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Teachers' Competence, Motivation, and Practices: Pathways to Inclusive Learning

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Abstract

This study examines teachers' competence, motivation, and teaching practices as interrelated pathways to inclusive learning in public elementary schools in the Schools Division of Bohol. Anchored on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, the research investigates how these variables interact to support inclusive education. A quantitative descriptive-correlational design was employed, involving 298 respondents (247 Key Stage 2 teachers and 51 school heads) selected through random sampling. Data were collected using a researcher-modified, validated questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.919$) and analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and the Kruskal–Wallis H test. Findings revealed that teachers demonstrated high levels of competence ($M = 3.77$), motivation ($M = 3.69$), and inclusive teaching practices ($M = 3.72$). However, inclusive strategies and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) were the least developed areas. Significant positive relationships were found among competence, motivation, and teaching practices, with motivation showing the strongest influence on instructional practices. No significant differences were observed across demographic variables, indicating that these factors are shaped more by professional and internal dynamics than by background characteristics. Despite high competence and motivation, challenges such as lack of SNED training, heavy workloads, and limited resources hinder effective implementation of inclusive strategies. The study concludes that strengthening teacher training, particularly in SNED and UDL, along with enhanced institutional support and instructional leadership, is essential to sustain inclusive practices. It recommends continuous professional development, collaborative learning communities, and targeted capacity-building programs. This study aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by promoting inclusive and equitable learning environments and improving teacher working conditions. Its sustainability impact lies in enhancing educational quality, strengthening institutional capacity, and supporting equitable access to learning, thereby contributing to long-term socio-educational development.

Keywords: Assessment Literacy; Inclusive Education; Motivation; Teacher Competence; Teaching Practices; Universal Design for Learning

1. Introduction

Inclusive education is a central priority in ensuring equitable access to quality learning for all learners, including those with special educational needs. Despite strong global and national policy support, effective implementation in mainstream classrooms remains largely dependent on teachers' competence, motivation, and instructional practices. This study examines how these interrelated factors function as pathways to inclusive learning, particularly within public elementary schools, and aims to inform capacity-building initiatives and institutional support systems.

1.1 Background on Teachers' Competence, Motivation, and Teaching Practices for Inclusive Learning

Inclusive education in the Philippine basic education system emphasizes equitable learning opportunities and social participation for all learners. Policies from the Department of Education support integrating learners with diverse needs into mainstream classrooms; however, translating these policies into effective classroom practices remains challenging. Teachers play a critical role, yet many lack sufficient pre-service and in-service training in special needs education (SNED), affecting their ability to deliver differentiated instruction and appropriate assessments. Motivation further influences implementation. While teachers often hold positive attitudes toward inclusion, contextual constraints such as large class sizes, heavy workloads, limited resources, and insufficient specialist support contribute to stress and reduced instructional effectiveness. Consequently, teaching practices may remain traditional, limiting meaningful participation of learners with special needs. This study therefore investigates teachers' competence, motivation, and teaching practices as key determinants of inclusive learning pathways.

1.2 Themes on Teachers' Competence, Motivation, and Inclusive Teaching Practices in Literature

Inclusive education is globally recognized as a fundamental right and a mechanism for promoting equity, participation, and social justice (UNESCO, 1994; Ainscow & Miles, 2008). Literature consistently identifies teachers as central agents in implementing inclusive practices, with competence, motivation, and teaching strategies shaping classroom inclusivity. Teacher competence encompasses content knowledge, pedagogical skills, inclusive strategies, classroom management, and assessment literacy. Strong subject knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge enable effective instruction and adaptation to diverse learners (Shulman, 1986; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Inclusive pedagogy emphasizes equitable participation and prevention of marginalization (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011), while assessment literacy supports responsive instruction and equitable evaluation (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Popham, 2009). Motivation is equally critical. Intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, professional commitment, and job satisfaction influence persistence and instructional quality (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Klassen et al., 2013). Motivated teachers are more likely to adopt inclusive strategies and sustain engagement despite challenges (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Cañoso, 2024). Inclusive teaching practices operationalize competence and motivation through strategies such as differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), adaptations, learner-centered approaches, and inclusive assessment (CAST, 2018; Tomlinson et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2017). These approaches enhance learner engagement, participation, and outcomes, although challenges such as limited training and resources persist (Jugan et al., 2024; Rubio, 2024).

1.3 Context of Inclusive Education Policies Affecting Teachers in Public Elementary Schools

Globally, inclusive education is grounded in human rights frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948), the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006). These frameworks emphasize equitable access, appropriate accommodations, and teacher preparedness. Nationally, the Philippine Constitution (1987) guarantees the right to quality education, while laws such as R.A. 7277, R.A. 10533, and R.A. 11650 (2022) institutionalize inclusive education and mandate teacher training, curriculum adaptation, and resource provision. DepEd Orders further translate these into classroom practices, emphasizing differentiated instruction and professional development (DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009; DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019; DepEd Order No. 003, s. 2022). Despite these frameworks, implementation gaps persist due to limited training, resources, and institutional support (Lugo & Delos Reyes, 2024; Jugan et al., 2024). Local studies highlight the need for teacher adaptability, continuous professional development, and systemic support to achieve meaningful inclusion (Vergara et al., 2025).

