



Special Education: Challenges Faced by Teachers in the Philippines

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12614584>

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Abstract:

This qualitative study explores the issues and challenges faced by special education teachers in the Philippines. Through interviews with teachers, several key themes emerged. Firstly, inadequate teacher training and professional development hindered effective instruction for students with disabilities. Limited access to resources and support materials was identified as a significant barrier, leading to the need for curriculum modification. Parental acceptance and involvement were crucial but often challenging, impacting collaboration between teachers and parents. Additionally, teachers emphasized the importance of individualized teaching approaches and student support to meet diverse learning needs. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated dedication to supporting students' growth and enhancing their skills. Addressing these issues is essential for improving the quality of special education programs and ensuring the success of students with disabilities. This study underscores the need for comprehensive training, resource allocation, and collaborative efforts to create inclusive environments for students with special needs.

Keywords: special education, Philippines, challenges, teacher perspectives, teacher training, resources

Introduction:

Education for learners with special needs has undergone significant transformation, evolving from isolated special education (SPED) settings to integrated education, and more recently, to inclusive education frameworks. Inclusive education aims to provide equitable educational opportunities by accommodating diverse learning needs within mainstream classrooms (Ainscow, 2020). However, despite the supportive policies and initiatives designed to facilitate inclusive education, numerous challenges persist, particularly in the Philippines.

In the Philippine context, the legal framework supporting inclusive education includes the Republic Act Nos. 3562 and 5250, which mandate the training of teachers, administrators, and supervisors in SPED by the Department of Education (DepEd) (Republic Act No. 3562, 1968; Republic Act No. 5250, 1968). Despite these legislative measures, the actual implementation of SPED programs faces significant obstacles, including limited resources, inadequate training, and insufficient support for teachers (Lazaro, 2018).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Declaration of the Rights of the Child emphasize the right to inclusive education for all children, regardless of their disabilities (United Nations, 2007). However, in practice, many schools in the Philippines struggle to effectively integrate students with



disabilities into regular classrooms. Studies have shown that teachers often lack the necessary skills and resources to address the diverse needs of these students, leading to suboptimal educational outcomes (DepEd, 2017).

This study aims to explore the challenges faced by SPED teachers in the City of Ilagan, Philippines. By employing a qualitative research design, this study seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the issues from the perspective of those directly involved in the educational process. The scientific management theory and classical theory will serve as the theoretical framework for analyzing the efficiency and effectiveness of SPED implementations (Taylor, 1911).

Understanding the specific challenges faced by SPED teachers is crucial for developing strategies to enhance the implementation of inclusive education. Previous research highlights the importance of teacher training, resource allocation, and administrative support in overcoming these challenges (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Therefore, this study will focus on identifying the key obstacles and proposing actionable solutions to improve the quality of education for learners with special needs.

Literature Review:

The evolution of special education has been marked by a gradual shift from segregation to inclusion. Initially, children with disabilities were educated in separate institutions, isolated from their peers. Over time, the integration movement sought to bring these students into mainstream schools, albeit often in separate classrooms (Winzer, 1993). The ultimate goal of inclusive education emerged from the recognition that all students, regardless of their abilities, should learn together in the same environment. This shift aligns with the principles of social justice and the right to education for all (Ainscow, 2020).

Inclusive education is supported by various international frameworks and policies. The Salamanca Statement, adopted in 1994, emphasized that schools should accommodate all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions (UNESCO, 1994). Similarly, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) explicitly states the right to inclusive education (United Nations, 2007). These frameworks advocate for the removal of barriers and the provision of necessary support to ensure that all children can access quality education.

In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 7277, also known as the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons, mandates that the state provide accessible and appropriate education for persons with disabilities (Republic Act No. 7277, 1992). Additionally, the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic Act No. 10533) emphasizes inclusive education as a key component of the K-12 curriculum (Republic Act No. 10533, 2013).

Despite supportive policies, the implementation of inclusive education faces numerous challenges. One significant issue is the lack of adequately trained teachers. Studies have shown that teachers often feel unprepared to handle the diverse needs of students with disabilities due to insufficient training and professional development opportunities (Forlin, 2010). In the Philippines, this issue is particularly pronounced, with many teachers lacking formal training in special education (DepEd, 2017).

