

Exploring inclusive education through the lenses of teachers, school leaders, and parents of learners with special needs

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the perspectives of teachers, school leaders, and parents of learners with special needs on inclusive education at Tayud Elementary School, Liloan District, Cebu, for the school year 2025–2026. Specifically, it aimed to describe the respondents' demographic profile, determine their level of knowledge and involvement in inclusive education, identify significant differences among groups, document their experiences, and develop an action plan to address identified gaps. A mixed-methods research design was employed, utilizing a structured survey questionnaire with both quantitative and qualitative components. Eighty-five respondents were selected through convenience sampling: 50 teachers, 5 school administrators, and 30 parents. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency, mean, and standard deviation, and inferential statistics, specifically one-way ANOVA, were used to analyze the quantitative data, while thematic analysis was applied to qualitative responses. Results revealed that parents had the highest self-rated knowledge of inclusive education, followed by teachers and administrators, with all groups agreeing on its importance and benefits. Involvement levels were generally positive, though gaps emerged in areas such as regular consultation with SPED specialists, participation in IEP development, and knowledge of assistive technologies. Significant differences were found among the three groups in both knowledge and involvement. Respondents' experiences highlighted challenges related to limited resources, insufficient training, and inconsistent policy implementation, but also successes in collaboration and student progress. The study concludes that while all stakeholders support inclusive education, full implementation requires targeted training, improved resources, and stronger partnerships. An action plan was proposed to enhance the capacity, collaboration, and sustainability of inclusive education practices in the district.

Keywords: special education, inclusive education, stakeholder perspectives, quantitative qualitative method, action plan, Liloan, Cebu, Philippines

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is widely recognized as the most effective approach to ensure that all children, including those with special needs, have equitable access to high-quality education that fosters their growth and social integration. It promotes academic competence, social acceptability, respect, and adaptive behaviors by integrating children with disabilities into regular schools, therefore enhancing their overall development (UNICEF, 2024). Inclusive education is a vital component of social justice, facilitating the integration of historically marginalized pupils with their peers, hence reducing stigma and discrimination (PMC, 2019). The collaboration of educators, parents, and administrators is essential for establishing supportive settings that address the unique needs of learners, emphasizing the significance of incorporating the viewpoints of all stakeholders in inclusive education.

Furthermore, inclusive education aligns with international commitments to equity and quality in education, as demonstrated by policies and frameworks that advocate for the inclusion of all marginalized groups, including children with disabilities (UNESCO, 2021). Effective inclusive education necessitates flexible curricula, extensive teacher training, and adequate resources to address the varied needs of learners and avert the perpetuation of stereotypes or educational inequities (UNESCO, 2021). Parental involvement is essential, as their convictions and advocacy directly influence educational reforms and the successful integration of their children (PMC, 2019). Consequently, analyzing the perspectives of educators, school administrators, and parents provides critical insights into the challenges and prospects related to the implementation of inclusive education.

Notwithstanding the global emphasis on inclusive education, research reveals that persistent discrepancies and challenges continue to hinder its implementation in numerous countries. Many nations encounter fiscal limitations, such as insufficient resources for adaptive learning materials, assistive technologies, and infrastructure, which impede effective inclusion. Teacher training programs frequently demonstrate inconsistency and superficiality, leaving educators insufficiently prepared to meet the diverse demands of kids with special educational needs. Furthermore, overcrowded schools, especially in rural areas, impede the effective integration of children with disabilities (Dunajeva, 2025). Attitudinal barriers and insufficient legislative implementation intensify the difficulties of attaining inclusive education (UNESCO, 2021).

Moreover, global studies indicate that while regulations typically support inclusion, their application is often inconsistent, and curricula frequently lack the relevance or flexibility required to accommodate all learners, which can sometimes perpetuate exclusion or stigma (UNESCO, 2021). There is a notable deficiency of comprehensive research investigating the perspectives of all key stakeholders, especially parents and school officials, about the effectiveness and obstacles of inclusive education (Paul et al., 2022). This gap obstructs the comprehension of the execution of inclusive education policies and their capacity to improve equitable learning outcomes globally.

