



Towards an Effective Inclusive School for Learners with Special Educational Needs

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Abstract:

The study focused on the characteristics of an effective inclusive school. The respondents were teachers of a foreign school. The researcher utilized a descriptive design and utilized frequency and percentage, weighted mean, and ANOVA for the statistical treatment of data. Based on the results of the study, majority of the teacher-respondents are under the age range of 41-60 years old, mostly females, mostly have master's units and in the teaching profession for 6-15 years in service. In the assessment of the characteristics of an effective inclusive school, it is very evident that their school was manifesting characteristics of: Creating an Inclusive Culture that strives to minimize all forms of discrimination: Producing Inclusive Policies where the school seeks to admit all learners from locality/feeder schools, all school policies are inclusive, and barriers to attendance are minimized; and Evolving Inclusive Practices. The learners with special education needs are actively encouraged to participate in lessons, learners learn collaboratively, and teachers use a variety of teaching styles-scaffolding, modeling, peer tutoring, active learning, and cooperative group work. Henceforth, the result revealed that there is a significant difference in the assessment of an effective inclusive school when grouped accordingly making the null hypothesis rejected which means that the assessment of an effective inclusive school differs when grouped accordingly.

Keywords: characteristics, inclusive education, Oman's Ministry of Education standards

Introduction:

Inclusive education aims to ensure all individuals, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, are provided with opportunities to participate in mainstream education systems. This concept is rooted in social inclusion, which refers to enabling every individual to take part in societal activities, access resources equitably, and contribute to decisions about how these resources are shared.

Conversely, social exclusion manifests when individuals are marginalized from participation in economic, social, and cultural life, resulting in alienation from mainstream society. The education sector plays a critical role in addressing exclusion by fostering inclusion and ensuring that all students, including those with special needs, have access to quality education (Mitchell, 2015; UNESCO, 2015).

The development of inclusive education spans multiple perspectives. For instance, Jha (2002) identifies two approaches: one driven by special education reform in developed nations, and another, primarily in developing countries, focusing on educational reforms that respond to diverse learner needs. While developed countries initially emphasized reforms to integrate students with disabilities into regular schools, developing nations aim to design inclusive systems that address broader issues such as equity, cultural diversity, and economic challenges (Ainscow, 1999; Ferguson, 1996).

Despite global progress, inclusive education still faces significant barriers such as negative attitudes, limited teacher preparedness, and lack of infrastructure and policy implementation (Sharma & Michael, 2017; Howgego et al., 2014). The Philippines and other countries continue to grapple with these challenges, demonstrating the need for continuous monitoring, policy refinement, and teacher training to achieve sustainable inclusion (Mori, 2015; Reyes, 2014). This paper aims to explore the implementation of inclusive education, focusing on the strategies needed to overcome these challenges. It emphasizes the integration of home, school, and classroom practices to support students with diverse needs, as well as the role of policy frameworks, such as the Republic Act 10533 in the Philippines, in enhancing inclusiveness.

Literature Review

The movement toward inclusive education began in the 20th century, with landmark events like the United Nations' Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) and the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). These declarations emphasized the right of every child, including those with disabilities, to access education in regular schools without discrimination. The Salamanca Statement, in particular, called for governments to restructure education systems to accommodate diverse learners (UNESCO, 2015; Budlender, 2015).



Similar efforts were observed in the United States through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which mandated the least restrictive environment for learners with disabilities (Ashwini et al., 2015). Despite these efforts, however, many education systems, especially in developing nations, continue to struggle with effective implementation due to socio-economic barriers and inadequate infrastructure (Chataika et al., 2012; Kalyanpur, 2014).

The global experience highlights persistent challenges in achieving full inclusion, with various regions experiencing unique difficulties. For instance, Africa faces issues such as inaccessible environments and discriminatory admission procedures, while Nigeria struggles with socio-economic barriers, underfunded schools, and teacher shortages (Mukhopadhyay, 2015; Ibok, 2015). Similarly, inclusive education in the Philippines faces constraints related to poor facilities, large class sizes, and limited teacher preparation (Reyes, 2014; Muega, 2016). These challenges are compounded by misunderstandings about the nature of inclusion, making it difficult to translate policy rhetoric into practice (Alegado, 2018).

Research emphasizes the need for strategic modifications in school environments and teaching methods to accommodate diverse learners (Agarwal & Chakravarti, 2014). Teachers play a pivotal role in this process, requiring intensive training on inclusive pedagogies to effectively support students with special needs (Anthony et al., 2019).

Some studies suggest that recruitment processes should include assessments to identify students' needs early, ensuring appropriate support is provided (Hanafi et al., 2019). Other strategies include using individualized learning programs, particularly in Indonesia, where inclusive education is embedded within the cultural framework of mutual cooperation and acceptance (Kamariah et al., 2019).

