

Inclusive Education Policy Awareness and Teachers' Attitudes Toward Learners with Disabilities in Regular Classrooms

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Abstract

This study set out to examine how much teachers know about inclusive education policies and how this knowledge relates to their attitudes toward learners with disabilities in regular classrooms, with the aim of developing an action plan grounded in the findings. A descriptive-correlational research design was used, and the study was carried out at Lipata Central Elementary School during school year 2025–2026. Through total enumeration, all qualified teachers in the school took part in the study. Data were gathered using an adapted and validated survey questionnaire measuring policy awareness across four dimensions and teacher attitudes across four dimensions. The data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and standard deviation, while Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to test the relationship between the two variables. Results showed that teachers had a moderate overall level of awareness of inclusive education policies and a generally positive attitude toward learners with disabilities, with a statistically significant though weak positive relationship between the two. The study concluded that teachers' readiness for inclusive education is shaped by their level of policy awareness, but that awareness on its own is not enough to ensure inclusive practice, since attitudes are also driven by training, experience, and institutional support. The proposed action plan is therefore recommended for adoption to strengthen both policy awareness and attitudinal readiness among teachers.

Keywords: Special Education; Inclusive Education Policy Awareness, Teachers' Attitudes Toward Learners With Disabilities; Descriptive-Correlational; Lipata Central Elementary School, Cebu, Philippines

1. Introduction

In Abantas (2022), inclusive education is described as an essential priority in basic education because it guarantees the right of learners with disabilities to participate in regular classrooms with appropriate support, accommodations, and opportunities for learning. Ainscow (2020) also emphasizes that inclusive education requires policies and practices that promote equity and access, while Bandura (1997) highlights the role of teacher self-efficacy in effectively supporting learners with disabilities.

In the Philippine context, Cabansag, Tadena, and Umali (2023) note that national policies such as the Inclusive Education Act of 2022, the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities, and the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 require schools and teachers to provide equitable access to quality education for all learners. Arias, Calago, and Cabanilla (2023) argue that understanding these policies is crucial for teachers to implement inclusive education effectively, while Dignath et al. (2022) highlight the link between teachers' awareness and positive classroom practices.

According to Ajzen (1991), teacher attitudes and planned behavior play a significant role in implementing inclusion successfully, and this is further supported by the findings of Savolainen, Malinen, and Schwab (2022) and Yada, Leskinen, Savolainen, and Schwab (2022), who indicate that positive attitudes enhance the learning environment for learners with disabilities. Crispel and Kasperski (2021), De Arao and Fontanilla (2024), and Donath et al. (2023) stress that teachers who are knowledgeable about policy provisions, reasonable accommodations, support services, and school-level guidelines are better prepared to respond to diverse learner needs. Similarly, Lindner et al. (2023) and Macabenta et al. (2023) note that positive teacher attitudes create supportive, respectful, and inclusive learning environments.

In Gonzaga, Plan, and Aguipo (2024), Lipata Central Elementary School in Minglanilla, Cebu, is highlighted as a school serving learners with diverse needs, including learners with disabilities. Guillemot, Lacroix, and Nocus (2022) also note that while SPED centers support inclusion, teachers face challenges related to policy awareness, training, resources, classroom accommodations, and confidence in handling learners with disabilities.

This study, therefore, examined teachers' awareness of inclusive education policies and their attitudes toward learners with disabilities in regular classrooms, following the framework proposed by these studies, and used the findings as the basis for a proposed action plan to strengthen inclusive education practices at Lipata Central Elementary School.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design, which allowed the researchers to describe teachers' awareness of inclusive education policies and their attitudes toward learners with disabilities while examining potential relationships between these variables. Creswell and Creswell (2022) explain that this design is particularly suitable for exploring naturally occurring conditions without manipulation, while Ajzen (1991) emphasizes that correlational approaches are useful for understanding how attitudes influence behavior. Bandura (1997) also notes that teacher self-efficacy can shape responses in survey-based studies, supporting the use of this design to capture meaningful variations among participants.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The research was conducted at Lipata Central Elementary School in Barangay Lipata, Linao, Minglanilla, Cebu. Cabansag, Tadena, and Umali (2023) highlight the importance of selecting schools that serve diverse learners when studying inclusive education, and Arias, Calago, and Cabanilla (2023) note that SPED centers provide a rich context for examining policy awareness and inclusive classroom practices. The school's population, spanning Kindergarten to Grade 6, made it an appropriate setting to explore teachers' experiences with learners with disabilities.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

