

**Collaborative partnership between special education teachers
and general education teachers: Basis for proposed in-service training**

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the collaborative partnership between Special Education and General Education teachers in implementing inclusive education strategies. A descriptive-comparative research design was used in this study. The participants of the study were Special Education and General Education teachers with varied years of teaching experience and educational attainment. A researcher-made survey questionnaire was utilized to measure the level of collaboration between the two groups of teachers in the areas of instructional design, student readiness, assessment and feedback, and technology infrastructure. Findings revealed that both Special Education and General Education teachers reported high collaboration in most areas, with no significant difference except in assessment and feedback, where Special Education teachers perceived higher involvement. Barriers such as time constraints, differences in teaching styles, communication breakdowns, and a lack of professional development were also identified. The study recommends professional development programs, improved communication, scheduled planning time, and in-service training to strengthen collaboration between Special Education and General Education teachers in fostering inclusive education.

Keywords: Inclusive education, collaboration, co-teaching, Special Education, General Education.

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INTRODUCTION

Education systems globally are shifting toward a more inclusive approach that prioritizes providing learning opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities (Schuelka & Carrington, 2021). An inclusive education approach is recognized as a fundamental human right, emphasizing that all children should learn and interact together within their school. It aims to provide students equal access to quality education. In the Philippines, inclusive education is anchored in various policies including RA 9442, which mandates the integration of children with disabilities into regular educational settings, and RA 10533 which emphasizes the need for inclusive practices and the provision of necessary support services for students with special educational needs. The collaboration between special education teachers and general education teachers is crucial to the success of inclusive

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education, where students of all abilities learn together in the same classroom. At its core, the K to 12 Basic Education Program aims to deliver inclusive, quality, relevant, and accessible education to Filipino learners.

Despite these legal provisions, challenges exist in the implementation of inclusive education in the Philippines which includes a lack of structured collaboration between SPED and general education teachers. The gap often results in ineffective support for students with special needs, leaving them at risk of marginalization and reduced educational outcomes. This can hinder the development of comprehensive teaching strategies that cater to the diverse needs of learners, creating significant barriers to successful inclusion.

This study is particularly relevant given the growing number of SPED enrollees and students requiring inclusion across schools in the Division of Imus City. As schools increasingly recognize the importance of accommodating diverse learning needs, it is essential to explore how collaborative efforts between SPED and general education teachers can be strengthened. This study aims to address the urgent need for effective partnerships that can help create a more cohesive educational experience for learners.

Conducting this study holds several benefits for teachers and the broader educational community. By identifying and promoting effective collaborative strategies, this research can provide insights that enhance teaching practices, improve student engagement, and foster a culture of inclusion within schools. Furthermore, the findings may inform policy recommendations and professional development programs, ultimately contributing to a more supportive and equitable educational environment for all students.

Inclusive education for students with special educational needs has become a crucial global movement, affecting a significant number of individuals worldwide both directly and indirectly (Hornby & Kauffman, 2021). UNESCO defines inclusive education as a process that involves the transformation of schools and other educational institutions. The inclusive school would implement educational practices that address the diverse needs of all learners. This encompasses male and female students from various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, individuals from rural communities, those affected by HIV and AIDS, individuals with disabilities, and others facing learning challenges (UNESCO, 2009). Studies show that currently, the implementation of inclusive education in the country is 'moderately implemented' (Cayabyab, 2024) because regular teachers are unprepared to teach inclusive education due to various factors including lack of necessary resources, education, and training to educate students with disabilities (Alcosero et al., 2023).

A significant role in supporting inclusive education is performed through collaboration (Mouchritsa, 2021). By examining and understanding these collaborative efforts, best practices can be established, challenges can be addressed, and ultimately strengthen the framework of inclusive education. Recognizing the significance of this collaboration is crucial in bridging the gap in educational equity, ensuring that every student receives the support they need to thrive.

Inclusive education in the Philippines has made significant progress due to various policies and legislative frameworks aimed at integrating students with disabilities into mainstream schools (UNESCO, 2020). The Department of Education (DepEd) has issued guidelines to promote inclusive practices, emphasizing the importance of collaboration between special education (SPED) teachers and general education teachers (DepEd, 2016). However, due to several factors including lack of resources (Estroga, 2020), and insufficient teacher training (Llanes, 2019, Mercado, 2022), the implementation of these policies often differs.

