

Assessing Elementary Teachers Knowledge and Readiness of Inclusive Education in District of Santa Fe

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Abstract

This study assessed the knowledge and readiness of elementary teachers in the District of Santa Fe, Division of Leyte, toward the implementation of inclusive education. Grounded in inclusive education principles that emphasize equality, learner participation, and the reduction of barriers to learning, the study focused on determining teachers' level of knowledge, level of readiness, and the relationship between these two variables. A correlational research design was used, involving 30 elementary teacher-respondents selected through multistage cluster sampling. Data were gathered using a structured survey questionnaire with sections on teachers' knowledge and readiness for inclusive education, rated through a four-point Likert scale. The instrument was validated through expert evaluation, and the data were analyzed using weighted mean and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings showed that teachers had a high level of knowledge on inclusive education, with an overall weighted mean of 3.20, and a very high level of readiness, with an overall weighted mean of 3.55. However, gaps were noted in teachers' knowledge of disability categories, confidence in identifying learners with special educational needs, access to resources, and perceived administrative support. The correlation analysis revealed a very weak negative and non-significant relationship between knowledge and readiness, with $r = -0.025$ and $p = 0.465$. The study concludes that while teachers are generally knowledgeable and prepared, knowledge alone does not necessarily translate into practical readiness. The study supports SDG 4, Quality Education, by promoting inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for all learners. Its sustainability impact lies in strengthening educational, institutional, and community support systems for inclusive education in rural school contexts.

Keywords: Elementary Teachers, Knowledge, Readiness, Inclusive Education, Professional Development

1. Introduction

This study assesses the knowledge and readiness of elementary teachers in the District of Santa Fe, Division of Leyte, toward the implementation of inclusive education. Inclusive education is grounded in the principle that all learners, including those with disabilities and diverse learning needs, must be given equitable access to quality education within supportive mainstream classrooms. Since teachers serve as primary implementers of inclusion, their knowledge, preparedness, attitudes, access to resources, and institutional support are critical to the success of inclusive education. The study responds to the need for localized evidence on teacher readiness in rural and less urbanized educational settings, where inclusive education implementation may be affected by limited training, instructional materials, and support systems.

Education is a fundamental right and a means of empowering individuals and supporting national development (Black-Hawkins, 2011). Across the world, education systems continue to pursue equitable, inclusive, and high-quality learning opportunities for all learners regardless of background, ability, or learning need (UNESCO, 2020). Inclusive education emphasizes the accommodation of all learners in mainstream classrooms and requires not only policy reforms but also the capacity-building of teachers who directly implement inclusive practices. According to UNESCO (2009), inclusive education requires mainstream schools to strengthen their capacity to teach all children within their communities. Regular schools play an important role in reducing discrimination, building inclusive communities, and achieving education for all (Florin & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Inclusive schools also promote effective learning experiences for diverse learners while improving educational efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Since every child has the right to education and must be supported to reach and maintain an acceptable level of learning (Florin, 2010), education systems must be designed to respond to learners' varied characteristics, interests, abilities, and needs (Chaula, 2014).

The related literature emphasizes that inclusive education is necessary because learners possess diverse characteristics, interests, learning needs, and abilities (Chaula, 2014; Booth & Ainscow, 2011). Education programs and curricula must therefore be flexible, responsive, and inclusive. Inclusive education benefits not only learners with special needs but also the wider classroom environment by promoting collaboration, respect, and equitable participation among students