Seventy-two teachers participated in the study, including 63 general education teachers and 9 specialized teachers (7 SPED and 2 ALS teachers). Macabenta et al. (2023) note that including both general and specialized educators provides a comprehensive perspective on inclusive education practices, and Lindner et al. (2023) emphasize that teachers directly involved in classroom instruction offer the most accurate insights into policy awareness and attitudes.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Total enumeration was used because the population of qualified teachers was manageable, allowing for full participation. De Arao and Fontanilla (2024) recommend this approach for small, well-defined populations to reduce sampling bias, and Donath et al. (2023) note that excluding teachers on leave, newly hired teachers with less than one semester of service, or those assigned to administrative tasks ensures that respondents are actively engaged in classroom practices.

2.5 Research Instrument

Data were collected using an adapted and validated survey questionnaire. The instrument consisted of three sections: respondents' demographic profile, awareness of inclusive education policies, and attitudes toward learners with disabilities. Each of the awareness and attitude sections contained 28 indicators grouped into four domains, rated on a five-point Likert scale. Crispel and Kasperski (2021) explain that Likert scales are reliable for measuring subjective attitudes, while DeVellis (2017) emphasizes the importance of multiple indicators to improve the accuracy of survey instruments.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained the necessary permissions from school authorities, and respondents were oriented on the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Creswell and Creswell (2022) highlight that proper orientation and consent are essential to ensure data quality and ethical compliance. Questionnaires were administered personally during free periods or designated breaks and collected using a drop-and-collect method.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to analyze the survey data. Frequency and percentage were used to summarize respondents' profiles, while weighted mean and standard deviation measured levels of policy awareness and attitudes. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was employed to examine the relationship between policy awareness and teacher attitudes, following guidance from Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2019) and Field (2018), who note that correlation analysis is suitable for continuous variables and survey data.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any time. De Arao and Fontanilla (2024) and Donath et al. (2023) emphasize that these practices are essential for the ethical conduct of research involving human participants. All data were used solely for academic purposes and reported in aggregate form.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Profile of the Respondents

The study involved 72 teacher-respondents from Lipata Central Elementary School, most of whom were female, with 66 teachers (91.67 percent) and 6 male teachers (8.33 percent). As Abantas (2022) and Cabansag, Tadena, and Umali (2023) note, teacher demographics, experience, and qualifications can influence attitudes and readiness for inclusive education. The largest age group was 38–47 years, followed by 48–57 years, indicating a predominantly mature and experienced workforce. Most respondents had earned master's units, while a smaller number held a master's degree or only a bachelor's degree. Similarly, Macabenta et al. (2023) and Lindner et al. (2023) emphasize that varied educational backgrounds and teaching experience contribute to the effective implementation of inclusive practices.

3.2 Level of Teachers' Awareness of Inclusive Education Policies

The findings showed a moderate overall level of awareness of inclusive education policies, with a grand mean of 3.37, suggesting that teachers had a developing understanding of inclusive education but still required further strengthening in some areas. According to De Arao and Fontanilla (2024) and Donath et al. (2023), awareness of rights and accommodations for learners with disabilities is critical for fostering inclusive classrooms. In this study, understanding of rights and accommodations obtained the highest mean of 3.87, while knowledge of inclusive education legislation and familiarity with school-level guidelines obtained means of 3.33 and 3.35, respectively, indicating moderate awareness. Awareness of support services and resources was lowest at 2.93, consistent with Crispel and Kasperski (2021), who note that teachers often require additional information on referral systems, assistive technologies, and community-based support.