Collaboration between SPED and general education teachers is essential for creating an inclusive learning environment (Boehme, 2020). Effective collaboration can take various forms, including co-teaching (Mouchrista et al., 2021), joint planning (Boehme, 2020) and sharing of resources and strategies. However, challenges persist in achieving a high degree of

collaboration. Many general education teachers report feeling unprepared to address the diverse needs of students with disabilities, often due to insufficient training and support (Alcosero et al., 2023). This implies that SPED teachers might encounter challenges in sharing their specialized expertise with their general education teacher partners. Researchers such as Smith et. al., (2021), Jones and Roberts (2022), and Johnson and Wallace (2023) highlighted those differences in training and preparation, time constraints and heavy workload, and differences in educational philosophies and approaches often creates the barrier and reluctance to implement special education strategies. This implies that general education teachers may feel unsure about how to implement specific accommodations or modifications in their classrooms, while SPED teachers may feel frustrated by the lack of understanding or support from their general education colleagues.

The research is set in a school located along the road of Malagasang II-A in Imus, Cavite, with a rich legacy spanning 106 years. Covering a land area of 5,003 square meters, the school has developed a vibrant educational community that reflects both its long-standing tradition and commitment to inclusive education. In recent years the school has seen a significant increase in its SPED enrollment rising from 70 students in SY 2022 to 100 in 2024. This growth underscores the school's responsiveness to the needs of its learners and its dedication to accommodating students with diverse learning needs. Currently, over 20 learners with special needs are successfully integrated into regular classes, showing the school's ongoing efforts to provide an inclusive environment. This setting provides a unique opportunity to explore the collaborative partnerships between SPED and general education teachers, as they work together to enhance educational outcomes for all students in this dynamic and evolving school community.

Statement of the problem

Collaboration plays a significant role in supporting inclusive education. By understanding these collaborative efforts, best practices can be established, challenges can be addressed, and ultimately the framework of inclusive education can be strengthened. The current study wants to understand the degree of collaboration between SPED and general education teachers at public elementary schools in the Schools Division of Imus City during the school year 2024-2025 through answering the following questions:

1. To what extent is the degree of collaboration as perceived by general education teachers and SPED teachers in terms of instructional design, student readiness, technology infrastructure, and assessment and feedback?
2. Is there a significant difference between the assessed degree of collaboration between general education teachers and SPED teachers?
3. What output can be proposed based on the findings of the study?

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research design, population, samples, and sampling techniques, demographic profile of the respondents, research instrument, data gathering procedures, statistical treatment, and scoring procedure employed in the study.

The study used the descriptive research design. A descriptive research design is a type of research methodology that aims to provide a detailed account of a phenomenon, situation, or population by systematically collecting and analyzing data (Creswell, 2015).

The population includes the Special Education and General Education Teachers in public elementary schools from the Schools Division of Imus City. A purposive sampling

technique was employed to select the participants, specifically targeting 358 respondents who are directly involved in inclusive education practices. This sampling technique is employed when researchers aim to gather in-depth insights from a targeted group rather than aiming for a representative sample of the larger population.

Among the three hundred eighty-eight (388) total respondents of the study, 127 or 32.70% are Special Education Teachers, indicating that a significant, though smaller, proportion of the participants specialize in supporting students with special educational needs. On the other hand, 261 or 63.70% are General Education Teachers, who make up most of the participants. This suggests that the perspectives and experiences of General Education Teachers play a dominant role in the findings of this study.

The age distribution of both Special Education Teachers and General Education Teachers reveals the following profile. For Special Education Teachers, the largest proportion (28.3%) is in the 31-35 years age group, followed by 41-45 years (26.0%) and 25-30 years (13.4%). Smaller groups are found in the 36-40 years (14.2%), 46-50 years (12.6%), and 51-55 years (4.7%) age categories, with only 0.8% of Special Education Teachers being 55 years old or above. In contrast, General Education Teachers show a larger concentration in the 25-30 years (30.3%) and 31-35 years (30.3%) age ranges. This group also has a significant number in the 41-45 years category (26.8%), followed by 36-40 years (11.5%). Smaller proportions are represented in the 46-50 years (8.8%), 51-55 years (7.7%), and 55 years old and above (1.9%) categories.

