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Inclusive Education Readiness among Elementary Educators: A Case Study in Tugbongan Elementary School

¹ Epe Christine, ² Gadiana Sheila Mae, ³ Glodove Gea Nicole, ⁴ Mobida Fanny Mae
^{1, 2, 3, 4} Cebu Normal University, Philippines

Corresponding Author: **Epe Christine**

Abstract

This case study outlines the significance of assessing elementary teachers' readiness in Tugbongan Elementary School for inclusive education and how it affects the educational system as a whole. Numerous studies have revealed that some teachers are unprepared for inclusion (Wendy W. Fuschs, 2010), thus there is a need to assess elementary teachers. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach and thematic analysis, the study revealed that the educators from Tugbongan Elementary

School possess readiness when it comes to incorporating inclusive education within their classrooms. This is a positive finding that highlights their commitment to creating an inclusive learning environment for all students. The promotion of targeted training and seminars for these teachers is highly recommended. This study has helped to improve the existing knowledge of teacher perceptions and provide insight into possible interventions and recommendations.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Teachers' Readiness

1. Introduction

The Philippines has been putting several initiatives and plans into action to promote inclusive education. The "Inclusive Education for All" program is one such effort that teaches educators, parents, and school administrators how to effectively fulfill the requirements of every child (Llego Mark, 2022) ^[1]. In the Article III Section 6 of Presidential Decree 603, it states that "Every child has the right to an education commensurate with his abilities and to the development of his skills for the improvement of his capacity for service to himself and to his fellowmen.", therefore, inclusive education is existing in the Philippines.

According to Emily Steffek (2023) ^[16], inclusive education is an approach that aims to ensure all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, have equal access to quality education. This educational paradigm requires not only a shift in policies and practices but also a fundamental change in the mindset and readiness of educators. Recognizing the importance of inclusive education readiness among elementary educators, this research study focuses on exploring the preparedness of educators in Tugbongan Elementary School to implement inclusive education practices effectively. It is essential to create an environment that is conducive to learning and promotes equal participation, while also acknowledging and addressing the unique needs of each student; all children can excel in a supportive learning environment (Hawthorne H. 2022). Establishing an inclusive educational environment is imperative to ensure that all students are provided with equitable opportunities and are treated impartially.

The role of a teacher in fostering an inclusive learning environment, their dedication in addressing the various needs of every student (Joseph Aninakwa, 2022) ^[1], and their function as promoters and implementer of inclusive practices in education all contributes to what must be a teacher in an inclusive education. Numerous studies have revealed that some teachers are unprepared for inclusion (Wendy W. Fuschs, 2010). According to Wisdom *et al.* (2016), teachers lacked sufficient information regarding inclusion. Thus, it is critical to assess how well-prepared elementary teachers are; the skills, knowledge, and teaching pedagogies that they must use in order to promote inclusive education as this trend continues to rise.

This study primarily focuses on identifying the extent of the elementary teachers' perceived efficacy for inclusive education, and their attitudes towards it to suggest strategies to create a positive learning environment.

Research Questions

Specifically, this study was to find out the following;

1. What factor hinders the implementation of inclusive education?
 - 1.1 Teacher preparedness
2. How would the teachers incorporate effective strategies on implementing inclusive education in Tugbongan Elementary School?

Scope and Delimitation

This study is to focus on the readiness of the elementary school teachers in Tugbongan Elementary School in implementing inclusive education. Elementary school teachers are the target participants of this study that will be conducted in Tugbongan Elementary School. This study will identify the level of preparedness among the teachers in handling a diverse environment inside their classrooms. In addition, questions that are irrelevant and very personal questions that do not contribute to the study will not be addressed in the research study.

Definition of Terms

- **Inclusive education:** Inclusive education aims to ensure all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, have equal access to quality education.
- **Diversity:** The different social and ethnic backgrounds, and special needs.
- **Pedagogical approach:** The strategy and procedure used by teachers to approach teaching and learning while utilizing a certain curriculum and having specified objectives in mind.
- **Stereotype:** A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea to students with special needs.
- **Stigma:** a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person.
- **Learning environment:** A space where students are motivated by their environment and feel protected, supported, and safe in their pursuit of knowledge.
- **Teachers' readiness:** It is how well-equipped, competent, and capable educators are to successfully carry out their teaching obligations. It includes a variety of elements, such as their expertise, training, and capacity to design and deliver instructional materials, foster a positive learning environment, and address the various learning requirements of students.
- **Mainstream:** The ideas, attitudes, or activities that are regarded as normal or conventional; the dominant trend.

2. Review of Related Literature

Inclusive Education

According to Sito, L. (2020) ^[15], The Commission of Higher Education mandates all Teacher Training Institutions in the Philippines to offer a professional course on inclusive education starting the 2018-2019 school year. Teachers in the public schools are mandated by the law and by the Department of Education (DepEd) to practice inclusion in their classrooms.