Research on inclusive education in the Philippines reveals significant issues regarding teacher preparedness, resource availability, and community awareness. Research reveals that a small percentage of children with disabilities are incorporated into general education settings, highlighting a considerable gap in access and inclusion. Educators frequently indicate inadequate training and support for the effective implementation of inclusive practices, which affects the educational quality for students with special needs. Disparities in infrastructure and resources between urban and rural areas exacerbate these difficulties, limiting the efficacy of inclusive education programs (Dayso et al., 2025).

Furthermore, research is scarce about the perspectives of school administrators and parents in the Philippines, which is crucial for understanding the institutional and social factors influencing inclusive education. The lack of extensive data on stakeholders' views on inclusion, their challenges, and their roles in aiding children with special needs results in a knowledge deficit that obstructs the formulation of context-specific policies and initiatives. This gap underscores the necessity for research that synthesizes many viewpoints to formulate more effective and culturally pertinent inclusive education approaches in the Philippines.

The Liloan District of Cebu Province lacks localized research investigating the viewpoints of educators, school administrators, and parents regarding inclusive education. This gap obstructs the comprehension of the execution and experience of inclusive education policies at the community level, where cultural, economic, and infrastructural factors can profoundly influence educational practices. Without localized data, it is difficult to tackle particular challenges, such as resource constraints, the sufficiency of teacher training, and parental involvement, in this district.

The absence of studies on Tayud Elementary School obstructs the development of tailored treatments that correspond with the district's socio-cultural setting and educational requirements. Understanding the experiences and viewpoints of important players in this field is essential for creating inclusive education programs that are contextually appropriate and sustainable. Rectifying this shortcoming will further the primary goal of achieving equitable education for children with special needs in the region and provide valuable insights for similar circumstances in the Philippines.

Statement of the problem

This study aimed to determine the knowledge and involvement perspectives of teachers, school administrators, and parents of children with special needs in inclusive education at Tayud Elementary School for the 2025-2026 school year, providing a basis for an action plan. Specifically, this sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, and highest educational attainment?
2. To what extent are the respondents knowledgeable about inclusive education?
3. To what extent are the respondents involved in inclusive education practices?
4. Is there a significant difference in the level of knowledge and involvement in inclusive education among the three respondent groups?

5. What are the experiences of the respondents regarding the implementation of inclusive education?
6. Based on the findings, what action plan can be proposed to enhance inclusive education?

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study used a mixed-methods research design that combined a descriptive-comparative quantitative approach with a qualitative component to understand the knowledge and involvement of teachers, administrators, and parents in inclusive education at Tayud Elementary School. The quantitative part used a structured survey with a 5-point Likert scale to measure understanding and participation and to identify any significant differences among the groups. To provide deeper context, the qualitative part included open-ended questions that allowed participants to share their personal experiences, challenges, and suggestions, which were then analyzed thematically to inform a proposed action plan.

This study on inclusive education was conducted at Tayud Elementary School in Liloan, Cebu, a first-class municipality with urban and rural characteristics. The school, which serves approximately 1,702 learners from kindergarten to grade 6 with 63 teachers and one administrator, provided relevant research setting due to its diverse demographics and limited resources. Using a convenience sampling technique, the study involved a total of 85 participants, including 50 teachers (58.82%), 5 school administrators (5.88%), and 30 parents (35.29%). This approach, while not generalizable, allowed the researcher to gather meaningful and balanced insights from the key stakeholders most actively involved in implementing and experiencing inclusive education within the local community.

The study utilized a modified structured survey questionnaire to gather both quantitative and qualitative data from teachers, school administrators, and parents. The questionnaire had four parts: Part I collected demographic information to contextualize responses; Parts II and III used a 5-point Likert scale to measure the respondents' knowledge and involvement in inclusive education, respectively, with questions tailored to each group's role; and Part IV featured open-ended questions that provided qualitative insights into experiences, challenges, and suggestions, which were then analyzed to inform the study's recommendations.

