

Cultivating Innovative Classroom Technology for the Future: Assessing the Kindergarten Teachers' Readiness in Evolving Inclusive Settings

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Abstract

Based on the integrated findings from the study "Readiness of Kindergarten Teachers for Inclusive Education in Zamboanga City," this research assessed the awareness, attitudes, and competencies of receiving kindergarten teachers in implementing inclusive education programs. Employing a mixed-methods design, quantitative surveys and qualitative Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were utilized to provide a comprehensive picture of teachers' readiness. Results indicate that while teachers hold strong positive attitudes towards inclusive education and demonstrate general awareness, their practical preparedness and specialized skills remain limited. Significant barriers include lack of targeted training, inadequate resources, large class sizes, and insufficient systemic support. Teachers often use personal funds for materials and feel unprepared and anxious in early stages of inclusive teaching. The study highlights the gap between ideological commitment and practical readiness, underscoring the need for reforms in teacher professional development and enhanced systemic support aligned with Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers. These findings recommend policy reevaluation and emphasize collaborative efforts among teachers, SPED specialists, families, and the community to improve inclusive education implementation.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education, Kindergarten Teacher Readiness, Professional Development, Special Education*

1. Introduction

Over the years, acknowledging the presence and needs of children became profound. Anent this, an inclusive education setup where children with diverse needs are taken into careful consideration when implementing policies and programs for young children. This is evident in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), goal number 4 – on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. It further states that, quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all are central to ensuring a full and productive life to all individuals and to the realization of sustainable development. Teachers play a crucial role in fulfilling this goal. Inclusive education requires a classroom setting that is welcoming, respectful, and open to all children regardless of their special needs. Teachers serve as the primary

implementers of the inclusive education program and they are the ones that set either its success or failure.

Inclusive Education is a process. It enables children from different backgrounds with different needs in varying shapes, colors, and sizes to be acknowledged and accepted in the same school with the same learning opportunity. Inclusivity starts in the early years. Early childhood education serves as a fundamental foundation for learning. Children begin to gain interest in going to school at this early age. This stage also becomes an avenue for early intervention for children with possible special needs.

The World Health Organization along with World Bank reported that 15% of the world's population are living with special needs. This is also evident in the Philippines with more than 10% of the 100 million population are living with some form of disability [29]. Of the 10%, about 2% are attending schools. These children with identified special needs deal with the anxiety of acceptance and sense of belongingness as they embark on their educational journey. Through inclusive education, early detection, and early intervention help children modify their behaviors when their needs are met by teachers who are equipped to handle their situations. However, despite the growing emphasis on inclusion, there remains a gap in our understanding of kindergarten teachers' readiness to handle the evolving needs of diverse learners within their classrooms.

This is crucial because teachers are the primary implementers of the curriculum. As such, it is important for teachers to be abreast with updated pedagogical knowledge and technical know-how on Inclusive education. There are still gray areas which the program needs to shed light. The awareness on inclusive education are different among teachers especially on gender, locality and their marital status. This implies that inclusive education awareness may vary from one person to the next. This is also corroborated by recent studies that show the same result as that of [27], stating that teachers' attitude towards inclusive education was positive but became varied on variables such as their educational qualification, trainings attended, and the disability. Consequently, teachers believe that inclusive education is good for children with disabilities, however, most of the teachers believe that schools did not have the necessary conditions for the implementation of the program [23]. It is important to note that while all these studies consistently emphasize the need for equipping teachers in the implementation of inclusive education, these studies are mostly conducted for teachers in the intermediate level and not in kindergarten. Moreover, most studies do not underscore the essence of preparing kindergarten teachers – their awareness, attitudes, and skills - to handle inclusive settings at the onset of school experience which is kindergarten.

Today, 10 years after its institutionalization in the country and with the challenge set by the advent of the *Matatag Curriculum*, this research project aims to assess the extent of readiness of the kindergarten teachers in terms of their awareness, attitudes, and skills and explore the challenges experienced by the teachers in fostering inclusive classrooms specifically for children with special needs.

