

**Teacher familiarity of disabilities, preparedness and attitudes towards mainstreaming:
Professional development plan**

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ABSTRACT

This research evaluated the demographic profile in terms of age and gender, extent of familiarity with disabilities, preparedness, and attitude towards mainstreaming of mainstream teachers of identified public schools in the Department of Education, Cebu Province, on these Teacher Familiarity of Disabilities, Preparedness, and Attitudes Towards Mainstreaming as the basis for the Professional Development Plan. One hundred fifty respondents were asked to answer the survey questionnaires. The data collected were treated utilizing weighted mean, standard deviation,

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and Pearson's r correlation. Results revealed that the respondents were mostly aged between twenty-four and thirty-three, and more female teachers were teaching students with disabilities. Furthermore, respondents were moderately familiar with the different disabilities, moderately prepared in handling mainstream classes and had positive attitudes towards mainstreaming. Finally, there was a moderate, positive significant relationship between respondents' familiarity with the different disabilities and their preparedness in handling mainstreaming; however, there was weak, positive relationship between preparedness in handling mainstream classes and their attitudes towards mainstreaming. Thus, a proposed professional development plan is highly recommended for implementation.

Keywords: Special Education, familiarity of disabilities, preparedness in handling mainstream classes, attitude towards mainstreaming, descriptive correlational design, Cebu, Philippines

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INTRODUCTION

Integrating children with special educational needs in school has been made popular, thus bringing fairness and a variety of learning opportunities in school. In this way, the child learns among his peers and minimizes embarrassment or stigma related to his special needs. In fact, most countries of the world, including the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, adopt mainstreaming through international directives since admitting students with disabilities to mainstream classes is believed to have a rewarding effect on all students. Similarly, the UAE is reviewing its policies on inclusive education practices (Loyd et al., 2024).

The Philippines is also aligning with this global trend, integrating mainstream practices into its educational framework. However, opinions among teachers vary significantly and Liloan National High School teachers are not an exception to that; some educators express resistance to mainstreaming due to perceived inadequacies in their knowledge and training related to diverse disabilities.

The knowledge of teachers regarding other disabilities plus their preparedness to teach mainstream classes and attitude toward mainstreaming will help determine where there is a gap in training so that targeted professional development may be made available to better inform the education. This can ensure that educators are working with the relevant skills and resources to support all their students within an inclusive classroom. It can also determine possible biases or resistances, which could challenge successful practice.

Thus, the researcher is motivated to conduct a study on those areas to determine teachers' familiarity of different disabilities, preparedness in handling mainstream classes, and attitudes towards mainstreaming of identified public schools in Department of Education, Cebu Province because just like other educational institutions, the schools also aim to give the best service to their diverse students. The outcome of this study will benefit stakeholders by providing actionable insights that can drive improvements to resource allocation, overall support systems, and teachers' professional development plan which is also the output of this study, ultimately leading to a more effective and equitable educational environment for students with disabilities.

Statement of the problem

This research assessed the familiarity of different disabilities, preparedness and attitudes of general education teachers towards mainstreaming at the identified public schools in the Department of Education, Cebu Province, for the school year 2024-2025 as a basis for a proposed professional development plan. Specifically, it seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of age and gender?
2. What is the level of the respondents' familiarity with the different disabilities enrolled in mainstreamed classes?
3. As perceived by the respondents, what is the extent of their preparedness in handling mainstreamed classes?
4. What is the level of attitudes of the respondents towards mainstreaming?
5. Is there a significant relationship between the: respondents' familiarity with the different disabilities and their preparedness in handling mainstreamed classes, respondents' preparedness in handling mainstreamed classes and their attitudes towards mainstreaming?
6. Based on the findings of the study, what professional development plan can be proposed?

METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted using a descriptive correlational design. According to Seeram, E. (2019), such a design allows the prediction and explanation of relations between variables. It was quite rational on my part to decide to use such a design because the first association that is supposed to be explored within this study is that between the respondent's familiarity with different kinds of disabilities and their attitudes toward mainstreaming; the second one is about how prepared the respondents are and their attitudes toward mainstreaming. Primary data were collected by means of a survey questionnaire structured in such a way as to yield meaningful conclusions after careful analysis and interpretation.

The respondents of this study were the general education teachers consisted of 150 public school teachers from selected schools under the Department of Education in Cebu Province. The participants included both male and female teachers from various age groups. It is appropriate to gather data from this group of teachers since they have handled, and some are still handling, students with exceptionalities in their classes, making them appropriate participants for examining teachers' familiarity with disabilities, preparedness, and attitudes toward mainstreaming.

