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Attitudes of general education teachers toward the inclusion of learners with diverse needs in public school

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the attitudes of general education teachers toward the inclusion of learners with diverse needs in San Miguel Elementary School as a basis for developing a proposed inclusive training program during the school year 2025-2026. Specifically, it explored teachers' awareness of inclusive education, perceived benefits, challenges in implementation, and strategies used in inclusive classrooms. A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed, with fifteen (15) general education teachers selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. Findings revealed that teachers demonstrated strong awareness of inclusive education, emphasizing equity, participation, and learner-centered instruction. They perceived inclusion as beneficial in promoting equal learning opportunities, respect and acceptance of differences, and learners' confidence and participation. However, teachers reported challenges, such as managing diverse learner needs, limited instructional materials and resources, classroom management difficulties, and insufficient training and institutional support. Despite these challenges, teachers employed various strategies including differentiated instruction, individualized support, encouragement of learner participation, and the creation of a positive classroom environment. The study concludes that while general education teachers in San Miguel Elementary School hold positive attitudes toward inclusive education, effective implementation is constrained by systemic and instructional challenges. Strengthening teacher's competencies through professional development and enhancing institutional support are essential to sustain inclusive practices. Based on the findings, an inclusive training program is proposed to enhance teachers' competencies and support effective inclusion.

Keywords: Special Education, attitudes, inclusive education, thematic analysis, Cordova, Cebu, Philippines.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education aims to ensure that all learners, including those with diverse needs, are given fair opportunities to participate and learn in the regular classroom. The study recognizes that general education teachers have an important role in making inclusion possible because their attitudes, understanding, and classroom practices affect how learners with different needs are supported.

The study was conducted at San Miguel Elementary School in Cordova, Cebu, during School Year 2025–2026. The school implements an inclusive classroom setting, where general education teachers handle learners with varying abilities and learning needs. However, the school does not have an established SPED program or SPED-trained teachers assigned specifically to these learners. This situation places general education teachers in a position where they need to adjust their teaching and classroom practices according to the needs of their learners. The study explored the attitudes of general education teachers toward the inclusion of learners with diverse needs. It specifically looked into four areas: teachers' awareness of inclusive education, their perceptions of the benefits of inclusion, the challenges they experience, and the strategies they use to support learners with diverse needs. The results were also used as the basis for developing a proposed Inclusive Training Program for General Education Teachers.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative phenomenological research design to understand the experiences and perspectives of general education teachers regarding inclusive education. Fifteen (15) general education teachers from San Miguel Elementary School participated in the study. They were selected through purposive sampling based on their experience in teaching learners with diverse needs in inclusive classroom settings. Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The interview questions focused on the teachers' awareness of inclusive education, the benefits they associated with inclusion, the challenges they encountered, and the strategies they used in their classrooms. The interviews were conducted individually, recorded with the participants' consent, and supported by field notes. The collected data were transcribed and examined using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The analysis followed the six phases of familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, identifying possible themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming them, and preparing the final report. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and protection of participants' identities, were observed throughout the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings showed that the participating general education teachers had strong and functional awareness of inclusive education. They understood inclusion as providing equal learning opportunities, meaningful participation, and appropriate support to learners regardless of their abilities or differences. They also recognized the importance of adjusting instruction to respond to different learner needs. Differentiated instruction, individualized support, and flexible teaching were among the inclusive approaches identified by the teachers. The teachers also expressed positive views about the benefits of inclusion. They believed that including learners with diverse needs in regular classrooms promotes fairness and equal access to learning. They also perceived inclusion as helping develop respect and acceptance of differences and encouraging learners' confidence and participation. However, the study did not

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measure learner performance or other outcomes directly; therefore, these benefits remain based on the teachers' perceptions and experiences. At the same time, the teachers identified several challenges in implementing inclusive practices. These included managing learners with different abilities and needs in one classroom, limited teaching materials and resources, difficulties in classroom management, and lack of sufficient training and institutional support. The teachers described these concerns as significant barriers to the implementation of inclusive education. The data, however, focused mainly on the existence of these challenges and did not establish what specific actions teachers took to overcome or address them. Despite these difficulties, teachers reported using several strategies to support their learners. Four major strategies emerged: using differentiated instruction, providing individualized support, encouraging learner participation, and creating a positive and inclusive classroom environment. Teachers adjusted lessons and activities according to learner capacity, provided one-on-one assistance and additional support, encouraged learners to participate through positive reinforcement, and worked to create a classroom where learners felt respected, safe, and welcome.

The findings show that the general education teachers of San Miguel Elementary School have positive attitudes toward inclusive education and understand the importance of providing equitable opportunities and support for learners with diverse needs. Their reported practices demonstrate their willingness to adjust instruction and provide individualized assistance despite the difficulties they encounter. However, the findings also show that teachers' positive attitudes and willingness to support inclusion are accompanied by practical challenges. Managing different learner needs, dealing with limited resources, maintaining classroom management, and working with insufficient training and support make the implementation of inclusive practices more difficult. These concerns indicate that teacher commitment alone may not be enough to sustain effective inclusion.

CONCLUSION

The study therefore emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development, adequate instructional resources, and stronger institutional support. The findings provide the basis for the proposed Inclusive Training Program for General Education Teachers, which is intended to strengthen teachers' knowledge, skills, confidence, and preparedness in handling inclusive classrooms. The study also recognizes that the findings describe teachers' perceptions and reported practices rather than measured learner outcomes. The research did not establish whether the strategies used by teachers resulted in improved academic performance, behavior, participation, or long-term progress among learners with diverse needs. Thus, future research may further examine these areas and investigate how teacher practices and institutional support relate to actual learner outcomes.

Overall, the study presents general education teachers as positive and committed toward inclusion but working within real instructional and systemic limitations. Strengthening their competencies through professional development, improving access to resources, and providing consistent institutional support are important steps toward sustaining inclusive education at San Miguel Elementary School.

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