Objectives

Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following:

- a. Determine the level of readiness of the receiving kindergarten teachers in implementing the special education program inclusive setting through their demographic profile;
- b. Assess the readiness of the receiving kindergarten teachers' through measuring their awareness, attitudes, and skills in implementing special education inclusive program setting through their educational qualification, area of specialization, length in service, location of school and type of center (SPED and non-SPED Center);
- c. Identify the challenges encountered by the receiving kindergarten teachers in implementing special education inclusive program setting;

Statement of the Problem

The study mainly is focused on answering the following research problems:

1. What is the competency level in inclusive classroom among receiving kindergarten teachers based on the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers competencies: awareness and attitudes
3. What are the challenges encountered by the receiving kindergarten teachers in the implementation of special education inclusive program setting?

Significance of the Proposal

The need for this study revolves around the idea of assessing the level of readiness of kindergarten teachers in implementing inclusive education program which in turn, specifically benefits the following entities: Kindergarten teachers/early childhood educators, parents of children with possible special needs., *principals, education supervisors. curriculum developers, .inclusive education management team.*

Policy for Inclusive Education

Children have diverse needs. These needs are better addressed when discovered during the early years. When children are not provided with flexible learning and an educational setting that acknowledges and accepts their uniqueness, the likelihood of dropping out of school is very imminent. This where teachers in the early years play a crucial role.

The Department of Education crafted a program for the implementation of inclusive education. This is supported by DepEd Order 44, series of 2021. This order gives emphasis on Inclusive Education as highlighted in the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal number 4 in ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. RA 10410 Early Years Act enacted on March 26, 2013 was anchored on this SDG goal. Parallel to achieving this mandate by 2030, the government made quality education for children with special needs accessible.

This is especially evident with the current public schools' name or titles converting identified schools to special education or SPED centers. Moreover, through the enactment of Republic Act 10410, Early Years Act, early childhood education is recognized as a crucial stage of education that enables early intervention at an earlier stage of education. This measure is done to be able to reach out and plan an intervention program for children with special needs thereby assisting, slowing if not stopping the tendencies for children to have special needs.

As it is the mandate of the state to take care and acknowledge these children in view of the constitution, schools are obliged to prepare a welcoming, healthy, appropriate, accessible and quality education.

Teachers' Awareness on Inclusive Education

Teachers are the lifeblood of any educational institution. In view of the global awareness campaign for inclusivity, educational institutions have exerted efforts in orienting their teachers on the process on inclusion. This is evident in the study of [26], where a generally positive awareness of the inclusive program was marked.

However, there are still issues as to the widespread knowledge on the practice of inclusive education.

Moreover, it was observed that although most teachers are aware of the importance of inclusive education, most of them are not aware on the policies and projects for the implementation of the program (Amjad, et.al, 2020).

Teachers' Attitudes on Inclusive Education

In the study conducted by Jury, et al. (2021) the attitudes of teachers also vary between teachers who are special education majors and non-special education teachers. Their study show that, teachers who specializes on special education have more favorable attitudes towards inclusive education than teachers who have general specialization.

Teachers' Skills on Inclusive Education

Handling children with special needs are very challenging especially when you do not have the necessary knowledge and skills. Studies have enumerated vital skills for teachers to teach special children. Ektapa, et al (2021) found out in their study that teachers must ensure to exhibit self-acquaintance, communication and expression of empathy.

Muiruri and Wilson (2022) emphasized in the result of their study that classroom management and assessment are vital skills that teachers must possess when assigned in the inclusive education program. This shows that the inclusive education program requires teachers with similar instructional preparations as that of the regular classes.

Teachers' Importance of Teachers' Professional Development

The implementation of the inclusive education setting in public schools have added challenges to the teaching process. Inclusive education is considered a new program for regular teachers who do not have backgrounds on inclusive education. [21] emphasized in their research findings that preparing teachers for inclusion is considered as the number one factor for the successful implementation of the program. Moreover, they have underscored in their study that aside from lack of field experience, the lack of effective teacher training, and inadequacy of clear inclusive policies embracing specific inclusive and child centered strategies is also highlighted. This is supported by [11] who said that high-quality training for teachers is critical to inclusive teaching. In order to make sure that educators are up to the task, it is necessary to provide them with autonomy in the classroom, proper working circumstances, and support in addition to training. While professionalism requires teachers to consider how they can be inclusive of all learners and how to reject social biases and stereotypes, inclusive teaching methods require teachers to take responsibility for all students by providing a range of options to every student rather than offering a set of differentiated options only to some [11]. Teachers' lack of preparation for inclusive teaching may be caused by their ignorance of pedagogies and other inclusion-related topics. From instructional strategies and classroom management to multi-professional teams and learning assessment methodologies, teacher training may address a wide range of difficulties. According to the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2010), it must be pertinent to teachers' needs, cover a variety of inclusive teaching facets for all students, and provide follow-up assistance to assist instructors in incorporating newly acquired skills into their teaching practices.