In the Philippines, inclusive education is enshrined in laws such as the Republic Act 10533, which promotes education for all learners, including those with special needs. Despite these policies, many Filipino students with disabilities still face barriers due to financial constraints, lack of accessible facilities, and limited government support (TESDA, 2020; Reyes, 2014). The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 mandates schools to provide inclusive and quality education, yet implementation challenges persist. Large class sizes, insufficient resources, and inadequate teacher preparation hinder the effective delivery of inclusive programs (Alegado, 2018). The government has introduced training programs to equip teachers with the skills needed for inclusive practices, but misconceptions about inclusion remain a significant obstacle (Muega, 2016).

The literature shows that while inclusive education policies exist in many countries, including the Philippines, their implementation faces significant challenges. Addressing these barriers requires a holistic approach involving policy reforms, teacher training, and infrastructural development.

Schools must adopt flexible teaching strategies and ensure collaboration among stakeholders to create inclusive environments that cater to diverse learners. The success of inclusive education lies in continuous reflection and adaptation, ensuring that policies align with the changing needs of students and the broader community.

Methodology:

This study employed a descriptive-comparative research design to assess the characteristics of an effective inclusive school and determine if significant differences exist in the assessments when respondents are grouped by specific demographics.

The descriptive design was deemed appropriate because it enables the researcher to examine the natural variation among the participants and capture the extent to which certain conditions and characteristics are present. Descriptive research is valuable for understanding the existing state of affairs and identifying patterns or trends. The survey method was used to gather data on the present conditions in the school environment, particularly regarding inclusive practices. Surveys are useful for:

1. Providing reliable factual data.
2. Highlighting key aspects that are critical to the study's objectives.

Additionally, the comparative research method was employed to analyze potential differences in the respondents' assessments, considering variables such as age, sex, educational attainment, and teaching experience.

A survey questionnaire was developed based on a thorough review of relevant literature and studies related to inclusive education. The questionnaire underwent several validation steps to ensure reliability and content accuracy:

1. Expert Validation: Specialists in inclusive education reviewed the initial questionnaire to identify gaps and suggest improvements.
2. Pilot Testing: The questionnaire was administered to a sample group that did not form part of the actual study population. Feedback was gathered from the respondents and the researcher's colleagues.
3. Graduate School Consultation: The researcher sought advice from former professors to enhance the instrument's clarity and relevance.



4. Proposal Defense: During the defense, the panel provided further feedback, which was incorporated into the final version of the survey.

The participants in this study were 18 teachers from an inclusive school. The research site was chosen because the researcher observed a need for enhanced inclusive education programs. This locale offers a unique opportunity to assess how inclusive practices are implemented and how these efforts help students with special educational needs (SEN) reach their full potential.

Data collected from the survey were systematically analyzed and presented in alignment with the research questions. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to summarize the data. The H-test (Kruskal-Wallis test) was employed to determine the presence of significant differences in teachers' assessments based on their demographic characteristics. A significance level of 0.05 was used as the threshold for rejecting or accepting the null hypothesis.

Results:

The findings were systematically presented, analyzed and interpreted following the sequence of the research questions as enumerated and explained in the first chapter.

**Table 1
Profile of the teacher-respondents**

PROFILE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Age		
24-40	8	44
41-60	10	56
Total	18	100
Sex		
Male	3	17
Female	15	83
Total	18	100
Educational Attainment		
Bachelor's degree	4	22
with Master's units	9	50
with Master's degree	4	22
with Doctoral units	1	6
Total	18	100
Length of Service		
6--15	17	94
16-25	1	6
Total	18	100

Table 1 shows that out of 18 teacher-respondents, the majority were under the age bracket of 41-60 years old (56%) and less than half were 24-40 years old (44%). Thus, most respondents who joined the study were females (83%) rather than males (17%). Hence, many of the respondents had their master's units (50%) followed by those who



are still in bachelor's degree status (22%) and who had their master's degrees (22%) while few of them had their doctoral units (6%). Whereas most of the respondents were in the teaching profession for 6-15 years (94%) and some had been serving for 16-25 years in the teaching profession (6%).

