with special needs, due to limited resources and high costs.

School heads report that teachers are making significant adjustments to accommodate learners with special needs. They adapt their instruction, materials, and activities to cope with regular students. Public schools are implementing inclusive education, with teachers playing a crucial role. Adjustments include curriculum alignment, individual learning programs, and classroom management. Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled students enhances teaching-learning experiences.

Collaboration with Significant Others

Public schools face challenges in implementing inclusive education due to inadequate teacher competence, resources, and program delivery, requiring assistance from various stakeholders.

School heads seek technical assistance, social workers, and parents' advice to implement inclusive education. Sped coordinators collaborate with teachers to address special needs issues. Collaboration and communication are crucial for overcoming barriers. A support system is essential for school heads, sped coordinators, and mainstreamed



teachers. Inclusion goes beyond teachers and requires strategic action planning, commitment, and continuous monitoring. Effective implementation requires administrative support and family involvement.

Teacher's Training

Teachers, school heads, and SPED coordinators agree on actions for inclusive education in public schools, including teacher training and hiring Special Education teachers to accommodate learners with special needs.

SPED coordinators emphasize the need for teachers to be trained to handle learners with special needs effectively. They suggest educating teachers about inclusive education and providing training on different disabilities. Effective implementation depends on strategic action planning, commitment, and continuous monitoring. The government should intensify teacher training and resource allocation.

Hiring of Specialized Teachers

Public schools emphasize hiring special education teachers for inclusive education, as regular teachers struggle to provide effective intervention for learners with special needs.

School heads and SPED coordinators agree that specialized teachers are necessary for inclusive education. Regular teachers need an academic background in special education, and their training should focus on teaching strategies for regular students. The Department of Education should hire specialized teachers to address the needs of learners with special needs. Studies show that teachers with expertise in special education programs have adequate knowledge of implementing inclusive education. Multi-professional cooperation is crucial for successful implementation in inclusive settings.

Quantitative Analysis

Table 2

Level of Adaptability of Public Schools in Inclusive Education in Terms of Identification and Referral Process

The adaptability of public schools in Inclusive Education in terms of....	Mean	SD	Interpretation
A. Identification and Referral Process			
1. The school tags the learners with manifestations in the LIS or Learner's Information System.	4.4746	.6052	Highly Adaptable
2. The school identifies the learners with special needs through their manifestations.	4.5416	.5988	Highly Adaptable
3. The school refers the identified learners with manifestations to specialized doctors.	4.4369	.7328	Highly Adaptable
4. The school refers the identified learners with special needs to the SPED center.	4.3271	.8338	Highly Adaptable
5. The teachers or section advisers identify the learners with special needs through observation.	4.3675	.7029	Highly Adaptable
6. The teachers ask the parents about the behavior of the child at home.	4.4717	.7214	Highly Adaptable
As a whole	4.5224	.6217	Highly Adaptable

Table 2 reveals public schools' adaptability in identifying and referring learners with special needs, with a mean score of 4.5224. They respond positively to identifying learners and referring them for assessment. School administrators, SPED teachers, and parents all play roles in inclusive education, with teachers evaluating their participation positively.

Table 3

Level of Adaptability of Public Schools in Inclusive Education in terms of Assessment Services

The adaptability of public schools in Inclusive Education in terms of....	Mean	SD	Interpretation
B. Assessment Services			
7. The school seeks the help of specialized doctors in assessing the learners with manifestations.	4.3517	.7481	Highly Adaptable



8. The school has its assessment tool to assess learners with special needs.	4.1382	.9792	Adaptable
9. Learners with manifestations are assessed promptly by specialized doctors.	4.1811	.9308	Adaptable
10. The school has its budget or fund for the assessment of the learners with manifestations.	4.2588	.9289	Highly Adaptable
11. The recommendations made by the doctors are followed by the school.	4.3057	.8220	Highly Adaptable
12. The parents of learners with manifestations are willing to have their child assessed by a specialized doctor.	4.2627	.7802	Highly Adaptable
As a whole	4.3217	.7870	Highly Adaptable

Table 3 shows public schools' adaptability in inclusive education regarding assessment services, with a mean score of 4.3217. However, concerns arise regarding assessment procedures, timely assessment, and the lack of available tools. Previous studies emphasize the importance of specialist assessment, resource availability, and funding for specialists and support staff.

Table 4

Level of Adaptability of Public Schools in Inclusive Educations in terms of Adaptation of K-12 Curriculum

The adaptability of public schools in Inclusive Education in terms of....	Mean	SD	Interpretation
C. Adaptation of K-12 Curriculum			
13. The school adapts the K-12 curriculum to teaching learners with special needs.	4.2906	.7103	Highly Adaptable
14. The school combines regular and learners with special needs in accomplishing written works and performance tasks.	4.3566	.8037	Highly Adaptable
15. The teachers give learners with special needs similar activities to regular learners.	4.2127	.9014	Highly Adaptable
16. The teachers assess the outputs and performance tasks of learners with special needs similar to those of regular learners.	4.1934	.9037	Adaptable
17. Modifications in the curriculum are made by teachers for learners with special needs.	4.2930	.7658	Highly Adaptable
18. The teachers allow the learners with special needs to learn at their own pace.	4.3697	.7382	Highly Adaptable
As a whole	4.3328	.7273	Highly Adaptable

The study reveals that public schools are highly adaptable in implementing inclusive education, with a mean score of 4.3328. Teachers allow learners with special needs to learn at their own pace, and teachers adjust learning activities and assessments to accommodate their needs. This aligns with previous studies on inclusive education, suggesting that adjustments are necessary for successful implementation.