(Ainscow and Miles, 2008). Teacher training and school-based support systems are also essential in ensuring the successful implementation of inclusive practices (Forlin, 2010). Teachers serve as primary facilitators of classroom inclusivity, making their knowledge and readiness crucial to implementation (Sharma et al., 2012). However, research shows that inadequate teacher preparation remains a major barrier to inclusive education, especially in developing countries (Moberg et al., 2020). Several studies indicate that many teachers have limited knowledge of inclusive practices, which affects their ability to respond to diverse classroom needs. AlMahdi and Bukamal (2019) found that many pre-service teachers in the Philippines had only moderate comprehension of inclusive education policies, while Timothy et al. (2014) reported insufficient teacher knowledge in rural schools where professional development is limited. Opoku et al. (2021) similarly identified a knowledge gap among teachers in Ghana, particularly in their conceptual understanding of inclusive education. These findings point to the need for sustained and comprehensive training to strengthen teachers' theoretical and practical understanding of inclusion (Loreman, 2017). Teacher attitudes and perceptions also influence their willingness and readiness to implement inclusive practices. Positive attitudes are associated with greater willingness to integrate students with SEN into mainstream classrooms (de Boer et al., 2011). However, many teachers continue to feel unprepared to manage the complex needs of learners with disabilities and express concerns about their effectiveness in inclusive settings (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Savolainen et al., 2012). This suggests that professional development must not only increase knowledge but also build confidence and address negative perceptions often linked to inadequate preparation or past challenges with inclusion. Teacher readiness involves knowledge, attitudes, competencies, and self-efficacy. In the Philippine context, Ecoben (2019) found that public school teachers showed growing awareness of inclusive education but still lacked some of the skills required for effective implementation. Maligalig and Rola (2021) also identified gaps in teacher preparation programs and emphasized the need for better alignment with inclusive education policies. These findings highlight the importance of structured support systems that help teachers translate inclusive principles into actual classroom practice.

The literature further identifies practical barriers to inclusive education, including limited resources, lack of individualized instructional strategies, inadequate training, behavioral management concerns, and weak collaboration among stakeholders (Mabanag et al., 2024). Suprayogi et al. (2017) emphasized that limited collaboration among school administrators, special educators, and parents places additional burden on mainstream teachers. Saloviita (2020) also found that high student-teacher ratios and insufficient teaching assistants affect the quality of inclusive practices, particularly in low-resource settings. Professional development and in-service training can improve teacher preparedness and attitudes toward inclusion. Carroll et al. (2003) and Lancaster and Bain (2007) found that introductory courses on inclusive education positively influenced pre-service teachers' confidence and willingness to work with diverse learners. Continuous professional learning also enables in-service teachers to update their knowledge, apply evidence-based strategies, and respond to emerging trends in inclusive education (Sharma et al., 2019).

Globally, inclusive education is linked to the movement toward equitable and quality education for all learners (UNESCO, 2020). In the Philippines, the Department of Education has adopted inclusive education as a strategic priority aligned with global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4, which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education for all (Ballesteros & Corpuz, 2020). DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009, also supports the establishment of child-friendly, gender-sensitive, safe, and motivating learning environments for all learners.

Despite these policy directions, implementation challenges remain. Muego (2016) emphasized that the Philippines continued to face a significant need for stronger inclusive education implementation, while Muego and Echavia (2011) found that some schools lacked enough teachers capable of delivering inclusive education. Booth and Ainscow (2011) define inclusive education as the practical application of inclusive values that reduce exclusion, discrimination, and learning barriers while promoting equality for all learners. Teachers are central to this process because they strongly influence the effectiveness of inclusion in mainstream settings (Corpuz, 2020). The Philippine Department of Education continues to increase learner access regardless of individual needs through collaboration among teachers, learners, families, and communities. Ecoben (2019) also noted that the "Magna Carta for Disabled Persons" guarantees equal access to quality education and skill development opportunities for disadvantaged individuals. The involvement of government-funded teachers is therefore vital to the successful implementation of inclusive education in the country. At the local level, the District of Santa Fe in the Division of Leyte represents a rural educational context where teachers may encounter distinct challenges in implementing inclusive education (DepEd, 2016). Despite national reforms and advocacy, there remains limited localized evidence on the knowledge and readiness of elementary teachers, especially in less urbanized settings (Cabantog & Segumpan, 2021). Existing studies identify gaps in professional training, limited instructional materials, and misconceptions about inclusive practices as barriers to implementation (Al-Zyoud et al., 2020).

