

From Policies to Practices: A Proposed Standardized Inclusive Education Readiness Test for Teachers

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Abstract

The actual implementation of inclusive education is most evident in classroom instruction, where teachers play a critical role in addressing learner diversity. This study aimed to develop and validate the Inclusive Education Readiness Test (IERT), a standardized tool designed to assess Filipino teachers' preparedness to manage inclusive classrooms. Grounded in the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework—focusing on Engagement, Representation, and Action & Expression—the study aligned these principles with local and international standards for inclusive education, including DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019 (Department of Education, 2019) and Republic Act No. 11650 (Department of Education, 2019; Republic of the Philippines, 2022). A sequential exploratory mixed-methods design was employed, beginning with a qualitative literature review to identify key frameworks, practices, and indicators in inclusive education, followed by quantitative instrument development and expert validation. Four educational experts, selected based on their experience in curriculum design, inclusive education, and leadership roles, assessed the tool using the Content Validity Index (CVI) at both item and scale levels, supplemented by criterion-level evaluation to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with policy and theoretical frameworks. Results indicated that teachers generally demonstrate moderate to high readiness in valuing learner diversity, facilitating learning content and pedagogy, pursuing personal and professional development, and working collaboratively with stakeholders. However, challenges remain in practical application, institutional support, and technology integration, highlighting the need for structured professional development and policy alignment. The IERT serves as a reflective and evidence-based instrument for educators, supporting more equitable and effective inclusive education practices. The study contributes to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on Quality Education by enhancing teacher capacity to provide inclusive learning opportunities and SDG 10 on Reduced Inequalities by promoting equitable participation for all learners. Its sustainability impact lies in strengthening teacher competence, improving institutional readiness, and fostering community engagement, ensuring long-term implementation of inclusive education practices in Philippine classrooms.

Keywords: Action & Expression, Collaboration, Inclusive Education, Learner Diversity, Philippine Standards, Professional Development, Teacher Readiness, Universal Design for Learning, Valuing Student Diversity

1. Introduction

Teachers require holistic preparation to deliver quality education for diverse learners, both as pre-service and in-service educators. Global frameworks, including the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006), mandate inclusive practices and equitable learning opportunities (United Nations, 2006, Article 24). Filipino teachers demonstrate positive attitudes toward inclusion, but institutional readiness—such as administrative support, resources, and teacher confidence—affects implementation effectiveness (Nuñez & Rosales, 2021). The IERT is designed to assess readiness across four domains: valuing learner diversity, facilitating content and pedagogy, pursuing professional development, and working with others, guided by the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework (Rose et al., 2002).

Valuing learner diversity requires teachers to accommodate differences in culture, ability, and learning needs, fostering acceptance and equity (Baglieri, 2022; Uthus & Qvortrup, 2024; Resch & Schrittmesser, 2021). Facilitating learning content and pedagogy involves adapting curriculum, assessment, and instructional strategies to ensure accessibility and engagement (Gonzaga et al., 2024; Almeqdad et al., 2023; Benitez et al., 2024; Moon, 2023). Continuous professional development enhances teacher competence and confidence, with hands-on, cross-disciplinary, and technology-integrated training proving most effective (Donath et al., 2023; Holmqvist & Lelinge, 2020; Ng'andu, 2023). Collaborative

engagement with families, communities, and institutional stakeholders supports sustainable inclusive education implementation (Huliganga, 2025; Ališauskienė & Kairienė, 2016; Ketheeswaran, 2025; Muhire & Kiarie, 2024).

Philippine policies, including Republic Act No. 11650 (Republic of the Philippines, 2022) and DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019 (Department of Education, 2019), institutionalize Inclusive Learning Resource Centers (ILRCs) and set standards for teacher training and learner support. Internationally, inclusive education is guided by the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and UNCRPD (United Nations, 2006), emphasizing equitable access, anti-discrimination, and learner-centered approaches. Local implementation is shaped by context-specific resources, teacher preparedness, and institutional capacity, highlighting the need for tools like the IERT to measure readiness and guide professional development (Nuñez & Rosales, 2021).

The study is grounded in the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, which provides multiple means of engagement, representation, and action/expression to address diverse learner needs (Rose et al., 2002). Philippine Standards for Inclusive Education are aligned with UDL principles to identify indicators for teacher readiness, encompassing the “why” (engagement), “what” (representation), and “how” (action and expression) of learning. While teacher attitudes toward inclusion are generally positive, gaps remain in formal training, practical application, and institutional support (Nuñez & Rosales, 2021; Gonzaga et al., 2024). Existing studies highlight the need for validated, context-specific tools to assess teacher readiness and guide professional development in inclusive education, especially in the Philippine setting. This study addresses these gaps by proposing a standardized readiness test informed by qualitative and quantitative evidence.