The data indicates that both Special Education and General Education Teachers are predominantly represented by those in the early to middle stages of their careers, with many teachers in the 25-35 years age range. This suggests that the teaching force is relatively young, which could mean a higher openness to professional development and new teaching strategies. Special Education Teachers show a notable concentration in the 31-35 years category, implying a solid middle-career group, while General Education Teachers are more evenly distributed across their early and mid-career years, with an equal proportion (30.3%) in both the 25-30 years and 31-35 years categories. Additionally, a considerable proportion of General Education Teachers (26.8%) fall into the 41-45 years age group, indicating that they may have more experience in the field than their Special Education counterparts, who are more likely to be in the 31-35 years range.

A key distinction between the two groups is the lower representation of older educators among Special Education Teachers, with only 0.8% aged 55 and above. This may suggest a challenge in retaining Special Education Teachers in the long term. Conversely, General Education Teachers show a slightly higher retention rate in the older age categories, particularly in the 41-45 years and 46-50 years groups. The underrepresentation of both very young (under 25) and older teachers (55 and above) in both categories may point to trends in teacher entry and retirement, with fewer educators entering the profession at a very young age and fewer remaining in it past their 50s. The age distribution has several important implications for in-service training. Since a large portion of both Special and General Education Teachers are in the early to mid-career stages, the training programs should be designed to address the needs of this group, focusing on strengthening classroom management, teaching strategies, and collaboration skills. Specifically, for Special Education Teachers, who are more concentrated in the 31-35 years age group, training should address strategies for managing complex student needs and maintaining engagement in the profession long-term. For General Education Teachers, who show more age diversity, in-service training could focus on enhancing collaborative practices with Special Education Teachers, given their significant representation across age groups.

The gender distribution of respondents shows a clear trend in both Special Education Teachers and General Education Teachers. Among Special Education Teachers, the

overwhelming majority are Female, with 123 or 96.9% in this category, while only 4 or 3.1% are Male. There are no respondents from the LGBTQIA+ category in Special Education Teachers. In contrast, the General Education Teachers group has 360 Female or 92.8%, 22 Male or 5.7%, and 6 or 1.5% from the LGBTQIA+ category. The gender distribution highlights a notable gender imbalance in both groups, with Female teachers overwhelmingly represented in both Special Education and General Education categories. In Special Education, 96.9% of the teachers are Female, which suggests that the profession is largely dominated by women. The relatively small percentage of Male teachers (3.1%) in Special Education is consistent with national trends where special education is often viewed as a female-dominated field. For General Education, the gender distribution is also predominantly Female (92.8%), though there is a higher percentage of Male teachers (5.7%) compared to Special Education. This could indicate a somewhat more gender-balanced environment in General Education, though Female teachers still constitute the vast majority. The inclusion of LGBTQIA+ teachers in General Education (1.5%) represents a small but important minority that reflects growing inclusivity in the profession.

With respect to years of service, among Special Education Teachers, the largest group with 43 or 33.9% falls into the 13-15 years of service category, followed by 7-9 years with 25 or 19.7%, 10-12 years with 23 or 18.1%, 4-6 years with 20 or 15.7%, and 1-3 years with 16 or 12.6%. In the General Education Teacher category, the distribution is somewhat similar, with the largest group also in the 13-15 years of service category (35.6%), followed by 7-9 years (22.4%), 4-6 years (16.0%), 10-12 years (14.9%), and 1-3 years (11.1%). Both Special Education and General Education Teachers show a similar trend, with the highest proportion of teachers in the 13-15 years of service category, indicating a strong core of experienced educators in both fields. For Special Education Teachers, the 13-15 years group represents the largest proportion (33.9%), suggesting that many teachers in this field have accumulated substantial experience. The 7-9 years (19.7%) and 10-12 years (18.1%) categories also reflect a solid base of mid-career professionals, while only a smaller percentage (12.6%) are relatively new to the field with 1-3 years of service. In General Education, a similar trend emerges, with the 13-15 years group (35.6%) being the largest. However, the 7-9 years category (22.4%) is slightly larger than the 7-9 years category in Special Education, suggesting that General Education Teachers may have a slightly higher proportion of teachers with moderate experience compared to Special Education Teachers. The data suggests that both Special Education and General Education Teachers have a strong presence of experienced teachers, particularly in the 13-15 years of service range. This experienced group could serve as a resource for mentoring and guiding newer teachers, fostering a collaborative environment that can enhance the effectiveness of in-service training programs.