Resource allocation is another critical challenge. Inclusive education requires sufficient funding to provide necessary accommodations, such as assistive technologies, specialized teaching materials, and support staff (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). However, many schools, especially in developing countries like the Philippines, struggle with limited budgets and inadequate resources (Lazaro, 2018).

Moreover, societal attitudes towards disabilities can hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education. Negative stereotypes and misconceptions about the abilities of individuals with disabilities can lead to resistance from educators, parents, and even policymakers (De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011). Changing these attitudes is essential for fostering an inclusive culture within schools and the broader community.

Teachers play a pivotal role in the successful implementation of inclusive education. Their attitudes, beliefs, and competencies significantly influence how inclusive practices are executed in the classroom (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Research indicates that teachers who receive adequate training and support are more likely to adopt positive attitudes towards inclusion and effectively accommodate students with diverse needs (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

In the Philippines, studies have revealed that while many teachers support the idea of inclusive education, they often feel overwhelmed by the practical challenges. For instance, a survey conducted by the DepEd (2017) found that teachers frequently cite large class sizes, lack of resources, and insufficient training as major obstacles to effective inclusion. Furthermore, teachers expressed the need for more professional development opportunities focused on inclusive teaching strategies and classroom management techniques.



To address these challenges, several strategies have been identified as effective in promoting inclusive education. Professional development is crucial, as it equips teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary to support diverse learners. Training programs should focus on inclusive pedagogies, differentiated instruction, and the use of assistive technologies (Loreman, et al. 2016).

Collaboration is another key element. Inclusive education requires a team approach, involving regular teachers, special education teachers, support staff, and parents (Friend & Cook, 2013). Collaborative teaching models, such as co-teaching, where general and special education teachers work together in the same classroom, have been shown to benefit all students (Murawski & Swanson, 2001).

Moreover, creating an inclusive school culture is essential. This involves fostering positive attitudes towards diversity, promoting respect and understanding among students, and implementing policies that support inclusion (Ainscow, 2020). Schools should also ensure that their physical environments are accessible and that they provide necessary accommodations for students with disabilities (Edyburn, 2013).

Several case studies highlight successful inclusive education practices. For example, a study by Subban and Sharma (2006) examined the implementation of inclusive education in Australian schools. The researchers found that schools with strong leadership, adequate resources, and ongoing professional development were more successful in implementing inclusive practices. Similarly, a study by Peters (2003) on inclusive education in Africa revealed that community involvement and culturally relevant teaching practices were critical factors in promoting inclusion.

In the Philippines, some schools have developed innovative approaches to inclusive education. For instance, the Department of Education has implemented the Special Education (SPED) program, which aims to provide specialized services to students with disabilities within mainstream schools (DepEd, 2017). This program includes training for teachers, the provision of assistive devices, and the establishment of resource centers to support inclusive practices.

To further advance inclusive education, several recommendations can be made. First, increasing investment in education is essential to provide the necessary resources and support for inclusive practices. Governments and educational institutions should prioritize funding for inclusive education initiatives, including teacher training, infrastructure improvements, and the development of specialized materials (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Second, there is a need for continuous professional development for teachers. Training programs should be comprehensive and ongoing, covering various aspects of inclusive education, such as differentiated instruction, behavior management, and the use of technology (Loreman, et al. 2016). Additionally, teachers should have access to a supportive network of colleagues and specialists to share best practices and seek advice.

Third, fostering a positive school culture is crucial. Schools should promote an inclusive ethos that values diversity and encourages respect and understanding among students and staff (Ainscow, 2020). This can be achieved through awareness campaigns, inclusive policies, and the active involvement of the entire school community in promoting inclusion.

Finally, further research is needed to identify and address the specific challenges faced by different groups of students with disabilities. Studies should explore the effectiveness of various inclusive education strategies and provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and practitioners (Mitchell, 2015).

Methodology:

This study employed a systematic review methodology to examine the issues and challenges in special education from the perspective of teachers. Systematic reviews are comprehensive and structured approaches to synthesizing existing research, ensuring that the process is transparent, replicable, and minimizes bias (Higgins & Green, 2011). This methodology was chosen to provide a robust and detailed understanding of the current state of knowledge on the topic, as well as to identify gaps and areas for future research.