The data for this study were collected through a three-stage process. The preliminary stage involved getting official approval, validating and pilot-testing a modified survey questionnaire, and securing informed consent. In the data gathering stage, the researcher distributed the validated questionnaires to teachers, administrators, and parents, either in person or electronically, and was available to address any questions. Finally, in the post-data gathering stage, the collected data were organized and analyzed. Frequency and percentage were used for demographic profiles, while mean and standard deviation described knowledge and involvement levels. A One-Way ANOVA was performed to test for significant differences between the groups, and thematic analysis was used on the open-ended questions to provide qualitative insights. This combination of methods ensured a thorough and ethical approach to understanding the experiences of inclusive education stakeholders.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A survey of 50 teachers revealed a predominantly female workforce (44 out of 50) with a wide range of ages, though most are between 31 and 50 years old. This demographic suggests a mix of seasoned and adaptable educators who can bring diverse perspectives to inclusive education. The fact that 60% of teachers have master's degree units shows a strong commitment to professional development, which is a positive sign for inclusive practices. This diverse profile emphasizes the need for tailored professional development that leverages the experience of veteran teachers and the innovative approaches of younger ones.

The five school administrators surveyed show a nearly balanced gender distribution (3 females, 2 males) and a diverse age range from 37 to 54. This leadership team is highly educated, with 40% holding doctoral degrees and another 40% with master's degrees or units. This suggests the administration is well-equipped with the academic and leadership skills needed to implement effective inclusive education policies. The demographic diversity in age and gender can foster a more holistic and empathetic approach to leadership, which is critical for creating a supportive and inclusive school culture.

Out of 30 parent respondents, the vast majority were female (26) and fell within the 21-40 age range. Most parents were high school graduates (43.33%), with a significant portion (33.33%) also holding a bachelor's degree. This demographic suggests that the primary caregivers and advocates for children with special needs in this community are middle-aged mothers with a good level of education. This highlights the importance of creating accessible and targeted support programs that cater to this specific demographic to enhance their involvement and advocacy in inclusive education.

Based on the data, teachers at Tayud Elementary School have a solid understanding of inclusive education's core principles and strategies, with an average weighted mean of 4.00, or "agree." They are confident in their ability to differentiate instruction and use inclusive teaching methods. However, their knowledge is slightly weaker in practical areas like designing adapted lesson plans and using assistive technologies, suggesting a need for more focused professional development. This implies that while teachers have the theoretical foundation, they need additional training to translate their knowledge into effective, everyday classroom practices.

School administrators generally agreed they possessed considerable knowledge of inclusive education, with a mean score of 3.89. They showed a firm grasp of legal frameworks, policies, and their leadership roles. However, there was some uncertainty about their ability to create and assess policies that uphold equity and inclusion, with a mean of 3.40. This suggests that while administrators have a solid theoretical and policy-based understanding, they may need more professional development in practical skills like policy development and evaluation to lead and sustain inclusive initiatives effectively.

Parents of students with special needs demonstrated a firm understanding of inclusive education, with an average weighted mean of 4.56, or "strongly agree." They are highly knowledgeable about their children's rights, the benefits of inclusion, and their crucial role in collaborating with educators. This high level of knowledge reflects their readiness to be active participants and advocates in their children's education. This implies that schools have been

successful in empowering parents and should continue to provide resources and communication channels to maintain this strong partnership.

Teachers at Tayud Elementary School reported high involvement in inclusive education, with an average weighted mean of 4.07. They are particularly active in adapting their teaching methods, communicating with parents, and fostering an inclusive classroom culture. However, they expressed some uncertainty about regularly consulting with Special Education (SPED) specialists, suggesting that collaboration with specialized staff could be improved. This indicates that while teachers are committed and active in their classrooms, they may need more structured opportunities to work with specialists to provide truly comprehensive support for students with diverse needs.