The study is conceptually grounded in inclusive education principles that emphasize equality, participation, and the reduction of barriers to learning. Inclusive education requires schools to accommodate learners with diverse needs and to provide opportunities for all children to learn alongside their peers in regular classrooms (Booth and Ainscow, 2011). This perspective views inclusion not merely as the placement of learners with special needs in mainstream classrooms, but as

the development of inclusive values, practices, and support systems that allow all learners to participate meaningfully. The study also draws from the literature emphasizing teacher knowledge, readiness, attitude, and self-efficacy as essential conditions for effective inclusion. Teachers' understanding of inclusive practices and their ability to adapt teaching strategies are critical components of an inclusive learning environment (Sharma & Sokal, 2015). Teacher preparedness significantly influences inclusive education implementation (Loreman, 2017), while teacher competencies, resources, and institutional support affect the sustainability of inclusive practices (Togonu-Bickersteth et al., 2020).

Although inclusive education has been widely promoted through international frameworks and Philippine education policies, there remains limited understanding of how ready elementary teachers are to implement inclusive practices in rural and geographically disadvantaged settings such as the District of Santa Fe, Division of Leyte (DepEd, 2016). Existing literature points to gaps in professional training, resource availability, instructional materials, and teacher misconceptions about inclusion (Al-Zyoud et al., 2020). There is also a scarcity of localized assessments focusing on teachers' knowledge and readiness within the Philippine inclusive education context, particularly in less urbanized communities (Cabantog & Segumpan, 2021). This study therefore aims to assess the level of knowledge and readiness of elementary teachers in the District of Santa Fe, Division of Leyte, regarding inclusive education. Specifically, it seeks to determine the respondents' level of knowledge on inclusive education, their level of readiness, and whether a significant relationship exists between their knowledge and readiness. The study also tests the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between the respondents' level of knowledge and readiness toward inclusive education.

The study directly aligns with SDG 4 – Quality Education, particularly its emphasis on inclusive and equitable quality education for all learners (Ballesteros & Corpuz, 2020). By assessing teachers' knowledge and readiness, the research supports the goal of improving inclusive learning environments where learners with disabilities and diverse needs can participate in mainstream classrooms. The focus on teacher preparedness, professional development, instructional adaptation, and school support contributes to the broader aim of ensuring that no learner is excluded from meaningful educational opportunities. The study also supports educational equity by highlighting the importance of child-friendly, gender-sensitive, safe, and motivating learning environments as promoted in inclusive education policy. Since inclusive education depends on the capacity of schools and teachers to respond to learner diversity, the research contributes to the sustainability of quality education in rural settings by identifying areas where teacher training, resources, and institutional support may be strengthened.

This study contributes primarily to educational sustainability by generating localized evidence on the knowledge and readiness of teachers who are responsible for implementing inclusive education at the elementary level. Strengthening teacher preparedness can help sustain inclusive teaching practices, improve classroom participation, and support learners with disabilities or special educational needs. The study also contributes to institutional sustainability by providing data that may guide administrators, policymakers, and education officials in developing professional development programs, allocating resources, and improving school-based support systems. It further supports community sustainability by encouraging collaboration among schools, parents, learners, and stakeholders in promoting inclusive learning environments. In a broader multidisciplinary sense, the study connects education, social equity, policy implementation, and community development. By identifying teacher strengths and gaps, it provides a basis for interventions that can improve inclusive education practice, strengthen teacher competence, and help ensure that all learners are given fair opportunities to participate, learn, and succeed.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a correlational research design to assess the knowledge and readiness of elementary teachers regarding Inclusive Education in the District of Santa Fe, Division of Leyte. This design was appropriate because it allowed the systematic collection of data to describe existing conditions and examine the relationship between variables without manipulation (Siti Noormi, 2021; Creswell, 2014). Through this approach, the study determined the degree of association between teachers' knowledge and their readiness to implement inclusive education, which is important in understanding how these factors contribute to educational outcomes (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015).