Cantos, L. & Celindro, N. (2021) ^[2] has also covered the features of the inclusive education in terms of children at risks, with physical difficulties/disabilities, suffering from severe poverty, with communication barriers, diverse gifted/talented, children with sensory-based disabilities (visual and hearing deficits), children with special needs (autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, down, syndrome).

Also, according to Faseeha Khursheed *et al.*, (2020) that inclusion involves provision of a structural environment for students with special needs in general education classroom settings among their peers. Teachers are the fundamental pillar for the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Challenges in Inclusive Education

With our insufficient materials and educational services, the teachers need to attend training programs to enhance the awareness, attitudes, and skills of teachers towards inclusion. In any case, they need training, classes, and workshops because few mainstream teachers are new to mainstreaming. They are agreeable on inclusive education. However, they need refreshed hands-on training. Ecoben, M (2019) ^[5].

Teacher Preparedness

According to Forlin and Sin (2017) ^[6], in-service teachers and recent graduates from teacher training institutions are not adequately equipped for managing inclusive classrooms and managing different learners across the majority of Pacific regions. According to Formoso, D. (2019) ^[7], It is important for the teachers as implementers of the policy, to have a positive attitude towards inclusion, otherwise all efforts will be futile. (Gordon, 2013) The study demonstrated that the inclusion of teachers in general education classes has raised concerns among most teachers, but they all supported inclusive learning. (Simsek, 2019) Teachers were also found to have a general understanding of what inclusive education is and to think that inclusive education is necessary and that it has advantages and disadvantages according to the way it is applied, and that teachers and students should have in-service training. (Chumo, 2020) Seminars, workshops and symposia which will provide continuous professional development to increase the competence of handling skills, teaching methodologies and knowledge in providing supportive equipment so that all learners are able to achieve their individual learning needs.

3. Methodology

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is to identify the level of preparedness among the teachers of Tugbongan Elementary School to implement inclusive education, and to identify the strategies they employ for catering to the needs of their diverse learners. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights into the current state of inclusive education in Tugbongan Elementary School, and will help to inform the development of effective policies and practices for promoting diversity and equity in the classroom.

This study is beneficial to the following:

Teachers: The study will provide guidance on the implementation of inclusive teaching strategies inside the classroom.

Future Researchers: The study would provide future researchers with information to guide them in their next studies.

Research Design

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, specifically interview questionnaires as the main method used since the study acquires in knowing the experiences

from the elementary teachers in Tugbongan Elementary School on how prepared they are in conducting and implementing inclusivity inside their classroom.

Research Environment

This study is to be conducted in Tugbongan Elementary School which is convenient to the researchers, and the participants are the teachers, specifically, elementary teachers coming from that school which are considered to be suited for our data collection.

Research Participants

The participants in this study are the teachers from elementary levels in Tugbongan Elementary School. Creswell (1998) states that 5 to 25 interviews are the optimal number, thus, the researchers target participants will be 5 female or male teachers that suit the inclusion criteria of the study.

The qualified teacher-participants of this study are the [1] bonafide elementary teachers in Tugbongan Elementary School, and [2] agree to participate in this study.

On the other hand, the teacher-participants who were unqualified to participate in this study are those [1] special needs education teachers and those who [3] did not want to be part of this study.

If in any case that the teacher-participants decide to withdraw themselves from participating in the study, the researchers must look for other elementary teachers that are qualified to participate in this study. The participants must inform the researchers of their withdrawal, however, they are not required to state the reasons behind their withdrawal.

Research Instruments

There will be a set of interview questions that researchers use for this study. This will be done in a semi-structured interview.

Interview Questions	Responses
1. Have you received enough training and seminars about implementing inclusive education?	
2. What teaching methods have you employed in your classroom to accommodate students with a range of learning needs?	
3. What strategies will you apply in implementing inclusivity inside the classroom?	
4. What crucial traits or abilities should a teacher have in order to successfully implement inclusive education, in your opinion?	
5. With all the knowledge and teaching pedagogies that you have acquired as a teacher, are you prepared enough to implement inclusive education in your own classroom? How?	

Data Procedure

The researchers submitted an ethical consideration and constructed an adapted question for the interview, validated by the professor of the subject. The researchers will conduct the study in Tugbongan Elementary School, and will have 5 respondents that are fit for this study, specifically, Elementary Teachers. Then, the researchers will give the respondents a brief explanation of what the study is all about through an informed consent. The researchers will be able to get an analysis based on the results and would end in satisfying outcomes. The data gathered from the respondents will be held confidential.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data gathered, the researcher will use Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis. This will serve as the basis in which the researchers refer to the answer of the participants through a semi-structured interview.

Transcription: Interview audio files will be transcribed while keeping the participants' identities confidential.