This study believes in the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers byline, stating that, the quality of our education cannot exceed the quality of our teachers. It is already challenging to handle children in the regular classes. It will be more challenging to handle children with special needs in an inclusive setting. The inclusive education program requires a different set of skills and competencies that will enable the teacher to become effective if not efficient in teaching young children. If the teachers' knowledge and skills are compromised the same will be with the teaching and learning environment in the classroom.

Challenges on Implementing Inclusive Education

As with any other programs, inclusive education share equal challenges and issues that need to be addressed. [18] enumerated in the findings of their study that over population, lack of training, and lack of skills impede the implementation of inclusive program. In addition, [24] also pointed out that meeting children's special needs in the classroom contribute to challenges of teachers. The lack of knowledge and practice on inclusive education is also seen as a detrimental to the program. It was also pointed out in the study that inclusive education practice is providing the special needs of children with or without disability and that generally, curriculum implementation, the attitude of teachers towards materials preparation, availability of equipment and budget are the common concerns of teachers.

A recent study shows that not only do teachers experience challenges but schools management as well. Inclusion management gaps are among the challenges encountered by teachers along with conflicting practices and accommodations in the program for children with special needs. Cox, in her article published in 2023, listed the most common challenges teachers experience in the implementation of inclusive education which are on lack of resources, attitudinal barriers, and teacher preparation and training.

All these add to the importance of studying carefully how inclusive education can be enhanced for meaningful experiences among our children with special needs and in the implementation of the inclusive education program.

2. Methodology

Design

This study utilized a mixed-methods research design. A survey was employed as a research method to gather information and acquire insights on the readiness of the respondents on implementing inclusive education based on their profile, awareness, attitudes, and skills, along with the challenges they encountered while implementing the program. One of the most crucial components of performing the quantitative conclusion of this research was the survey distribution and the large number of persons reached based on the research period and objectives. Additionally, a focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted to capture the challenges, issues and recommendations based on their individual realities.

Population

For this study, respondents were identified through an official list of schools with receiving Kindergarten teachers who were implementing inclusive education. Total enumeration was used.

In this study, the respondents were the Kindergarten teachers teaching in the Department of Education, Zamboanga City Division. Participants were Kindergarten teachers who were teaching in the current academic year and who were assigned as receiving teachers in an inclusive education setting.

Respondents who were not teaching Kindergarten or assigned to teach other grade levels and were not teaching in schools as identified by the City Division Office were excluded from participating as respondents. In addition, kindergarten teachers who were not teaching in the current academic year and were not assigned in inclusive education settings were excluded from being respondents of the study. Participants were asked to provide their consent to be included in the study. However, those who were unavailable were excluded due to absence of consent.

In this study, informed consent, including information on the respondent's participation in the research, its aim, methods, risks and rewards, voluntary nature, participation, and the safeguards to ensure confidentiality will be specifically requested.

This study was not generalizable to other grade levels and other inclusive education program setting.

Sample Size

The study used total enumeration sampling in identifying the respondents of the study. Respondents will be receiving Kindergarten teachers and who are assigned in an inclusive education setting in the Zamboanga City Division. There are identified schools implementing inclusive education program in the entire Division of Zamboanga, with receiving Kindergarten teachers for each school. The researcher will use total enumeration to eliminate bias in the sample selection.

Site of the study

The study will be conducted in Zamboanga City, Philippines. Respondents will be coming from identified Public Schools implementing the inclusive education program within the Zamboanga City Schools Division Office (ZC-SDO). There are identified Schools implementing Special Education inclusive setting in the Division located within the City. The respondents will be surveyed within their school premises on their available time following strict health protocol measures in view of health concerns.