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in the District of Santa Fe, Division of Leyte, which consists of 17 elementary schools and 166 teachers. The district was considered an appropriate setting because it represents a rural educational context where teachers may experience various challenges in implementing inclusive education (DepEd, 2016). Its teaching population provided a relevant context for examining teachers' knowledge and readiness to implement inclusive practices for learners with diverse needs (Sharma et al., 2012). Given the national mandate for inclusive education, assessing the preparedness of teachers in rural areas such as Santa Fe is necessary in determining the professional development and capacity-building support needed to establish equitable learning environments (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Forlin & Sin, 2010).

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were elementary school teachers in the District of Santa Fe, Division of Leyte. A total of 30 teachers participated in the study. This number was based on the recommendation of L.R. Gay (1991), who stated that a minimum of 30 participants is sufficient for small-scale educational research to generate reliable data.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study used multistage cluster sampling to obtain a representative and manageable sample of respondents. The schools were first grouped into clusters based on geographical location, after which a random selection of schools and teachers within the clusters was conducted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This method was appropriate because it addressed the dispersed nature of the population while maintaining randomness and reducing logistical constraints (Etikan & Bala, 2017). It also supported the validity and generalizability of the findings within the context of inclusive education (Zhang et al., 2020).

2.5 Research Instrument

The study used a structured survey questionnaire to assess elementary teachers' knowledge and readiness of Inclusive Education in the District of Santa Fe, Division of Leyte. The instrument consisted of two sections: Teachers' Level of Knowledge of Inclusive Education and Teachers' Level of Readiness for Inclusive Education. Each section contained 20 statements rated using a four-point Likert scale, where 4 represented Strongly Agree, 3 represented Agree, 2 represented Disagree, and 1 represented Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire was adapted from existing studies on Inclusive Education Teachers Knowledge and Readiness by Caro, J., & Rivera, A. (2018) and Jones, R., & Smith, D. (2019), and aligned with the principles of Inclusive Education as outlined by the Department of Education under Republic Act No. 11650 (2022). The validity of the questionnaire was established through expert evaluation to ensure its alignment with inclusive education implementation frameworks and objectives.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Before data collection, the researcher secured informed consent from the respondents and informed them about the nature and purpose of the study. The respondents were assured of the anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary nature of their participation. After obtaining consent, the researcher administered the survey questionnaire in the respondents' respective elementary schools to facilitate data collection. The gathered responses were then consolidated and used as the basis for data interpretation and analysis. The data gathering was conducted from April to May 2025.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The study used statistical procedures to ensure accurate and valid interpretation of the findings. The weighted mean was used to determine the respondents' level of knowledge and readiness for Inclusive Education. This statistical measure was appropriate because it considered the varying significance of response categories and provided a more precise representation of the respondents' perspectives. Through the weighted mean, the study identified the overall trends in teachers' knowledge and preparedness for Inclusive Education. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the relationship between elementary teachers' knowledge and readiness for Inclusive Education. This statistical tool measured the strength and direction of the relationship between the two continuous variables and was suitable for examining how knowledge relates to readiness. A strong positive correlation would indicate that higher levels of knowledge correspond to greater readiness, while a weak or negative correlation would suggest the presence of other factors affecting teachers' preparedness (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). The level of significance was set at 0.05 to test the null hypothesis. Pearson's correlation has been widely used in educational research to examine relationships between training, competency, and implementation outcomes (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2016).

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study observed ethical procedures by securing informed consent from the respondents before data collection. The participants were assured that their identities and responses would remain confidential and that their participation was voluntary. Ethical clearance was also obtained from the relevant institutional review board to ensure compliance with ethical standards in educational research (Resnik, 2020).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Teachers' Knowledge and Readiness Toward Inclusive Education