The study was conducted in selected public schools under the Department of Education in Cebu Province. These schools serve diverse student populations, including learners with and without disabilities, and implement inclusive education policies mandated by the Department of Education. The researchers believed that the schools provided an appropriate setting to examine teachers' familiarity with various disabilities, their level of preparedness, and their attitudes toward mainstreaming. Conducting the study across different schools allowed for the collection of varied perspectives, which served as a basis for developing a professional development plan responsive to the needs of teachers in inclusive classroom settings.

As a data collecting instrument, a survey questionnaire was used to gather relevant information necessary for this study. The researcher adopted a questionnaire from Mutuku (2023) intended for the respondents, which is composed of four parts.

Part I is designed to determine the demographic profile of the respondents consisting of age, gender, highest educational attainment, and number of years of teaching. Part II assessed respondents perceived familiarity of different disabilities using the five-point Likert scale of 1 to 5 where 1 – Not. Familiar, 2 – Less Familiar, 3 – Moderately Familiar, 4- Familiar, 5 – Very Familiar. Part III is designed to assessed respondents perceived level of preparedness in handling mainstream classes using the five-point Likert scale of 1 to 5 where 1 - Not Prepared, 2 - Less Prepared, 3 - Moderately Prepared, 4 - Prepared, and 5 - Highly prepared. Part IV assessed respondents perceived attitude extent towards mainstreaming using the five-point Likert scale of 1 to 5 where 1- Very Negative, 2- Negative, 3- Neutral, 4 – Positive, and 5 – Very Positive.

Preliminary Stage. The researchers asked permission from the principal of the selected schools under the Department of Education in Cebu Province to conduct a study and survey the teachers handled or still handling students with exceptionalities enrolled in the school.

Data Gathering. After seeking approval, the questionnaire was personally administered by the researchers. After the respondents answered the questionnaire, the researcher retrieved them

Post Data Gathering. The data gathered were tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted using statistical software. To interpret the data efficiently, the researcher used the following statistical treatment: Frequency count. This is used to determine which options occur more or less

Percentage. This is used to expressed numbers as a proportion of a whole to present findings and compare results. Weighted mean. This is used to calculate the average value of a set of data.

Standard deviation. It is a measure utilized to evaluate the measure of variation or dispersion of a set of data values. Pearson's r. This is used to test the hypotheses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and interprets the findings of the study based on data gathered from 150 teacher-respondents using a descriptive-correlational research design. Data were collected through a structured survey questionnaire designed to measure respondents' familiarity with different disabilities, their level of preparedness in handling mainstreamed classes, and their attitudes toward mainstreaming. The respondents were selected through an appropriate sampling approach consistent with the study context, and the collected data were subjected to statistical treatment, including the computation of frequencies, percentages, weighted means, standard deviations, and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. The discussion that follows is grounded strictly on the results obtained and is aligned with the objectives of the study, particularly in examining how teachers' awareness of different disabilities relates to their preparedness and attitudes toward inclusive education.

Profile of the respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents, particularly age and gender, provide an important context for understanding the results of the study, as these variables may influence teachers' exposure to training, professional experience, and attitudes toward mainstreaming. Of the 150 respondents, 122 were female, representing 81.33 percent of the sample, while 28 were male, accounting for 18.67 percent. This distribution indicates a clear predominance of female teachers in the respondent group, reflecting a broader trend observed in the teaching profession where women are more highly represented. In terms of age, the largest proportion of respondents

belonged to the 24-33 age group, with 65 teachers or 40.00 percent. This was followed by those aged 34-43, comprising 46 respondents or 23.33 percent, and those aged 44-53, with 29 respondents or 30.00 percent. The smallest group consisted of teachers aged 54 and above, with 10 respondents or 6.67 percent, all of whom were female, as no male respondents were recorded in this age bracket.

The age distribution suggests that the teaching workforce represented in the study is relatively young, with a substantial proportion of teachers in the early stages of their careers. This demographic pattern has important implications for inclusive education, as younger teachers may have had more recent exposure to inclusive education concepts during their pre-service training, but may also have limited practical experience in handling mainstreamed classes. Conversely, older teachers may possess greater classroom experience but may require additional support in adapting to newer inclusive practices and technologies. The absence of male respondents in the oldest age group further points to a potential gap in gender representation and accumulated experience among male teachers in mainstream settings. These demographic trends are consistent with literature suggesting that age and gender can influence teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and their perceived competence in working with students with exceptionalities, thereby underscoring the relevance of considering these characteristics when interpreting the study's findings.

Familiarity with different disabilities

Teachers' familiarity with different disabilities is a critical factor in fostering effective mainstreaming, as knowledge of specific conditions enables educators to adopt appropriate instructional strategies and cultivate inclusive classroom environments. The results indicate varying levels of familiarity across different types of disabilities. Respondents reported being familiar with hearing impairment and visual impairment, both of which obtained a weighted mean of 3.47, with standard deviations of 1.13 and 1.22, respectively. These scores fall within the "familiar" range, suggesting relatively higher awareness and exposure to these disabilities, possibly due to their more visible nature and the availability of general information and interventions within school settings.