School administrators demonstrated a high level of involvement in promoting inclusive education, with an average weighted mean of 4.04. They actively encourage inclusive practices, allocate resources, coordinate with parents and specialists, and integrate inclusion goals into the school's improvement plan. This shows that administrators are dedicated to creating and sustaining an inclusive school environment from a leadership and policy perspective. Their consistent engagement across key duties makes them a vital force for ensuring that inclusion is a priority and is supported at the institutional level.

Parents of learners with special needs reported a very high level of active involvement, with a "Strongly Agree" average weighted mean of 4.58. They are highly engaged in attending meetings, participating in IEP planning, communicating with the school, and providing support at home. Their proactive and collaborative approach highlights a strong sense of shared responsibility with educators. This deep parental engagement is a critical asset to the school, underscoring the importance of maintaining open communication and providing accessible resources to empower them as active partners in their children's inclusive education.

Based on the data, parents possess a significantly higher level of knowledge about inclusive education than teachers and school administrators. A statistical analysis (p-value of 0.00) confirmed that these differences in mean scores were significant. This suggests that parents' direct advocacy for their children's needs drives them to be highly informed. In contrast, the lower scores for teachers and administrators highlight potential knowledge gaps in their professional roles. These findings emphasize the crucial need for targeted professional development to improve the knowledge and confidence of teachers and administrators, ensuring all stakeholders are equally prepared to implement and support inclusive practices effectively.

Significance of the difference in the level of involvement in inclusive education

Parents showed the highest level of involvement in inclusive education, with a mean score of 4.58, followed by teachers and administrators who reported slightly lower but still substantial involvement. A statistical analysis (p-value of 0.00) confirmed that these differences were statistically significant, indicating that each group's engagement level is fundamentally distinct. This suggests that parents' high involvement is driven by their direct interest and advocacy, while the involvement of teachers and administrators, though positive, may be influenced by professional roles and resource availability. This finding highlights a crucial need for schools to increase the involvement of teachers and administrators through targeted

professional development and enhanced support, ensuring that all key stakeholders are equally engaged to create a cohesive and effective inclusive environment.

Experiences of the respondents regarding the implementation of inclusive education

What challenges do you experience in implementing or supporting inclusive education?

Teachers face significant challenges in implementing inclusive education, primarily due to a lack of resources such as materials and assistive technologies, as well as overcrowded classrooms. Many feel a pressing need for more specialized training to effectively manage the diverse behaviors and needs of students with disabilities. Additionally, they identify limited parental awareness and involvement as a key barrier. These issues collectively create a problematic environment for teachers who feel unequipped to provide equitable and high-quality instruction to all students.

School administrators report facing four main challenges in implementing inclusive education: insufficient teacher training, parental acceptance, inadequate physical infrastructure, and overcrowding. They note that many teachers lack the specialized skills needed to support diverse learners. Administrators also struggle with a lack of understanding and acceptance from some parents regarding their children's needs. Physical infrastructure, such as ramps and quiet spaces, is often inadequate. These issues are further complicated by the high number of students in each classroom, which makes it challenging to provide the individualized attention that learners with special needs require.

Parents experience a mix of challenges and positive attitudes towards inclusive education. Many express a strong desire to support their children and teachers, but are hindered by a lack of resources and information. They also grapple with the emotional toll of bullying and the practical and financial difficulties of providing for their children. Despite these struggles, many parents hold a positive view of inclusive education and actively participate in meetings and advocacy to ensure their children are included. This shows that parents are willing partners but need more support and resources to overcome systemic and personal barriers.

What do you think are the most important improvements needed in inclusive education in your community?

Teachers believe that the most critical improvements needed in inclusive education are enhanced teacher training and access to adequate resources and infrastructure, such as learning materials and assistive technologies. They also emphasize the need for greater parental and community engagement and support, along with a focus on individualized assessment and support for students. Lastly, teachers highlight the need for increased funding and policy support from the government to realize inclusive education goals fully.