The research contributes to SDG 4 (United Nations, 2015) (Quality Education) by promoting inclusive, equitable, and accessible learning. It aligns with SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by fostering professional development and teacher capacity, ensuring learners with diverse needs can fully participate and succeed. This study advances educational sustainability by providing a validated tool for teacher preparedness, supporting long-term inclusion policies, and enhancing professional competencies. It fosters socio-cultural sustainability by promoting equity and acceptance of diversity, technological sustainability through UDL-informed practices, and institutional sustainability via ILRCs and evidence-based policymaking (Republic of the Philippines, 2022; Department of Education, 2019).

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The research utilized a Sequential Exploratory Mixed Method Design, starting with qualitative data collection to identify key themes, frameworks, and practices in inclusive education, followed by quantitative instrument development. This approach is suitable for emerging research topics and allowed the researchers to create and refine the IERT based on insights from literature and expert input (Katz-Buonincontro, 2024).

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted within the Philippine educational context, specifically focusing on regions including the National Capital Region (NCR) and CALABARZON (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon). The findings are contextually grounded in these areas, reflecting local inclusive education policies and standards, such as DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019 (Department of Education, 2019) and Republic Act No. 11650 (Republic of the Philippines, 2022).

2.3 Respondents of the Study

Respondents consisted of classroom teachers and expert validators involved in inclusive education, curriculum planning, and teacher development. The expert panel included a Special Education Supervisor at DepEd-NCR, a Chief Education Supervisor for the Curriculum and Learning Management Division in CALABARZON, a Program Chair and Graduate School Professor at National University–Manila, and the Director of Extension and Community Services at EARIST Manila, all with substantial experience in education and community leadership.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was used to select validators based on expertise in inclusive education, curriculum and assessment experience, relevant administrative or academic positions, and familiarity with national educational frameworks. This ensured the instrument’s validity in both theoretical and practical contexts. Four experts were selected to provide comprehensive evaluation and alignment with global and local inclusive education standards.

2.5 Research Instrument

The qualitative phase involved systematic literature review analysis of peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, dissertations, and research reports to extract recurring concepts and theoretical frameworks related to inclusive education.

Insights from this phase informed the quantitative readiness assessment tool. The IERT comprises demographic information and four main components: Valuing Learner Diversity, Facilitating Learning Content and Pedagogy, Pursuing Professional Development, and Working with Others. Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale with verbal interpretations from Never (N) to Always (A), aligned with Philippine standards for inclusive education.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

The IERT was administered to expert validators in both digital and printed formats. Each expert assessed the relevance, clarity, and appropriateness of items using the Content Validity Index (CVI) framework, providing both quantitative ratings and qualitative feedback. The IERT items were evaluated using a four-point scale: 1 = Not Acceptable, 2 = Below Expectations, 3 = Meets Expectations, 4 = Exceeds Expectations. Feedback from the panel was compiled to refine the instrument, ensuring alignment with Universal Design for Learning principles and inclusive education policies (Du et al., 2025; Saw et al., 2025).

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative analysis involved calculating the Item-Level Content Validity Index (I-CVI) for individual items and the Scale-Level Content Validity Index Average (S-CVI/Ave) to assess overall content validity. Criterion-level evaluation using the Validation Rubric for Expert Panel (VREP) complemented these measures, evaluating ten qualitative content criteria including clarity, wording, relevance, balance, and relationship to the research problem. Qualitative thematic analysis was conducted to identify emergent themes and ensure the IERT reflected both international and Philippine inclusive education standards.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Universal Design for Learning Implementation

3.1.1 Engagement

Results showed that engagement is enhanced when learners are provided meaningful choices, opportunities for autonomy, and flexible participation formats. Learners showed greater motivation and participation when instructional activities were linked to real-life experiences and opportunities for collaboration. Teachers, however, faced challenges in maintaining sustained engagement due to varying learner needs and limited professional development. Discussion of these results indicates that culturally responsive strategies and positive shifts in teacher mindset contribute to greater student involvement. Literature suggests that learner choice and autonomy are crucial for equitable participation and sustaining interest in diverse classrooms (Priyadharsini & Mary, 2024).

3.1.2 Representation

Analysis revealed that using multiple modalities—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic—enhances content accessibility for learners with diverse needs. Integration of assistive technologies and alignment with neurodiverse preferences emerged as critical themes. Teachers reported partial implementation due to insufficient training and resource constraints (Scott et al., 2022). The discussion emphasizes that multiple means of representation address language and cognitive barriers, improving inclusivity. Personalized technological supports are necessary to align teaching with individual learner needs, confirming prior findings on UDL efficacy (Priyadharsini & Mary, 2024).