In contrast, respondents were only moderately familiar with autism, which recorded a weighted mean of 3.07 and a standard deviation of 1.20, intellectual disability, with a weighted mean of 3.17 and a standard deviation of 1.18, and specific learning disability, which obtained the lowest weighted mean of 2.95 and a standard deviation of 1.14. These results indicate limited confidence and experience in handling disabilities that are often more complex, heterogeneous, or less immediately observable. The aggregate mean familiarity score across all disabilities was 3.23, with an aggregate standard deviation of 1.18, corresponding to a "moderately familiar" level overall.

This moderate level of familiarity suggests that while teachers possess basic awareness of inclusive education, significant gaps remain, particularly in relation to autism, intellectual disability, and specific learning disability. Previous studies have similarly noted that teacher education and professional development programs often provide insufficient depth and practical exposure to these conditions, resulting in lower confidence and preparedness among teachers. The complex and varied nature of autism spectrum disorder, for instance, makes it difficult for educators to rely on standardized strategies, especially in the absence of clear protocols and

adequate resources. Likewise, specific learning disabilities require specialized and differentiated instructional approaches, yet many teachers report limited training and access to appropriate materials. These findings highlight the need for targeted and sustained professional development initiatives that focus on deepening teachers' understanding of less visible and more complex disabilities to support effective mainstreaming.

Preparedness in handling mainstreamed classes

Teacher preparedness is a foundational element in the successful implementation of mainstreaming, as it directly influences instructional effectiveness, classroom management, and student engagement. The results reveal that respondents were moderately prepared in all areas assessed, with an overall aggregate mean of 2.95 and a standard deviation of 1.09. This indicates that while teachers possess basic competencies necessary for mainstream classrooms, their level of preparedness has not yet reached an optimal level.

Among the specific areas examined, managing classroom behavior obtained the highest weighted mean of 3.17 with a standard deviation of 1.06, followed closely by differentiating instruction, which recorded a weighted mean of 3.13 and a standard deviation of 1.07. These findings suggest that teachers feel relatively more confident in general classroom management and in adjusting instruction to accommodate diverse learners. However, preparedness was lower in areas that require more specialized skills and collaborative practices. Collaborating with special education teachers or support staff obtained a weighted mean of 2.80 and a standard deviation of 1.11, while modifying assessments recorded a weighted mean of 2.97 and a standard deviation of 1.07, both of which were still categorized as moderately prepared.

The lowest level of preparedness was observed in the use of assistive technology, which obtained a weighted mean of 2.67 and a standard deviation of 1.16. This finding points to limited exposure, training, and access to assistive tools that are essential for supporting learners with disabilities. The moderate preparedness observed across all areas aligns with existing literature indicating that many teacher preparation programs offer limited training in collaborative practices, assessment modification, and assistive technology. Time constraints, lack of institutional support, and insufficient integration of technology in teacher education curricula further exacerbate these challenges. Collectively, these results underscore the need for enhanced professional development, improved access to resources, and stronger institutional support to elevate teachers' preparedness for mainstreamed classroom environments.

Attitudes toward mainstreaming

Teachers' attitudes toward mainstreaming play a pivotal role in determining the success of inclusive education initiatives. The findings reveal an overall positive attitude toward mainstreaming among the respondents, as reflected by an aggregate mean of 3.42 and a standard deviation of 1.06. This indicates general support for the inclusion of students with special needs in general education classrooms and recognition of the value of inclusive practices.

The highest weighted mean among the attitude indicators was recorded for the belief that mainstreaming requires significant additional resources, with a score of 4.29 and a standard deviation of 0.97, which was interpreted as very positive. This suggests that teachers are highly aware of the resource demands associated with effective mainstreaming. Respondents also expressed a strong willingness to receive additional training to better support students with special

needs, with a weighted mean of 4.00 and a standard deviation of 0.96, indicating openness to professional growth. Positive attitudes were likewise evident in beliefs regarding collaboration with special education staff, which obtained a weighted mean of 3.57 and a standard deviation of 1.05, and in confidence that students with special needs can achieve academic success in mainstream classrooms, with a weighted mean of 3.41 and a standard deviation of 1.06.

However, several indicators were rated as neutral, including confidence in adapting teaching methods, perceived benefits of mainstreaming for all students, administrative support, and the perceived feasibility of successfully implementing mainstreaming in one's own classroom. These neutral responses suggest persistent uncertainties that may stem from limited training, insufficient support systems, and gaps in practical experience. While the overall attitude toward mainstreaming is positive, these findings indicate that supportive beliefs do not always translate into confidence in practice, reinforcing the importance of addressing structural and professional barriers to inclusive education.