Thematic Analysis: To find patterns in the data gathered, Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis will be used. After doing initial analysis, a process of evaluation will be carried out.

4. Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data

This chapter presents the presentation, analysis and the interpretation of data based on the answers we've gathered from the survey we conducted. The researchers aim is to know how prepared and ready are the teachers from Tugbongan Elementary School in implementing inclusivity inside their classroom.

The researchers used thematic analysis using a descriptive approach to gather relevant data, in which it utilizes surveys, techniques to observe and describe the behavior of the respondents. The researchers conducted a survey questionnaire to the respondents. The respondents of this study are the elementary teachers from Tugbongan Elementary School.

Teacher	Age	Years of Experience
Teacher 1	28 years old	7 years
Teacher 2	57 years old	20 years
Teacher 3	52 years old	20 years
Teacher 4	29 years old	8 years
Teacher 5	28 years old	7 years

Ethical Considerations

Below are the ethical considerations which are relevant to the study.

Conflict of Interest

This study's objective is purely for the researcher's development in education, to know how prepared are the Elementary teachers in adapting inclusivity in their own classrooms, and also in growth professionally. Thus, there is no existing conflict of interest in the outcome of our research study.

Privacy and Confidentiality

The respondents will be informed that the data that is collected in conducting this study, such as their personal information will remain confidential. Instead, we will use aliases in presenting and analysis of the data.

Informed Consent

The respondents will be informed regarding the purpose and benefit of the checklists in our study. Asking permission will be done before anything else for their own purpose and safety.

Risks

The study has no possibility in putting our respondents into harm while collecting the data. The data gathering will be done through a checklist that will be answered by the participants at their convenient time.

Recruitment

The process in recruiting the respondents was based on the place that is easily accessible for our survey. The researchers will discuss to the respondents on how it will be done right from the beginning up until they finish.

Benefits

The results of this study that we conducted, will greatly benefit the respondent. After publishing the results in a more recognized journal, the suggested teaching pedagogies and recommendations of the curriculum will be disseminated.

Incentives

Course credit incentives will be given to the participants in this study.

Collaborative Study Terms of Reference

There were no collaborative study terms applicable to this study.

Results and Discussion

Major Theme #1: Teachers Preparedness

One of the first major themes that is generated based on the collected data from the interview on the elementary teachers' is their readiness in implementing inclusive education. As Teacher 1, Significant Statement 1 (T1, SS1) have answered, *"Yeah, mao lage train me for that"*, T1 is prepared enough as they are being trained for that. Additionally, T3 SS5, and T4 SS5 have also answered that they are prepared enough for inclusive education *"Yes gyud na siya, kay ang teacher dili gyud makabalibad, kinahanglan gyud ka na everyday is read, what will happen today and tomorrow, you're always ready."* and *"Prepared uy! Walay dili kay Kong mag teacher na gani ta dili jud ka mo ingon na dili ka ready."* As teachers, being prepared all the time is important and when it is mandated and tasked to do so, teachers cannot decline. T2 SS5 also answered, *"Yes. However, I still need to study more about it."* It signifies that the teacher considers the fact that there is still a need to learn more about inclusive education and the implementation of it. However, T5 SS5 responded, *"Not yet, it needs more proper training."* The teacher is not yet prepared to implement inclusivity in its own classroom as it requires more proper training.

Sub-theme #1: Proper Trainings

According to Sanchez, P. A., *et al.*, (2023) one of the biggest obstacles to inclusion is inadequate initial teacher training, based on the response of the teachers, most of them have answered, As T3, SS1 have answered, *"Yes, katong first week of August naa mi training about inclusive education, focus siya sa children with disabilities"* T1 received a training last August. Additionally, T2 SS1 also answered that she had a training *"O naka train mi ana all about kanang mga PWD, pero karon so far wala man ko [students]."* While T4 SS1 answered that she had only received once [training]. *"Para nako kay wala. Once raman mi naka training anang inclusive education jud"*. And T5 SS1 answered, *"Trainings, wala pa gyud ko ka receive kay ang nag Inclusive training kay ang ato kay kinder to grade three Raman."* T5 SS1 haven't received any training regarding inclusive education because it was only teachers from kindergarten to grade 3.

Sub-theme #2: Attitude

As Christopher Boyle, *et al.*, (2020) have said that the beliefs and attitudes of teachers will be crucial in determining how inclusion is demonstrated both inside the classroom. Based on the responses of the teachers, all of the teachers have a common answer which is being patient. As T5 SS4 answered, *"Patience, patience gyud."* and T3 SS4, *"So para sa akoo, kinahanglan ang teacher is patient lang gyud siya sa buhaton sa mga bata kay og makasala ta delikado kaayo."* The significance of being patient, particularly when dealing with children, cannot be overstated. According to Schwab L., a professor in college teaching science and mathematics, suggests that the most crucial quality shared by all exceptional teachers is patience. It is imperative to comprehend that each child is a unique individual with distinct requirements and character traits. Understanding these differences is crucial to effectively meeting their needs.