Regarding educational attainment, among Special Education Teachers, the highest proportion with a frequency of 53 or 41.7% hold a Master's degree, followed by 44 or 34.6% with Master's units earned. Meanwhile, 26 or 20.5% have only a Bachelor's degree, while 2 or 1.6% earned Doctorate units and completed a Doctorate degree respectively. In contrast, among General Education Teachers, the largest share (41.0%) also possess a Master's degree, followed by 34.8% with Master's units earned, 19.3% holding only a Bachelor's degree, 2.8% with Doctorate units, and 2.1% who have earned a Doctorate degree. The educational attainment data reveals that both Special Education Teachers and General Education Teachers are predominantly well-educated, with the majority of both groups holding Master's degrees or Master's units earned, with 53 or 41.7% for Special Education Teachers and 106 or 41.0% for General Education Teachers. The data suggests that both groups have a highly educated workforce, with a significant proportion holding Master's degrees. This calls for in-service

training programs that cater to advanced learners, focusing on refining leadership skills, fostering research-based practices, and enhancing mentoring abilities.

The research instrument is a three-part researcher-made survey questionnaire. The first part of the survey is intended to collect demographic information from the respondents. The second part of the survey instrument intends to gather data to quantify the extent of the degree of collaboration as perceived by General Education Teachers and SPED Teachers in terms of instructional design, student readiness, technology infrastructure, and assessment and feedback. The last part of the survey contains open-ended questions.

Prior to the conduct of the study, the researcher wrote a permission letter addressed to the concerned personnel from the Schools Division of Imus City for approval to conduct the study. Upon approval, a pilot study was conducted to establish the validity and reliability of the instrument. A total of 110 teachers was chosen for pilot testing to establish the validity and reliability of the instrument. Before data collection, a consent form was given to them to ensure that the participants are aware of the risks and benefits of participating in the study. Likewise, they were informed about the purpose of the research and how the data collected from them were treated and stored. Should the respondent disagree and not consent to any of the terms given, the respondent was free to withdraw from participating in the study. The instrument was distributed to the respondents in pen and paper format. The data that were collected from the respondents of pilot testing were subjected to analysis. After establishing the instrument's validity and confirming its reliability through pilot testing, with a Cronbach's alpha of .964 indicating excellent internal consistency, the researcher proceeded to distribute the survey, which included a consent section for the target respondents. Once responses were collected, the data were analyzed using SPSS. A detailed presentation and interpretation of the results are provided in Chapter 3.

The following statistical tools were used to describe and analyze the collected data. The mean was used to describe the level of vocabulary of the learners. The mean is what many people refer to as "average" and is a value that is most representative of a group of data (Sani & Todman, 2006). The weighted mean (WM) was computed using the formula $WM = Efx / N$, where Efx is the sum of the product of frequency distribution and the score, and N is the total number of respondents. The standard deviation was also employed, as it is regarded as the most reliable measure because it is influenced by the value of each observation and is the most stable measure of spread. In interferences, this is the only measure of spread that is used. For this study, the standard deviation helped describe how dispersed the set of gathered data is. It was computed using the formula $SD = \text{square root of } E(x \text{ minus } X) \text{ squared divided by } N$, where SD is the standard deviation of the sample, E denotes the sum of, x is each value in the data set, X represents all values in the set, and N is the number of values in the data set. One-way Analysis of Variance was used to determine if the mean between observed data and expected data is due to chance, or if it is due to a relationship between the variables being investigated. It was computed using the formula $F = MST / MSW$, where F is the ANOVA coefficient, MST is the mean sum of squares between groups, and MSW is the mean sum of squares within groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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CONCLUSION

This study examined the collaborative partnership between Special Education and General Education teachers in implementing inclusive education strategies. Through analysis of survey data, the investigation sought to describe the level of collaboration across key areas, determine whether significant differences existed between the two teacher groups, and identify the barriers that hindered effective partnership. The findings served as the basis for drawing conclusions and formulating recommendations aimed at strengthening collaborative practices in inclusive educational settings.