Table 2
Assessment of characteristics of an effective inclusive school

	STATEMENT (n=18)	MEAN	SD	REMARKS
A	Creating Inclusive Cultures			
1	Everyone is made to feel welcome/accepted	3.89	0.32	Highly Evident
2	Learners help each other in class and outside class	3.94	0.24	Highly Evident
3	Staff and students treat one another with respect	3.89	0.32	Highly Evident
4	There is a partnership between staff and parents	3.94	0.24	Highly Evident
5	There are high expectations for all learners	3.94	0.24	Highly Evident
6	Teachers, staff, parents, and learners share a philosophy of inclusion	3.94	0.24	Highly Evident
7	Learners are equally valued	3.94	0.24	Highly Evident
8	Staff seeks to remove barriers to learning and participation in all aspects of the school	3.94	0.24	Highly Evident
9	The school strives to minimize all forms of discrimination	4.00	0.00	Highly Evident
10	Difference amongst the school community is celebrated	3.94	0.24	Highly Evident
	Sub Mean	3.94	0.23	Highly Evident
B.	Producing Inclusive Policies			
11	The school seeks to admit all learners from locality/feeder schools	4.00	0.00	Highly Evident
12	The school makes the buildings physically accessible to all people	3.89	0.32	Highly Evident
13	All new learners are helped to settle into the school	3.94	0.24	Highly Evident
14	The school arranges teaching groups so that all learners are valued	3.94	0.24	Highly Evident
15	Support for learners for LSEN is coordinated	3.94	0.24	Highly Evident
16	Staff are given opportunities to participate in professional development that will support teaching of learners with LSEN	3.94	0.24	Highly Evident
17	All school policies are inclusive	4.00	0.00	Highly Evident
18	Staff are aware of their responsibilities under current legislation in relation to the education of learners with LSEN	3.89	0.32	Highly Evident
19	Barriers to attendance are minimized	4.00	0.00	Highly Evident
20	Bullying is minimized	3.89	0.32	Highly Evident



	Sub Mean	3.94	0.19	Highly Evident
C	Evolving Inclusive Practices			
21	Teaching is planned with the learning of all learners in mind	3.94	0.24	Highly Evident
22	Learners with special education needs are actively encouraged to participate in lessons	4.00	0.00	Highly Evident
23	Learners are actively involved in their own learning	3.89	0.32	Highly Evident
24	Learners learn collaboratively	4.00	0.00	Highly Evident
25	Teachers use a variety of teaching styles-scaffolding, modeling, peer tutoring, active learning, cooperative group work	4.00	0.00	Highly Evident
26	Teachers use a variety of alternatives for recording and writing	3.89	0.32	Highly Evident
	Sub Mean	3.95	0.15	Highly Evident
	OVERALL MEAN	3.94	0.20	Highly Evident

Range:

- 4.00-3.25 *Highly Evident*
- 3.24-2.50 *Evident*
- 2.49-1.75 *Moderately Evident*
- 1.74-1.00 *Not Evident*

Table 2 presents the assessment of the characteristics of an effective inclusive school. The overall mean score of 3.94 shows that it is very evident that their school was manifesting the following characteristics: Creating an Inclusive Culture that strives to minimize all forms of discrimination; Producing Inclusive Policies where the school seeks to admit all learners from locality/feeder schools, all school policies are inclusive, and barriers to attendance are minimized; As such, Evolving Inclusive Practices. The learners with special education needs are actively encouraged to participate in lessons, learners learn collaboratively, and teachers use a variety of teaching styles-scaffolding, modeling, peer tutoring, active learning, and cooperative group work.

In line with the finding, Anwar (2017) asserts that teachers must adapt the curricula to the traits and ability levels of impaired children and the instruction methodology must be tailored to meet the array of personal and educational needs of disabled students.

Sightsaver (2021) also suggested that to protect the children from discrimination there is need to ensure quality education opportunity; upholding human rights; safe school environment; physical accessibility of school and related facilities; capacity building; family-school partnerships; and appropriate language use and increasing awareness campaigns among other interventions.

Table 3
Significant difference in the assessment of an effective inclusive school when grouped accordingly

VARIABLE	N	DF	MEDIAN	AVG. RANK	H-TEST	P-VALUE	REMARKS
Profile	18	1	1.88	9.50	27.249	1.79E-07	Reject Ho
Assessment	18	1	3.96	27.50			Significant

Level of Significance <.05

Table 3 reveals that there is a significant difference in the assessment of an effective inclusive school when grouped accordingly after garnering the H-test average of 27.249 with a probability value of 1.79E-07 which is less than the .05 level of significance using 1 degree of freedom. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected which means that the assessment of an effective inclusive school differs when grouped accordingly.

Previous research found that teachers demonstrated marginally positive attitudes towards inclusion, which were correlated with their age. Specifically, younger teachers expressed more positive attitudes than their older colleagues. However, in contrary, no differences were detected between men and women (Galaterou, 2017).



Discussion:

Out of 18 teacher-respondents, the majority were under the age bracket of 41-60 years old (56%) and less than half were 24-40 years old (44%). Thus, most respondents who joined the study were females (83%) rather than males (17%). Hence, many of the respondents had their master's units (50%) followed by those who are still in bachelor's degree status (22%) and who had their master's degrees (22%) while few of them had their doctoral units (6%). Whereas most of the respondents were in the teaching profession for 6-15 years (94%) and some had been serving for 16-25 years in the teaching profession (6%).