3.3 Level of Teachers' Attitudes Toward Learners with Disabilities

Teachers generally exhibited positive attitudes toward learners with disabilities, with a grand mean of 4.12. Savolainen, Malinen, and Schwab (2022) and Yada, Leskinen, Savolainen, and Schwab (2022) highlight that such positive attitudes are associated with better engagement and support in inclusive classrooms. Commitment to inclusive practices was highest (mean = 4.42), indicating strong dedication to creating respectful and welcoming learning environments. Willingness to accommodate learners obtained a mean of 4.20, and beliefs about learner capabilities scored 4.18. Comfort in interacting with learners with disabilities was slightly lower at 3.69 but remained positive, echoing findings by Lindner et al. (2023) and Macabenta et al. (2023) that teacher confidence varies based on training and experience.

3.4 Significant Relationship Between Policy Awareness and Teachers' Attitudes

The study revealed a weak but significant positive relationship between inclusive education policy awareness and teachers' attitudes ($r = 0.444$, $p = 0.000$). Bandura (1997) and Ajzen (1991) explain that self-efficacy and planned behavior can influence the translation of knowledge into attitude-driven practices. This indicates that teachers with higher awareness of policies tend to hold more positive attitudes toward learners with disabilities. However, factors such as training, experience, resources, school culture, and institutional support may also play a role, as noted by Sharma, May, and Engelbrecht (2021) and Tagyamon, Andan, and Villanueva (2025).

3.5 Proposed Action Plan

Based on these findings, the study proposed an action plan aimed at strengthening inclusive education practices. Cabansag, Tadena, and Umali (2023) and Arias, Calago, and Cabanilla (2023) emphasize that regular policy orientations, training on reasonable accommodations, differentiated instruction, and awareness of support services can improve teachers' readiness. The plan also encouraged collaboration among teachers, SPED personnel, parents, and administrators to ensure that inclusive classrooms are effectively supported (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021; De Arao & Fontanilla, 2024).

3.6 Proposed Strategic Implementation Plan for the Centralized Digital Profile System

To complement the action plan, a Strategic Implementation Plan for a Centralized Digital Profile System was proposed. Donath et al. (2023) and Gonzaga, Plan, and Aguiro (2024) highlight the importance of participatory leadership, continuous staff digital competency development, and standardized administrative procedures. The plan includes feedback sessions, planning workshops, training simulations, budget allocation for system maintenance, and cybersecurity practices to ensure sustainability and proper implementation. These measures aim to strengthen both policy awareness and attitudinal readiness among teachers, supporting a secure, organized, and inclusive learning environment.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that teachers of Lipata Central Elementary School had a moderate level of awareness of inclusive education policies and generally positive attitudes toward learners with disabilities in regular classrooms. Although teachers understood the basic rights of learners with disabilities and showed willingness to support inclusion, gaps remained in their awareness of support services, referral systems, assistive technologies, and school-level implementation procedures.

A significant but weak positive relationship was found between policy awareness and teachers' attitudes. This indicates that greater awareness of inclusive education policies is associated with more positive attitudes, although training, experience, resources, and institutional support also influence inclusive practice.

It is recommended that the school implement the proposed action plan to strengthen teachers' policy awareness and attitudinal readiness. Regular orientations, practical training on accommodations and differentiated instruction, stronger collaboration with SPED personnel and parents, and improved access to support services and resources should be prioritized. Future studies may be conducted in other schools to compare findings across different inclusive education settings.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study complied with applicable academic, institutional, and ethical standards in the conduct of research involving human participants. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and the teacher-respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of the data gathered. Informed consent was secured before data collection, and respondents were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All responses were treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for academic and research purposes. The data were presented in aggregate form to protect the identity of the respondents. The researcher observed honesty, proper attribution of sources, respect for participant welfare, and compliance with data privacy principles throughout the conduct of the study. No conflict of interest was declared, and the manuscript remains the intellectual work of the researcher, with all cited materials duly acknowledged in accordance with scholarly and ethical standards.

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