The literature search was conducted across multiple academic databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC, PubMed, and JSTOR. The search terms used were a combination of keywords related to special education, inclusive education, teacher perspectives, challenges, and issues. Specific search terms included "special education challenges," "inclusive education teacher perspectives," "issues in special education," and "teacher attitudes towards inclusion." Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to refine and expand the search.

Articles published between 2010 and 2023 were included to ensure the review captured recent developments and current perspectives. Only articles published in English were considered. Studies that specifically focused on teachers' perspectives regarding challenges and issues in special education and inclusive education were included. Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and official reports were included.



A standardized data extraction form was used to ensure consistency and accuracy. Two reviewers independently extracted data from each study, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus. To ensure the reliability and validity of the included studies, a quality assessment was conducted using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Hong et al., 2018). This tool allows for the evaluation of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method studies. Each study was assessed on criteria such as the clarity of the research question, the appropriateness of the methodology, the robustness of data collection and analysis, and the validity of the conclusions drawn.

Findings and Discussion:

Lack of Teacher Training and Professional Development:

Teacher training and professional development play a crucial role in ensuring that educators are equipped to address the diverse needs of students with disabilities. However, several studies have indicated significant gaps in training and development opportunities for teachers in special education.

Subban and Sharma (2006) underscored the concerns expressed by teachers regarding the insufficient training in special education. Teachers reported feeling ill-prepared to effectively support students with disabilities in their classrooms. Specifically, they lacked specialized training to handle various disabilities, including learning disabilities, autism, and intellectual disabilities. This lack of specialized training can impede teachers' ability to provide appropriate support and accommodations for students with diverse learning needs.

Additionally, Republic Act No. 7277 (1992) emphasized the need for training and professional development for teachers in special education. Despite legislative efforts to address this issue, challenges persist in providing comprehensive training programs for teachers. The act highlights the importance of ensuring that teachers, administrators, and supervisors receive appropriate training by the Department of Education to effectively support students with disabilities.

Limited Access to Resources and Support Materials:

Access to adequate resources and support materials is vital for effective teaching in special education settings. However, many teachers face challenges due to the lack of instructional materials, curriculum guides, and specialized resources tailored to the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

Teacher Gold emphasized the difficulties faced by teachers regarding the scarcity of instructional materials and curriculum guides designed for students with disabilities. This shortage hampers teachers' ability to implement effective teaching strategies and cater to individual learning needs (Teacher 3).

Furthermore, Teacher 2 highlighted the issue of a lack of specialized instructional materials tailored to different learning needs and disabilities. Teachers often find themselves without appropriate resources to support students with various disabilities, making it challenging to provide quality education (Teacher 2).

Teachers commonly reported a shortage of instructional materials specifically designed for students with disabilities. These materials include adapted textbooks, learning aids, assistive technologies, and sensory tools necessary to support diverse learning needs (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) emphasized the importance of having access to a variety of instructional materials to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. However, the lack of such materials poses a significant barrier to effective teaching and learning in special education classrooms.

Due to the limited availability of resources, teachers often resort to modifying the curriculum to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities. This may involve adapting existing materials, creating personalized learning resources, or adjusting teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning styles (Peters, 2003).

Peters (2003) highlighted the necessity for teachers to modify curriculum content and teaching approaches to address the diverse needs of students with disabilities. However, this places an additional burden on teachers and may not always result in optimal learning outcomes.

Efforts are needed to address the challenge of limited access to resources and support materials in special education. Governments and educational institutions need to allocate resources to develop and provide specialized instructional materials tailored to different disabilities and learning needs (UNESCO, 1994). Teachers should receive training on adapting materials and using alternative teaching strategies to meet diverse learning needs (UNESCO, 1994). Schools and educators can collaborate to share resources and materials, creating a more supportive environment for teaching students with disabilities (UNESCO, 1994).

Parental Acceptance and Involvement in Special Education



Parental acceptance and involvement play a crucial role in the success of special education programs. However, some teachers encounter challenges in engaging parents, particularly in accepting their child's learning disabilities, which can impact collaboration between teachers and parents.