Table 5

Level of Adaptability of Public Schools in Inclusive Education in terms of Individualized Educational Plan

The adaptability of public schools in Inclusive Education in terms of....	Mean	SD	Interpretation
D. Development of Individualized Educational Plan			
19. The teachers develop an individualized education plan for learners with special needs.	4.2121	.8198	Highly Adaptable
20. The teacher considers the learners' disability in developing the plan.	4.3307	.8046	Highly Adaptable
21. The developed plan is validated by the SPED coordinator, school head, and experts.	4.1261	.9063	Adaptable
22. The individualized activities are followed as planned by the teacher.	4.2940	.7751	Highly Adaptable



23. The teachers modified the activities in the daily lesson plan to accommodate the learning needs of LSNs.	4.2616	.8068	Highly Adaptable
24. The school has a team of teachers who do the crafting of the individualized educational plan for LSNs.	4.1711	.9915	Adaptable
As a whole	4.2388	.8489	Highly Adaptable

Public schools are highly adaptable in creating individualized educational plans for inclusive education, with a high mean score of 4.3307. However, concerns about crafting and validating these plans persist due to a lack of knowledge among teachers and support staff. This issue is exacerbated by limited time for designing programs for students with disabilities.

Table 6

Level of Adaptability of Public Schools in Inclusive Education in terms of Educational Placement

The adaptability of public schools in Inclusive Education in terms of...	Mean	SD	Interpretation
E. Educational Placement			
25. The school combines learners with special needs with the regular learners in a class.	4.2352	.6940	Highly Adaptable
26. The school assigns the learners with special needs as non-graded.	4.1658	.9677	Adaptable
27. The school identifies to which grade level the learners with special needs will be placed based on their disability.	4.0792	.9367	Adaptable
28. The learners with special needs are placed in a specific graded class.	4.1630	.8754	Adaptable
29. The learners with special needs are promoted to the next grade level.	4.1975	.7463	Adaptable
30. The school has guidelines on when to promote learners with special needs to the next level.	4.1300	.9323	Adaptable
As a whole	4.1618	.7511	Adaptable

Table 6 shows public schools' adaptability in inclusive education, with a mean score of 4.1618. However, they struggle with identifying grade levels, promoting special needs, and placing them in non-graded groups. Addressing these issues remains a concern for public schools

Table 7

Level of Adaptability of Public Schools in Inclusive Education in terms of Resource Room Services

The adaptability of public schools in Inclusive Education in terms of...	Mean	SD	Interpretation
F. Resource Room Services			
31. The school provides the necessary equipment and materials for learners with special needs.	4.1807	.8288	Adaptable
32. The school provides a resource room intended only for learners with special needs.	4.0562	.9683	Adaptable
33. The school allots enough funds for the procurement of the equipment and materials.	4.1494	.9099	Adaptable
34. The teachers modify or improvise materials for learners with special needs.	4.2863	.7879	Highly Adaptable
35. The infrastructure like classrooms and buildings can cater to the special needs of the learners.	4.0717	.9041	Adaptable
36. The facilities for learners with special needs are functional.	4.1822	.9233	Adaptable
As a whole	4.1762	.8851	Adaptable



The study reveals that public schools are adaptable but need to fully implement inclusive education in resource room services. The mean score is 4.1762, with the highest score being 4.2863 for teachers modifying materials for learners with special needs. The lowest score is 4.0562 for providing a resource room exclusively for learners with special needs. This indicates a need for more financial resources to provide necessary resources for inclusive education. Previous studies have found a low level of demand orientation and uneven distribution of special needs teacher resources. Resourcing inclusive education is crucial for education systems and schools, requiring adequate and sustainable resources.

Table 8

Level of Adaptability of Public Schools in Inclusive Education in terms of Program Delivery

The adaptability of public schools in Inclusive Education in terms of....	Mean	SD	Interpretation
G. Program Delivery			
37. The school delivers the program in inclusive education according to the provisions in the DepEd Order.	4.2052	.7293	Highly Adaptable
38. The school utilizes the Special Education support fund according to the needs of these learners.	4.3406	.7306	Highly Adaptable
39. The school is adaptable to the needs of the learners with special needs.	4.2633	.7179	Highly Adaptable
40. The school involves the parents in the delivery of the program.	4.3542	.6854	Highly Adaptable
41. The school trains the teachers in handling learners with disability.	4.1990	.8055	Adaptable
42. The school taps the help and support of other stakeholders in the delivery of program.	4.3429	.7940	Highly Adaptable
As a whole	4.2374	.7427	Highly Adaptable

The study reveals that public schools are highly adaptable in implementing inclusive education, despite some limitations. The highest mean score is for involving parents in program delivery. However, teacher training is crucial for effective implementation. Collaborative efforts among stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, and parents, are essential for successful inclusive education. Teachers with expertise in such programs are well-versed in implementing inclusive education policies.

Summary of Findings

The study found that public schools are adaptable in implementing inclusive education, but only partially in resource room services and educational placement. Issues include teacher competence, resource inadequacy, and assessment of special needs. Adjustments made include modifications to the learning process and collaboration with others. To effectively implement inclusive education, public schools should include teacher training and hiring Special Education teachers in policy recommendations.

Conclusions

The study concludes that public schools have successfully implemented inclusive education provisions, but some areas, like resource room services and educational placement, have not been fully fulfilled. To ensure effective implementation, schools must respond promptly to learners with special needs, address teacher shortages, and provide adequate resources. Despite challenges, schools continue to adapt and collaborate with stakeholders to create a conducive learning environment. A positive mindset is crucial for successful implementation.

Recommendations

The study recommends public schools allocate funds for resource rooms and teacher training for learners with special needs. They should also consider additional financial resources for other expenses, such as assessments and consultations with specialized doctors. Localized learning materials should be developed for learners with special needs, and inclusive education provisions should be included in the school improvement plan.

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