1.4 Theoretical Basis on Teachers' Competence, Motivation, and Teaching Practices in Inclusive Learning

This study is anchored on three interrelated theories. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory explains how teachers' competence and self-efficacy influence behavior and instructional practices (Bandura, 1986). Self-Determination Theory emphasizes the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in sustaining motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory highlights the social and contextual nature of learning and the importance of culturally responsive teaching (Vygotsky, 1978). Within the conceptual framework, teachers' competence and motivation function as independent variables influencing inclusive teaching practices. Competence directly shapes instructional decisions, while motivation enhances or constrains the application of these competencies. Teaching practices serve as the dependent variable, reflecting observable inclusive strategies such as differentiation, collaboration, and learner-centered approaches. These interactions collectively create pathways to inclusive learning.

1.5 Research Gaps on Teachers' Competence, Motivation, and Inclusive Teaching Practices

Despite extensive policy frameworks and theoretical support, significant gaps remain in the implementation of inclusive education. Many teachers report insufficient training in SNED, limited understanding of UDL, and challenges in adapting instruction to diverse learners (Vergara et al., 2025; Jugan et al., 2024). Resource constraints, large class sizes, and workload pressures further hinder effective practice (Tenerife et al., 2022). Existing studies often examine competence, motivation, or teaching practices separately, with limited focus on their combined influence on inclusive learning. There is also a need to analyze how these variables interact across different teacher profiles, including educational attainment, experience, training, class size, and workload. This study addresses these gaps by examining the levels, relationships, and differences among teachers' competence, motivation, and teaching practices, providing a comprehensive basis for developing targeted action plans for inclusive education.

1.6 Alignment of Teachers' Inclusive Practices with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This study aligns primarily with: SDG 4 – Quality Education: It directly supports inclusive and equitable education by examining factors that enhance teacher effectiveness and learner participation (United Nations, 2015). SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth: By addressing teacher motivation, workload, and professional development, the study contributes to improving working conditions and professional well-being. SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities: Inclusive teaching practices promote equitable access and participation for learners with diverse needs, reducing educational disparities. The research contributes to achieving these goals by strengthening teacher capacity and promoting inclusive learning environments.

1.7 Importance of Teachers' Competence, Motivation, and Teaching Practices to Multidisciplinary Sustainability

This study contributes to socio-economic, educational, and institutional sustainability. Educational sustainability: It enhances long-term quality and inclusivity of education systems by improving teacher competence and instructional practices. Socio-economic sustainability: Inclusive education supports social mobility, reduces inequality, and promotes workforce readiness among diverse learners. Institutional sustainability: Findings guide policy implementation, teacher training, and school leadership strategies, strengthening education systems. By integrating competence, motivation, and teaching practices, the study supports the development of resilient, inclusive, and adaptive educational environments that benefit learners, educators, and institutions.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study used a quantitative descriptive correlational design to identify relationships among variables without manipulation. It determined the levels of teachers' competence, motivation, and teaching practices, as well as their interrelationships and differences across selected demographic profiles. This approach provided evidence for understanding how these variables function as pathways to inclusive learning and inform teacher development programs.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The research was conducted in selected public central elementary schools in the Schools Division of Bohol, covering multiple municipalities. The setting represents a diverse educational environment within the province, providing a relevant context for examining inclusive education practices in public elementary schools.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents included Key Stage 2 teachers as primary participants and school heads as secondary participants. Teachers provided self-reports on their competence, motivation, and teaching practices, while school heads offered supervisory perspectives to validate and triangulate the data. This dual perspective strengthened the reliability of the findings regarding inclusive learning practices.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The number of teacher respondents was determined using data from the Schools Division of Bohol Planning Office. Random sampling was applied due to the impracticality of covering the entire population. Slovin's formula was used to compute the sample size, resulting in 247 teachers and 51 school heads, for a total of 298 respondents.