Sub-theme #3: Uncertainty

Based on the responses of the teachers, T2 SS5 have responded that *"Yes, pero need pa tun an og maayo."* The teacher acknowledges that there is still a need to learn to be prepared enough in inclusive education. However, T5 SS5 said, *"Not yet, dili pa gyud kay need jud siya og proper training"* The teachers acknowledge that they have the knowledge about inclusive education, however, they feel that there is still more to learn. The teachers recognize that there are still gaps in their knowledge and need to further educate themselves in order to have a deeper understanding, they need more comprehensive training to understand the principles, strategies, and approaches involved. The level of preparedness among teachers for inclusive education can differ based on their prior training and experience in teaching students with special needs.

Major Theme #2: Methods Implemented

The second major theme that is generated from the data gathered is Methods Implemented, this is based on the responses of the teachers on what teaching strategies they have implemented in their own classroom to accommodate the young learners' different needs, and upon the responses of the teachers. As teacher 5, Significant Statement 2 had answered, (T5 SS2) *"I use differentiated instruction, for example, I separate both fast and slow learners."* Additionally, T4 SS2 and T2 SS2 answered that they also apply differentiated instructions, *"Mag kuan kog differentiated instruction. Kanang example, sa groupings kay diba inclusion dili pa man jud ka kahibaw nga kana siyang bataa naa siyay special needs"* and *"Differentiated [activities], lahi ang ihatag sa kamao, lahi sad sa hinay kay wa man namo ang fast, gi usa man sila [star section]."* This signifies how effective it is to give differentiated instructions to the learners. According to Ivory, A. (2023)^[10], differentiated instruction matters just as much for students who are struggling as it does for top achievers. In a differentiated classroom, every student may feel included and succeed by catering to their cultures, interests, and learning profiles.

Sub-theme #1: Knowledge Sharing System

As per the statements provided by the teachers, they have been employing diverse strategies to support their students'

learning. Among these strategies is the buddy system. According to T4 SS3, “So akong style pud magpili jud kog mo lead ba apil sad na ang e partner sila kanang buddy kay dili mana sad ingon nga section 1 naa sad juy masagol sa akua nga tagilid pa and maong kinahanglan naay partner nga kamao.” This proves that pairing our learners with their peers is crucial in learning. According to (Dörnyei, 1998; Gardner & Lambert, 1972), buddy system support mechanism which reinforces student motivation through encouragement, social interaction, feedback, and sound learning environments. Therefore, this method is proven to be effective and crucial in students' learning.

Sub-theme #2: Learning Styles

Based on the statements provided by T3 SS3 and T5 SS2, “*Gaan nako sila og differentiated learning materials og kato bataa hatagan jod to nako og para iyaha nga activity*” and “*I use differentiated instruction, for example, I separate both fast and slow learners.*” Every learner possesses a distinct set of characteristics and learning styles. By providing differentiated learning materials, learners can identify effective learning strategies that align with their unique attributes. This approach can lead to better learning outcomes and help ensure that learners are successful in meeting their goals.

5. Summary of Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter will summarize the results obtained from earlier chapters as well as a summary of findings. In addition, the conclusions obtained from these findings are used to provide an answer to the general problem of this study. Following this, recommendations which have been derived from results will be made.

Findings

The results from the qualitative data analysis on Inclusive Education Readiness among Elementary Educators: A Case Study in Tugbongan Elementary School are as follows:

After meticulous collection and organization of data, it is unequivocally determined that Elementary Teachers at Tugbongan Elementary School exhibit readiness in incorporating inclusive education within their classrooms. However, a specific teacher expresses a recognition of the ongoing learning journey and that she is not prepared to implement inclusivity, indicating a need for further preparation. Consequently, advocating for targeted training sessions and seminars emerges as a crucial component for the continuous professional development of these educators.

Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive research conducted, this underscores the significance of investing in the professional development of teachers, particularly in the context of inclusive education. By equipping educators with the necessary tools and strategies, we can ensure that all students, regardless of their diverse needs, receive equitable and quality education. However, it is evident that the Elementary Teachers at Tugbongan Elementary School possess readiness when it comes to incorporating inclusive education within their classrooms. This is a positive finding that highlights their commitment to creating an inclusive learning environment for all students. It is highly recommended to advocate for targeted training sessions and

seminars for these educators. These initiatives will not only provide the necessary support and resources for further enhancing their skills and knowledge but also foster a culture of continuous learning within the school community.

Recommendations

1. The school should conduct more training and seminars to their educators about inclusive education.
2. Provide enough support and resources in implementing inclusive education.
3. Teachers should implement more effective and inclusive strategies for their unique individual learners.

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