School administrators believe that the most important improvements needed in inclusive education are regular teacher training and capacity building to equip educators with the necessary skills. They also emphasize the need for improved school facilities and resources, including assistive devices. Administrators also highlight the importance of promoting a

harmonious and collaborative school environment and hiring additional inclusive education specialists and support staff. Lastly, they recognize that community awareness and engagement are crucial for fostering a supportive culture for learners with special needs.

Parents believe that the most crucial improvements needed are better parental education and awareness about inclusive education. They also emphasize the need for more opportunities for their children to have social interaction and acceptance with their peers. Parents highlight the importance of strong communication and collaboration between parents and teachers, as well as greater acceptance and emotional support from the community. Lastly, they call for improved resources and a supportive learning environment that actively prevents bullying and promotes equal opportunities for all children.

How do you ensure that children with special needs are included in school activities?

Teachers ensure the inclusion of children with special needs by providing differentiated and adapted instruction and giving all students equal attention. They actively foster social inclusion by creating a supportive classroom culture where everyone feels they belong, often using peer-buddy systems to encourage friendships. Teachers also emphasize the importance of collaboration with families and the community, as well as their own continuous professional development to stay updated on inclusive teaching strategies. Lastly, they prioritize safety and accessibility to create a secure environment where every child can participate.

School administrators ensure the inclusion of children with special needs by creating a safe and welcoming school environment where all students feel valued. They employ a multifaceted approach that involves comprehensive planning and adapting activities to meet diverse needs. Administrators also focus on encouraging willing participation and a sense of belonging, ensuring that students are included based on their abilities and interests. Lastly, they emphasize the importance of tailoring activities to suit individual needs, which ensures that every child can participate meaningfully.

Parents ensure their children with special needs are included by encouraging and supporting them to build their confidence. They maintain active communication and collaboration with teachers to stay informed and advocate for their children. Parents also believe in providing suitable, differentiated activities that are tailored to their child's abilities. They highlight their own parental support and presence as a key factor in their child's inclusion, actively attending school events and ensuring their children feel motivated to participate.

Findings

The study found that, in terms of demographic profile, the majority of teacher respondents were female and within the 31–50 age range, with most having earned master's units. School administrators were well-represented in terms of gender, with many holding advanced degrees. At the same time, most parent respondents were female, aged 21–40, and had graduated from high school and in terms of knowledge of inclusive education, teachers and school administrators generally agreed that they understood the principles, policies, and strategies of inclusion. In contrast, parents strongly agreed that they were aware of their roles, their children's rights, and the benefits of inclusive education.

Regarding their involvement in inclusive practices, teachers reported actively participating in classroom modifications, inclusive activities, and anti-bullying efforts. However, regular consultations with SPED specialists and participation in IEP development were less consistent. School administrators indicated involvement in policy implementation, resource allocation, and staff support, while parents highlighted their active role in home-school collaboration and monitoring their child's inclusion. Statistical analysis revealed a significant difference among the three groups in both knowledge and involvement, with parents showing the highest self-rated knowledge, followed by teachers and school administrators. In terms of experiences, respondents cited challenges such as inadequate resources, limited training opportunities, and occasional resistance to change; however, they also shared positive experiences of collaboration, student progress, and community support in fostering inclusive education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results, it can be concluded that while inclusive education is recognized and supported by all stakeholders, its full implementation remains a challenge due to limitations in training, resources, and coordinated efforts. Bridging these gaps requires a collaborative approach where educators, administrators, and parents work together under a structured action plan to ensure that learners with special needs receive equitable and adequate educational opportunities.

It is recommended that the proposed output of the study, the Action Plan, be adopted by schools and the local education authority. The action plan focuses on capacity-building programs for teachers, improved provision of specialized resources, strengthened school-home partnerships, and systematic monitoring of inclusive practices. Implementing this plan will help address the identified gaps and ensure a more effective, sustainable, and collaborative approach to inclusive education in the district.

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