3.1.1 Level of Knowledge on Inclusive Education

The results showed that elementary teachers generally had a high level of knowledge on inclusive education, with an overall weighted mean of 3.20. The highest-rated indicators reflected teachers' strong understanding of differentiated instruction, their educational preparation for handling students with behavioral difficulties, their access to colleagues for assistance, and their need for sufficient training opportunities from the district supervisor. Teachers also showed high agreement with adapting teaching materials, receiving in-service training, and supporting the placement of learners with special needs in

regular classrooms. However, lower ratings were observed in their knowledge of various disability types and confidence in identifying learners with special educational needs. The lowest-rated item showed disagreement with the statement that regular teachers should not be responsible for teaching children with special needs, indicating that respondents generally accepted their role in educating diverse learners. These findings suggest that teachers in the district have a positive foundation in inclusive education and are generally aware of their responsibility to support learners with diverse needs. This is consistent with De Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert (2011), who observed that teachers with moderate exposure to inclusive education tend to demonstrate positive attitudes and reasonable confidence in teaching students with special educational needs. The results also affirm the importance of institutional support, professional learning, and collaboration, as Sharma, Loreman, and Forlin (2012) emphasized that access to professional learning opportunities strengthens teachers' self-efficacy in applying inclusive strategies. The respondents' disagreement with exclusionary views aligns with the inclusive principle that all educators share responsibility for equitable learning opportunities (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002), and reflects the teacher role described by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011). Nevertheless, the lower confidence in identifying learners with special needs and understanding disability categories indicates the need for more targeted training, since inadequate preparation can limit the effectiveness of inclusive practice (Moberg, Muta, & Takahashi, 2020). This is also supported by Dapudong (2014), who noted that direct experience with learners with special needs can influence teacher confidence and willingness to include them in regular classes. Without adequate competence and experience, teachers may become concerned about inclusion, especially in performance-driven school settings (Lindsay, 2007). Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) also warned that competitive school environments may unintentionally marginalize learners whose needs differ from the norm.

3.1.2 Level of Readiness on Inclusive Education

The results indicated that elementary teachers demonstrated a very high level of readiness for inclusive education, with an overall weighted mean of 3.55. The highest-rated responses showed that teachers were willing to participate in professional development programs and believed that inclusive education benefits all students, not only those with special needs. They also strongly recognized the need for more training, felt able to approach administrators regarding concerns, and reported that their educational background had prepared them to teach students with special needs. Other indicators showed that teachers were encouraged to attend workshops and conferences, were prepared to implement inclusive teaching strategies, and were comfortable collaborating with special education teachers. However, comparatively lower ratings were recorded for access to appropriate resources and perceived administrative support in creating inclusive classrooms. These results indicate that teachers are highly willing and personally prepared to implement inclusive education, but their readiness still depends on stronger institutional support and resource provision. The findings align with global educational trends that view inclusion as essential to quality education and equitable learner access (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020). The high rating for professional development also shows that teachers recognize the continuing need to improve their competencies. This supports Pershina, Shamardina, and Luzhbina (2018), who explained that teacher readiness is shaped by both personal and organizational components, including school leadership and inclusive school culture. The respondents' confidence in collaborating with colleagues and special education professionals also reflects the collaborative nature of inclusive education, which depends on teamwork among teachers, specialists, and administrators (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). However, the lower ratings for resources and administrative support suggest that individual willingness may not be enough to sustain inclusive practices. Pershina et al. (2018) further emphasized that readiness for inclusion should be understood through personality traits, pedagogical competence, and organizational culture, including professional and psychological support that helps teachers respond to learners with learning and health abnormalities.