2.5 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a researcher-modified questionnaire adapted from validated instruments, theories, and literature. The instrument consisted of four main parts. The first part gathered demographic information, including educational attainment, teaching experience, SNED training, class size, and workload. The second part measured teachers' competence across five domains: content knowledge, pedagogical skills, inclusive strategies, classroom management, and assessment literacy. These domains were grounded in established frameworks (Shulman, 1986; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Popham, 2009). The third part assessed motivation through intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, professional commitment, and job satisfaction, based on motivation theories (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Dinham & Scott, 1998; Rosenholtz, 1989; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). The fourth part evaluated teaching practices in inclusive learning, including differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning, adaptations and modifications, learner-centered practices, and inclusive assessment (Tomlinson, 2014; CAST, 2018; Friend & Bursuck, 2019; Vygotsky, 1978; Weimer, 2013; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Florian & Beaton, 2018). Parallel versions of the questionnaire were administered to teachers and school heads to enable data triangulation, consistent with instructional leadership perspectives (Leithwood et al., 2004; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Robinson et al., 2008). The instrument used a four-point scale to measure responses. It underwent expert validation and pilot testing, and reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = 0.919$), indicating high internal consistency. Selected items were revised based on uniform responses. The questionnaire was administered in both online and printed formats.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection followed three phases. Approval was first obtained from relevant authorities, including the university and the Schools Division Superintendent, ensuring compliance with ethical standards such as informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and the Data Privacy Act of 2012. The survey questionnaire was then administered systematically through printed copies and online forms, with coordination from school administrators. Respondents were given clear instructions and sufficient time to complete the instrument, and the researcher remained available for clarifications. Finally, completed questionnaires were collected, checked for completeness, and organized for

analysis. Data cleaning procedures were conducted to ensure accuracy, and all information was handled with strict confidentiality.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages, were used to describe respondents' demographic profiles. Weighted mean scores were computed to determine levels of competence, motivation, and teaching practices using a four-point scale with corresponding interpretations. Correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships among variables, using Pearson product–moment correlation for normally distributed data and Spearman rank correlation when assumptions were violated. To determine differences across demographic groups, the Kruskal–Wallis H test was applied due to the ordinal nature of the data and the presence of multiple independent groups. This non-parametric test provided a robust method for comparing distributions without requiring normality assumptions.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Teachers' Competence, Motivation, and Teaching Practices

3.1.1 Teachers' Demographic Profile

The findings show that most teachers have pursued graduate studies, with the largest group having Master's units (36.44%), followed by those with Master's CAR (25.51%) and Bachelor's degrees (21.05%), while only a few have doctoral-level qualifications. In terms of experience, the majority have 11–20 years (38.06%) and 21 years and above (36.03%), indicating a highly experienced workforce. However, most teachers (72.87%) have not attended any SNED training. Most handle class sizes of 16–30 learners (71.26%), and the majority report heavy workloads, particularly those teaching six hours daily with additional responsibilities (56.28%). These results suggest that while teachers are experienced and engaged in professional development, completion of advanced degrees remains limited due to structural constraints. This aligns with Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) and Opfer and Pedder (2021), who note that teachers often accumulate graduate units without completing degrees due to work demands. Although experience contributes to instructional effectiveness (Graham et al., 2020), inclusive practice requires continuous professional learning (Messiou and Ainscow, 2021). The lack of SNED training reflects a major gap, consistent with Sharma et al. (2021) and Chong and Reinders (2020), emphasizing the need for structured training. Additionally, large class sizes and heavy workloads limit the implementation of inclusive strategies (Blatchford et al., 2021; Hattie, 2023; OECD, 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020; Waitoller and Pazey, 2020).

3.1.2 Teachers' Level of Competence

The results indicate that teachers demonstrate a high level of competence, with an overall mean of 3.77, interpreted as "Highly Competent." Content knowledge received the highest rating (3.84), followed by classroom management (3.78), assessment literacy (3.79), pedagogical skills (3.76), and inclusive strategies (3.69), which had the lowest rating among the domains. These findings suggest that teachers possess strong foundational competencies but relatively lower proficiency in inclusive strategies. This supports literature emphasizing the importance of content knowledge in teaching effectiveness (König et al., 2022) and its role in inclusive adaptation (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011). However, adaptive pedagogy remains challenging (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020), particularly in inclusive contexts where specialized knowledge is required (Sharma et al., 2021; Florian and Camedda, 2020). The results also indicate that while teachers are skilled in assessment design, using data for instructional improvement remains an area for development.

3.1.3 Teachers' Level of Motivation

The findings show that teachers are highly motivated, with an overall mean of 3.69. Among the domains, professional commitment scored the highest (3.74), followed by job satisfaction (3.68), intrinsic motivation (3.66), and self-efficacy (3.66). Teachers expressed strong enthusiasm for teaching and commitment to supporting learners, though slightly lower ratings were observed in lesson design and resource satisfaction. These results indicate that teachers possess strong internal motivation and professional dedication. This aligns with motivation theories suggesting that intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy enhance persistence and engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). High professional commitment reflects strong teacher identity and dedication, which are essential for inclusive education. However, lower ratings related to resources suggest that external constraints may limit the full expression of motivation, even when intrinsic drive is strong.