3.1.3 Action and Expression

Teachers utilized varied methods for student output, including alternative assessments and opportunities for learner voice. Results highlighted the need for stronger support and training, as many educators struggled with flexible performance tasks and inclusive grading systems (Scott et al., 2022). Interpretation indicates that alternative assessments empower learners to demonstrate understanding aligned with their strengths. Professional development programs are essential to equip teachers with skills to implement UDL effectively and sustain equitable learning environments.

3.2 Philippine Standards for Inclusive Education

The study found that the four domains—Valuing Student Diversity, Facilitating Content and Pedagogy, Pursuing Professional Development, and Working with Others—align strongly with national and global standards. Teachers reported moderate to high readiness in valuing diversity, applying differentiated instruction, and integrating inclusive strategies into pedagogy (Nuñez & Rosales, 2021; Gonzaga et al., 2024; Almeqdad et al., 2023). Institutional readiness, including administrative support and resource availability, significantly affected effective implementation. Discussion highlights that inclusive education benefits from culturally responsive teaching, technology integration, and scaffolded learning. Continuous professional development enhances teacher competence, supporting SDG 4 (Quality Education) and equitable learning opportunities. Evidence from local studies demonstrates that ongoing training and systemic support correlate with improved teaching performance in inclusive settings (Benítez et al., 2024; Moon, 2023).

3.3 Professional Development and Collaboration

Findings indicated that teachers require targeted, hands-on training to translate UDL principles into practice. Many educators demonstrated an understanding of inclusive education principles; however, challenges remained in applying these principles effectively, adapting instruction to diverse learner needs, and maintaining confidence in managing inclusive classroom environments. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and cross-disciplinary training improve skill acquisition and teacher cohesion, positively impacting student outcomes (Holmqvist & Lelinge, 2020; Ng'andu, 2023). The discussion underscores that professional development should move beyond lecture-based methods, emphasizing experiential learning, mentorship, and collaborative practices. Stakeholder engagement, including families, communities, and ILRC coordinators, supports sustainable inclusion and ensures alignment with policy frameworks (Huliganga, 2025; Ališauskienė & Kairienė, 2016).

3.4 Challenges and Recommendations

The study revealed ongoing challenges in the implementation of inclusive education, including insufficient resources, overcrowded classrooms, limited training opportunities, barriers to digital literacy, and inconsistencies in policy execution. Effective inclusive education requires localized, collaborative, and reflective teaching strategies. Engagement with community stakeholders and policy alignment emerged as critical for program success (Ketheeswaran, 2025; Muhire & Kiarie, 2024). Discussion highlights that addressing these challenges involves structured professional development, policy support, and enhanced collaboration. Localized solutions, CSR initiatives, and awareness campaigns strengthen inclusive education, creating child-centered and equitable learning environments in accordance with Republic Act No. 11650 (Republic of the Philippines, 2022).

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study demonstrated that Filipino teachers exhibit moderate to high readiness in implementing inclusive education, with strong alignment to Universal Design for Learning principles—Engagement, Representation, and Action & Expression—and adherence to Philippine standards for inclusive education (Nuñez & Rosales, 2021; Gonzaga et al., 2024; Almeqdad et al., 2023). Teachers showed favorable attitudes toward valuing learner diversity, facilitating content and pedagogy, pursuing professional development, and collaborating with stakeholders. Despite these positive indicators, gaps remain in practical training, institutional support, adaptation skills, and technology integration, highlighting the ongoing need for professional development and policy support to strengthen inclusive classroom practices (Arboiz & Aoanan, 2024; Faragher et al., 2021).

Based on the findings, it is recommended that education stakeholders, including administrators and ILRC coordinators, implement structured professional development programs focused on inclusive pedagogy, Universal Design for Learning applications, and collaborative teaching strategies. Enhancing teacher confidence and practical skills through hands-on training, digital platforms, and reflective practices will support sustained adoption of inclusive education. Institutional support, resource allocation, and policy alignment are necessary to bridge gaps between teacher readiness and effective classroom implementation, ensuring equitable, learner-centered, and culturally responsive education for all students (Moon, 2023; Ng'andu, 2023).

Compliance with ethical standards

The authors declare no conflict of interest. This study complied with recognized ethical standards for human-participant research by ensuring voluntary participation with informed consent, the right to withdraw without penalty, and strict confidentiality through anonymous, secure, and aggregated data handling. Given the focus on psychological well-being, procedures were non-invasive, and safeguards were observed to minimize discomfort, with guidance to appropriate support services when needed, and required institutional permissions were secured for instrument use and access to academic records.

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