3.2 Relationship Between Knowledge and Readiness Toward Inclusive Education

The analysis showed a very weak negative correlation between teachers' level of knowledge and level of readiness toward inclusive education, with a Pearson r value of -0.025 and a p -value of 0.465 . Since the p -value was greater than the 0.05 level of significance, the result showed no statistically significant relationship between the two variables. This means that the teachers' level of knowledge on inclusive education was not significantly associated with their readiness to implement inclusive education. Although a negative correlation was hypothesized (H_a), the result did not support the claim because the observed relationship could have occurred by chance and does not represent a reliable pattern in the population (Field, 2013). This finding differs from studies that reported a positive relationship between knowledge and readiness in inclusive education. Sharma and Sokal (2015) found that higher professional knowledge was significantly associated with increased teacher efficacy in inclusive classrooms, while Alnahdi (2020) reported that adequate knowledge of inclusive practices predicted teacher readiness and confidence. The lack of significant relationship in the present study may be influenced by contextual factors such as limited training opportunities, different interpretations of readiness, and varying institutional support across schools (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). It may also suggest that theoretical knowledge does not automatically translate into practical readiness without sustained experience and professional development (Florian & Spratt, 2013). Similarly, increased knowledge alone may not always lead to confidence or readiness to implement inclusive practices (Sharma et al., 2012), because institutional support, access to resources, and professional development experiences may affect whether teachers can apply their knowledge in real classrooms (Loreman, 2010). This reflects the

possible gap between pre-service or continuing education and the actual conditions teachers face in inclusive settings (Forlin et al., 2009). Thus, the findings point to the need for professional development that goes beyond theory and includes experiential learning, mentorship, and exposure to inclusive classroom environments (Sokal & Sharma, 2017).

3.3 Summary of Major Findings

Overall, the findings showed that elementary teachers in the District of Santa Fe, Division of Leyte had a high level of knowledge and a very high level of readiness toward inclusive education. They demonstrated awareness of inclusive principles, willingness to support diverse learners, and openness to professional development and collaboration. However, specific gaps remained in disability identification, knowledge of disability categories, access to resources, and administrative support. The absence of a significant relationship between knowledge and readiness suggests that teacher preparedness for inclusive education is shaped not only by knowledge but also by practical competencies, institutional support, professional experiences, and available resources.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

This study concluded that elementary school teachers in the District of Santa Fe, Division of Leyte generally possessed a high level of knowledge and a very high level of readiness toward the implementation of inclusive education. The respondents recognized the importance of differentiated instruction, collaboration, and institutional support in addressing the needs of diverse learners. However, the findings also showed areas for improvement, particularly in teachers' knowledge of disability categories and their confidence in identifying learners with special educational needs. The correlation analysis revealed no significant relationship between teachers' knowledge and readiness, indicating that knowledge alone does not automatically translate into practical readiness. Overall, the study affirms that while teachers demonstrate positive understanding and willingness to implement inclusive practices, sustained capacity-building and support mechanisms remain necessary to strengthen actual classroom implementation.

Based on the findings, teachers are encouraged to pursue advanced studies, specialized training, and certification programs related to inclusive and special needs education to enhance their professional competence. School administrators and education authorities should provide continuous professional development programs focused on classroom management, differentiated instruction, assessment adaptations, individualized learning strategies, and the identification of learners with special educational needs. Schools should also support the use of flexible instructional approaches, cooperative learning activities, accessible learning materials, and evidence-based interventions that promote meaningful participation among all learners. Educational leaders are encouraged to strengthen collaboration through teamwork, peer mentoring, co-teaching, and joint lesson planning. Future researchers may conduct similar studies involving larger and more diverse teacher populations and may examine other factors affecting readiness, such as administrative support, resource availability, self-efficacy, professional development experiences, and school climate.

The study was limited to elementary school teachers in the District of Santa Fe, Division of Leyte, which means that the findings may not fully represent teachers in other districts, divisions, or educational contexts. The results were also focused only on teachers' knowledge and readiness toward inclusive education and the relationship between these variables. Other possible factors that may influence readiness, such as administrative support, availability of resources, self-efficacy, professional development experiences, and school climate, were identified as areas for future investigation.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study complied with institutional ethical standards in the conduct of educational research. Participation of elementary teacher-respondents was voluntary, and informed consent was secured before data collection. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and were assured that their identities and responses would remain confidential and used only for research purposes. Ethical approval and necessary permissions were obtained prior to the administration of the survey questionnaire. The author declares no conflict of interest in the conduct of the study and acknowledges the contribution of the participating teachers, schools, and concerned education authorities. Copyright ownership of the manuscript remains with the author, and all responsibilities related to the accuracy, originality, and ethical conduct of the research are duly recognized.

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