The demographic profile of the teacher-respondents revealed that the majority were female, comprising 96.9 percent of Special Education teachers and 92.8 percent of General Education teachers, with most belonging to the 31 to 35 years age group. Respondents demonstrated substantial teaching experience, with 33.9 percent of Special Education teachers and 35.6 percent of General Education teachers having rendered 13 to 15 years of service. In terms of educational attainment, the majority held Master's degrees, with 41.7 percent of Special Education teachers and 41.0 percent of General Education teachers completing this level of education, reflecting a professionally qualified and academically accomplished teaching force composed of seasoned educators capable of contributing meaningful insights into collaborative practice.

Both Special Education and General Education teachers reported high levels of collaboration across several key areas. Instructional design obtained a mean of 3.51, student readiness obtained a mean of 3.61, and assessment and feedback obtained a mean of 3.54, indicating strong partnership in meeting the diverse needs of students. Technology infrastructure, however, showed only moderate collaboration with a mean of 3.38, with some challenges noted in relation to digital tools and resources. Overall, teachers perceived collaboration positively, particularly in tailoring instruction and ensuring student engagement, though the integration of technology into inclusive classroom practice remained an area requiring further development.

The comparison between Special Education and General Education teachers revealed no significant difference in perceived collaboration in instructional design, student readiness, and technology infrastructure. A significant difference was found in assessment and feedback, with Special Education teachers reporting slightly higher collaboration at $p = 0.04$, suggesting that Special Education teachers may feel more actively involved in the assessment process relative to their General Education counterparts. This finding reflects the specialized training and professional responsibility of Special Education teachers in ensuring that students with disabilities receive appropriate interventions and monitoring.

The study likewise identified several key barriers to effective collaboration. Time constraints arising from conflicting schedules, differences in teaching styles that led to inconsistent classroom experiences, and communication breakdowns that hindered effective planning and feedback were among the most prominent challenges. Unequal workload distribution and a lack of professional development in co-teaching models were also highlighted as significant obstacles that prevented both teacher groups from collaborating as effectively as possible.

The study concludes that the teacher-respondents represent a well-qualified and experienced professional group whose demographic characteristics equip them to contribute valuable perspectives on collaborative inclusive education. The diversity in age and years of service reflects a broad range of viewpoints on the benefits and challenges of collaboration, while the prevalence of graduate-level attainment suggests a readiness for advanced professional engagement. Teachers in both groups demonstrate a high degree of collaborative effort in instructional design, student readiness, and assessment and feedback, underscoring strong cooperative orientation toward meeting diverse student needs. The moderate level of collaboration in technology infrastructure, however, indicates that challenges remain in fully

integrating digital tools to support inclusive education. The finding that Special Education teachers reported higher collaboration in assessment and feedback points to the more active monitoring role they assume by virtue of their specialized training and responsibility for students with disabilities, and highlights the need for General Education teachers to assume a more equitable share of assessment-related responsibilities. The barriers identified in the study, including time constraints, differences in teaching styles, communication breakdowns, unequal workloads, and insufficient professional development in co-teaching, collectively represent systemic challenges that must be addressed to optimize collaborative outcomes for students with disabilities.

In light of these conclusions, the study recommends that ongoing professional development be prioritized to enhance collaboration, with particular attention to co-teaching strategies and inclusive education practices suited to educators across varying experience levels. Given the prevalence of Master's degree holders among the respondents, advanced training programs would be especially appropriate. Gender-sensitive training and inclusive work environments should also be fostered to support both male and female teachers in maximizing their collaborative potential. Schools should likewise invest in professional development focused on technology integration, ensuring that both Special Education and General Education teachers are equipped with the necessary tools and competencies to incorporate digital resources effectively into their teaching. Open communication between teacher groups should be actively maintained and structured to sustain high levels of collaboration, particularly in areas where challenges persist. To promote more balanced participation in assessment and feedback, joint professional development on assessment strategies should be provided, and regular discussions on shared assessment goals should be institutionalized to standardize practices and improve consistency in student evaluation. Dedicated planning time should be scheduled regularly for both teacher groups to ensure meaningful collaborative engagement, and professional development addressing co-teaching models, communication skills, and time management should be made consistently available. Clarifying roles and responsibilities at the outset of each collaborative arrangement and implementing feedback mechanisms to assess and adjust collaborative progress will likewise be critical to fostering successful and sustainable partnerships. To consolidate these efforts, an in-service training program should be developed and implemented to improve collaboration between Special Education and General Education teachers, with a focus on building practical competencies in co-teaching, communication, time management, technology use, and behavior management, thereby providing a structured and sustained foundation for effective inclusive education across the school community.

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