Relationship between familiarity with disabilities and preparedness for mainstreaming

The relationship between respondents' familiarity with different disabilities and their preparedness in handling mainstreamed classes was examined using Pearson correlation analysis. The results yielded an r -value of 0.554, indicating a moderate positive correlation between the two variables. The p -value was 0.000, which is less than 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and confirming that the relationship is statistically significant. This finding indicates that as teachers' familiarity with different disabilities increases, their preparedness for handling mainstreamed classes also increases.

This moderate positive relationship underscores the critical role of knowledge and awareness in building teachers' confidence and competence in inclusive settings. Teachers who possess greater understanding of different disabilities are more likely to feel equipped to implement appropriate instructional strategies and manage diverse learning needs. The result aligns with existing research emphasizing that targeted training, exposure, and professional development in disability awareness are essential for strengthening teachers' preparedness and promoting effective mainstreaming practices.

Relationship between preparedness and attitudes toward mainstreaming

The relationship between respondents' preparedness in handling mainstreamed classes and their attitudes toward mainstreaming was also examined using Pearson correlation analysis. The analysis produced an r -value of 0.433, indicating a weak positive correlation between preparedness and attitudes. The p -value was 0.000, which is less than 0.05, resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis and confirming a statistically significant relationship. This finding suggests that higher levels of preparedness are associated with more positive attitudes toward mainstreaming, although the strength of the relationship is relatively modest.

The weak positive correlation implies that while preparedness contributes to positive attitudes, other factors may also influence teachers' perceptions of mainstreaming, such as institutional support, workload, class size, and availability of resources. Nonetheless, the result supports the notion that improving teachers' preparedness through training and resource provision can foster more favorable attitudes toward inclusive education. Previous studies have similarly

found that teachers who feel underprepared are more likely to experience anxiety and resistance toward mainstreaming, whereas those who receive adequate preparation tend to develop more positive and supportive attitudes.

Synthesis of findings

Overall, the findings of the study indicate that teachers demonstrate moderate familiarity with different disabilities, moderate preparedness in handling mainstreamed classes, and generally positive attitudes toward mainstreaming. The significant relationships observed between familiarity and preparedness, as well as between preparedness and attitudes, highlight the interconnected nature of these variables in shaping inclusive education practices. The results emphasize that enhancing teachers' knowledge of disabilities and strengthening their practical skills are essential for improving preparedness and fostering positive attitudes toward mainstreaming. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on inclusive education by reinforcing the importance of targeted professional development, adequate resources, and institutional support in translating inclusive ideals into effective classroom practice. The insights gained from this study provide a logical foundation for the succeeding section of the manuscript, which will focus on conclusions, implications, and recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of findings of this study, it can be concluded that the respondents have moderate familiarity regarding disabilities, moderate readiness to deal with mainstreamed classrooms, and overall optimistic views regarding mainstreaming, indicating initial support for inclusive education but having distinguished gaps to be met. They are more aware of hearing and visually impaired children, and their familiarity regarding autism, intellectual disability, and specific learning disabilities remained limited, and it was largely because of inadequate training, lack of exposure, and poor teaching resources. Moreover, readiness was moderate on all dimensions, and particular strength was noted in classroom and instructional differentiation, but weaknesses again emerged in using assistive technology, working together with special education staff, and accommodating assessment.

Despite such difficulties, there were generally positive attitudes and readiness to engage in further training shown by respondents to mainstreaming. In particular, the sentiments were tempered by non-committal views of respondents' self-confidence and support from administrators in mainstreaming. On the other hand, there was also a significant positive association between familiarity and preparedness of respondents and between preparedness and attitudes toward mainstreaming to underscore that knowing more and possessing more skills results in better preparedness for mainstreaming and more positive attitudes toward mainstreaming in general. In particular, the findings generally underscore the importance of appropriate training and support to improve respondents' ability to mainstream effectively and deal with different students effectively.

Based on the research findings from this study, recommendations concerning teacher training and effective support mechanisms are proposed. These recommendations are intended to benefit the Department of Education and school administrators. Teachers should be trained on strategies regarding more unfamiliar and complex cases of disabilities such as autism, intellectual

disabilities, and specific learning disabilities. Training should also be provided to those teachers who work in the classroom to handle inclusive education settings using assistive technologies. There should be effective mechanisms of support between the special and general education teachers in schools. This can happen through mentoring programs or case conferencing. On top of this, there is a call for reinforcement of institutional support in terms of provision of teaching resources, technology, as well as administrative support for the realization of inclusive practices. Moreover, there is a need for constant evaluation and monitoring of teacher readiness and attitudes on the issue of mainstreaming. On top of this, future studies will focus on other factors which might influence attitudes and readiness of teachers towards mainstreaming, such as school culture, administrative support, and levels of outcomes.

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