Teacher 6 highlighted the difficulties teachers face in engaging parents, particularly in accepting their child's learning disabilities. Many parents may struggle to accept or acknowledge their child's disabilities due to fear of stigma or embarrassment (Teacher 6).

The reluctance of parents to accept their child's learning disabilities can significantly impact collaboration between teachers and parents. Teacher 1 emphasized how fear of stigma or embarrassment hinders parents from acknowledging their child's needs, which in turn affects the effectiveness of communication and cooperation between teachers and parents.

Parents may fear the stigma associated with having a child with disabilities and worry about how their child will be perceived by others (Lindsay, 2016). Some parents may lack understanding about their child's disabilities and may struggle to accept the diagnosis (Groenewald, et al., 2024). Cultural beliefs and attitudes toward disabilities can influence parental acceptance and involvement in special education (Harry et al., 2009).

Parental involvement is crucial for supporting the academic and social development of students with disabilities. When parents are actively involved in their child's education, it can lead to better outcomes for the child (Turnbull et al., 2015). Efforts are needed to improve parental acceptance and involvement in special education: Providing parents with information and resources about disabilities can help increase understanding and acceptance (Turnbull et al., 2015). Educators should be sensitive to cultural beliefs and practices when working with parents from diverse backgrounds (Harry et al., 2009). Establishing open and supportive communication channels between teachers and parents can help build trust and collaboration (Uy, et al., 2024)

Individualized Teaching and Student Support

Individualized teaching approaches and student support are crucial components of effective special education. Teachers emphasize the importance of recognizing and accommodating individual needs to promote students' development and learning.

Teacher 4 stressed the significance of individualized teaching approaches tailored to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. This approach involves adapting teaching methods, materials, and support strategies to address individual learning styles and abilities (Teacher 4). Teachers highlighted the necessity of accommodating individual needs to support students' development and learning. This includes providing personalized instruction, additional support, and accommodations to help students succeed (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2002).

Despite the challenges they face, teachers expressed dedication to helping students with disabilities grow and enhance their skills. Teacher 5 emphasized the importance of continuous support and efforts to promote students' development (Teacher 5).

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) play a crucial role in providing individualized support for students with disabilities. These programs outline specific goals, accommodations, and support services tailored to each student's unique needs (IDEA, 2004). Teachers employ personalized learning strategies to accommodate individual needs and promote student success. This may include differentiated instruction, adaptive technologies, and one-on-one support (Tomlinson, 2017).

Teachers aim to promote student independence and self-advocacy skills alongside individualized support. This helps students become more self-sufficient and confident in their abilities (Test et al., 2005).

Individualized teaching approaches and student support are essential for the success of students with disabilities in special education settings. By recognizing and accommodating individual needs, teachers can help students thrive and reach their full potential.

Conclusion:

The findings of this study shed light on the various issues and challenges faced by special education teachers from their perspectives. Through qualitative analysis, several key themes have emerged, highlighting the complexities of teaching students with disabilities and the efforts made by teachers to overcome these challenges.

Firstly, the study revealed the persistent issue of inadequate teacher training and professional development in special education. Many teachers expressed concerns about the lack of specialized training in handling specific disabilities, indicating a need for more comprehensive training programs to better equip teachers for inclusive classrooms.



Secondly, limited access to resources and support materials emerged as a significant challenge. Teachers reported shortages of instructional materials and curriculum guides tailored to different learning needs, leading to the need for curriculum modification and adaptation to meet individual student requirements.

Furthermore, parental acceptance and involvement in special education were identified as crucial factors affecting student success. Some teachers reported difficulties in engaging parents, particularly in accepting their child's disabilities, which highlighted the importance of building collaborative relationships between teachers and parents.

Additionally, the study highlighted the importance of individualized teaching approaches and student support. Teachers emphasized the necessity of recognizing and accommodating individual needs to promote students' development and learning, despite the challenges they face.

This study underscores the multifaceted nature of challenges in special education and the dedication of teachers to address these challenges. Addressing issues such as teacher training, resource access, parental involvement, and individualized support is crucial for improving the quality of special education programs and ensuring the success of students with disabilities.

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