In the assessment of the characteristics of an effective inclusive school. The overall mean score of 3.94 shows that it is very evident that their school was manifesting characteristics: Creating an Inclusive Culture that strives to minimize all forms of discrimination; Producing Inclusive Policies where the school seeks to admit all learners from locality/feeder schools, all school policies are inclusive, and barriers to attendance are minimized; and Evolving Inclusive Practices. The learners with special education needs are actively encouraged to participate in lessons, learners learn collaboratively, and teachers use a variety of teaching styles-scaffolding, modeling, peer tutoring, active learning, and cooperative group work.

Consequently, the result revealed that there is a significant difference in the assessment of an effective inclusive school when grouped accordingly after garnering the H-test average of 27.249 with a probability value of 1.79E-07 which is less than the .05 level of significance using 1 degree of freedom. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected which means that the assessment of an effective inclusive school differs when grouped accordingly.

Therefore, it is concluded that the majority of the teacher-respondents are under the age range of 41-60 years old, mostly females, mostly have master's units and in the teaching profession for 6-15 years in service. In the assessment of the characteristics of an effective inclusive school, it is very evident that their school was manifesting characteristics of: Creating an Inclusive Culture that strives to minimize all forms of discrimination: Producing Inclusive Policies where the school seeks to admit all learners from locality/feeder schools, all school policies are inclusive, and barriers to attendance are minimized; and Evolving Inclusive Practices. The learners with special education needs are actively encouraged to participate in lessons, learners learn collaboratively, and teachers use a variety of teaching styles-scaffolding, modeling, peer tutoring, active learning, and cooperative group work. Henceforth, the result revealed that there is a significant difference in the assessment of an effective inclusive school when grouped accordingly making the null hypothesis rejected which means that the assessment of an effective inclusive school differs when grouped accordingly.

Furthermore, it is recommended that the inclusion of children with disabilities in education is key to implementing Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) is about ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all be incorporated in all areas of the community. Additionally, the 4A's of inclusive education is highly recommended:

1. **Available:** public and private educational institutions are available in sufficient quality and quantity throughout the community for pupils with disabilities.
2. **Accessible:** educational institutions are accessible to everyone, without discrimination including buildings, information, communication, curriculum, education materials, new technologies, teaching methods, assessment, language, and support services. Universal Design is introduced, ensuring that the environment (both offline and online) and all instruments and tools for teaching and learning are designed from their origin and produced to foster inclusion and guarantee equality throughout the all education process, including classrooms, tutorials, gymnasium and sports areas, laboratories (including those of language), didactic and audiovisual materials, technological supports, transport, hygiene and toilet facilities, school cafeteria and recreational spaces. For the students who need reasonable accommodation to meet their specific needs, this should not entail any additional cost for them or their families.
3. **Acceptable:** all education-related facilities, goods, and services take into account and respect the requirements, cultures, views, and language of persons with disabilities. The form and the substance of education provided must be acceptable for all, including the use of affirmative actions to ensure that school is of good quality for all.
4. **Adaptable:** curricula are conceived, designed, and applied to meet and adjust to the requirements of every student and provide adequate responses making methods, and resources more flexible and adaptable. Standardized assessments are replaced by flexible and multiple forms of assessment and recognition of individual progress towards broad goals that provide alternative routes for learning. This is achieved by applying the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn.



Conclusion:

This study highlights the essential characteristics of an effective inclusive school based on the perspectives of teachers in a foreign school setting. The findings reveal that the school demonstrates a strong commitment to inclusion through three key elements: (1) Creating an Inclusive Culture that fosters respect, minimizes discrimination, and celebrates diversity; (2) Producing Inclusive Policies that ensure all learners are admitted, supported, and valued, with minimal barriers to participation and attendance; and (3) Evolving Inclusive Practices that encourage collaborative learning and employ diverse teaching strategies such as scaffolding, peer tutoring, and active learning.

The results also indicate that demographic factors such as age, educational attainment, and length of service influence teachers' assessment of inclusive practices, leading to a significant difference in how inclusion is perceived. This suggests the importance of continuous professional development to align teachers' understanding and practices across varying backgrounds.

The study affirms the need for inclusive schools to adopt flexible teaching methods and policies that reflect the principles of equality and accessibility. It reinforces the idea that teachers play a critical role in shaping inclusive environments by adapting teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of learners with special education needs (SEN). Additionally, strong partnerships between staff, parents, and the broader community are vital in sustaining these inclusive efforts.

Creating an inclusive school requires an integrated approach, combining supportive policies, inclusive culture, and effective teaching practices. With ongoing professional development and a commitment to equity, schools can better address the educational needs of all learners and foster an environment where every student, regardless of ability, can thrive.

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