3.1.4 Teachers' Level of Teaching Practices

The results reveal that teachers consistently implement inclusive teaching practices, with an overall mean of 3.72, interpreted as "Highly Inclusive." Learner-centered practices received the highest rating (3.82), followed by assessment (3.75), differentiated instruction (3.71), adaptations and modifications (3.68), and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which had the lowest mean (3.65). These findings suggest that teachers effectively translate competence and motivation into classroom practice, particularly in fostering learner participation and engagement. This aligns with inclusive education frameworks emphasizing learner-centered instruction (Florian & Camedda, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). Strong differentiation practices support learner variability (Tomlinson et al., 2021), while lower UDL implementation reflects the need for

specialized training. Challenges in implementing individualized plans also highlight the need for institutional support. Overall, the results indicate strong practice but continued need for capacity building in specialized inclusive strategies.

3.2 Relationships Among Teachers' Competence, Motivation, and Teaching Practices

The results show significant positive relationships among all variables. There is a strong positive correlation between competence and motivation ($\rho = .733$, $p < .001$), a very strong positive relationship between motivation and teaching practices ($\rho = .759$, $p < .001$), and a moderate to strong relationship between competence and teaching practices ($\rho = .693$, $p < .001$). These findings indicate that competence and motivation are interconnected, and both contribute to effective teaching practices. This is supported by Lauermann and König (2020), Fackler and Malmberg (2021), and Zee et al. (2021–2022), who emphasize the role of self-efficacy in linking competence and motivation. The stronger relationship between motivation and teaching practices highlights motivation as a key driver of instructional behavior, consistent with Collie (2021) and Ryan and Deci (2020). Additionally, the weaker relationship between competence and practice suggests that knowledge alone does not guarantee implementation, supporting findings by König et al. (2020). Overall, the results confirm that effective teaching arises from the interaction of competence, motivation, and contextual factors (OECD, 2023).

3.3 Differences in Competence, Motivation, and Teaching Practices Across Demographic Profiles

The results indicate no significant differences in teachers' competence, motivation, and teaching practices when grouped according to educational attainment, teaching experience, SNED training, class size, and workload, as all p-values exceeded the 0.05 level of significance. These findings suggest that these variables remain consistent across different demographic groups. This implies that competence, motivation, and teaching practices are not primarily determined by demographic characteristics but are influenced more by internal and professional factors. The results support the idea that teacher effectiveness is shaped by motivation, self-efficacy, and professional engagement rather than background variables. Furthermore, the lack of differences despite varying training exposure suggests that training quality and relevance may be more important than frequency. Overall, the findings highlight that improving inclusive education requires strengthening professional development, institutional support, and collaborative learning environments rather than focusing solely on demographic differences. The proposed action plan reflects this by emphasizing continuous training, instructional support, and collaborative practices to enhance inclusive teaching.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study established that teachers' competence, motivation, and teaching practices serve as significant pathways to inclusive learning among Key Stage 2 teachers in the Schools Division of Bohol. Findings revealed that teachers generally demonstrate high levels of competence across content knowledge, pedagogical skills, classroom management, assessment literacy, and inclusive strategies, although inclusive practices remain the lowest among the domains. Teachers also exhibited high levels of motivation, particularly in professional commitment, intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction. Similarly, teaching practices were consistently rated as highly inclusive, with learner-centered practices being the most prominent and UDL the least developed. The results further showed strong positive relationships among competence, motivation, and teaching practices, indicating that these variables are interconnected in supporting inclusive learning. However, no significant differences were found when grouped according to demographic profiles, suggesting that these variables are not influenced by factors such as educational attainment, experience, training, class size, and workload. Overall, while teachers are competent and motivated, the findings highlight the need to strengthen SNED training and institutional support to effectively translate these capacities into sustained inclusive classroom practices.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that Public Schools District Supervisors and School Principals strengthen instructional leadership by promoting inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) through continuous coaching, mentoring, recognition systems, and the establishment of professional learning communities. Teachers are encouraged to engage in ongoing professional development focused on SNED and inclusive education, and to consistently apply inclusive strategies such as UDL, differentiated instruction, and individualized approaches while participating in collaboration and reflective practice. Furthermore, future researchers are advised to conduct qualitative, longitudinal, and comparative studies to further examine inclusive teaching practices and explore the effectiveness of SNED and UDL-based interventions in improving teacher performance and learner outcomes.

The study was limited to selected public central elementary schools in the Schools Division of Bohol and focused on Key Stage 2 teachers and school heads during the School Year 2025–2026. It utilized a quantitative descriptive-correlational design and relied on self-reported data gathered through a structured survey questionnaire, which may limit deeper insights into contextual and experiential aspects of inclusive teaching practices.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards, ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity of all respondents. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the appropriate authorities, including the university and the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent of Bohol, prior to data collection. All procedures complied with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, and the information gathered was used solely for research purposes.

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