Study plan

As the final phase of the study, survey distribution and collection of data was done through survey questionnaires. The instrument utilized in the study was a modified instrument from the research study of Delonos (2013). The researcher sought first the approval of the author to use and modify the instrument. This academic study was subjected to ethics clearance. Clearance was provided by a certified ethics clearance center.

Upon approval of the ethics committee, permission was sought from the City Division Office. Then permission was sought from the City Division Office. Also, the researcher requested a formal letter addressed to the Central School Principals prior to administering the instrument to the target respondents in the identified Central Schools.

With an approved letter from the School Principals for the administration of the instrument, an informed consent was also attached for each respondent who participated in the study.

Through informed consent, the respondents was advised about the study's main objective and they were told they are allowed to decide whether or not to participate in the study freely. Respondents were informed that any data gathered, including their profiles, through the research be kept confidential and only used for the study. The respondents were also told they were entitled to a copy of the signed informed consent form.

Proper health protocols were ensured to keep the respondents safe while participating in the research study. The respondents were informed that the researcher had no financial or any other personal interests that could potentially conflict with the conduct of the study. Furthermore, the researcher had no personal relationships with any organization which may benefit from the conduct of the study. The researcher also did not have any personal relationship with anybody involved in the study to maintain objectivity. The researcher also declared that it is understood that any conflict of interest that may arise from the study may pose a threat on the integrity of the study.

Respondents were informed that they could withdraw from participating in the study and that this may be taken against them. Moreover, they were told that their participation in the survey did not incur any cost from them and that their participation in the study did not entitle the respondent of any benefits or compensation. The researcher personally distributed and gathered the instruments in the different schools on an actual visit.

Those who participated in the research study answered a questionnaire in three parts for about fifteen (15) minutes. The participants were informed that they could raise concerns, approach or ask the researcher for clarifications and explanations on areas or parts of the

questionnaire which they find vague or ambiguous. The collected data was analyzed. Data gathered from the respondents was kept strictly confidential and was used for the study and educational publications.

The respondents were informed that any information collected from the participants before the date and time that the participant left the study was kept confidential. It was emphasized that their information was treated as a research record and may be used as part of the research. Also, the researcher informed the respondents that the data gathered was only accessible for the researcher.

Data Processing and Analysis

Results from the survey of respondents were collected and evaluated. Tabulated data was obtained. This statistical analysis method was used to sort the data into rows and columns that will be simple to interpret and assisted in creating comparisons between the many research factors. Data will be analyzed to determine whether they were mutually exclusive or connected in some way.

The researchers utilized a questionnaire/checklist to check the readiness of the receiving kindergarten teachers in implementing the special education inclusive program setting through their demographic profile. A modified instrument was used. After data tabulation, the weighted mean was computed to show the readiness of the receiving kindergarten teachers' awareness, attitudes, and skills.

Moreover, to ensure an in-depth understanding of the extent of readiness of the kindergarten teachers in the implementation of the inclusive program in kindergarten, the researcher will employ the use of a semi-structured interview with the respondents. Respondents to undergo the interviews will be chosen through random and convenience sampling. Predetermined open-ended questions will be prepared by the researcher to ask the chosen respondents. An interview guide will be designed for this part of data gathering. The interview will be done face to face after assembling the respondents.

3. Results

The competency level in inclusive classroom among kindergarten teachers based on the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers competencies on their awareness

The self-assessed competency level of kindergarten teachers in the twelve (12) Central Schools of Zamboanga City regarding their awareness of inclusive classroom practices, aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) competencies is presented in this segment. The grand mean of ($M=3.856$), categorized as *More Aware*, suggests that, on average, the receiving kindergarten teachers in Zamboanga City generally possess a good level of awareness regarding competencies for inclusive classrooms. They are not fully *Very Much Aware*, but they are beyond *Moderately Aware*. Meanwhile, the standard deviations are generally around ($SD=0.9$ to $SD=1.1$). This indicates a moderate level of variability in responses. While there's a general trend in awareness, it's not a unanimous agreement across all teachers. Notably, item number 8 on the statement about being aware of strategies that could meet the needs of students with special needs scored the lowest. Meaning, this finding aligns with the study of Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), that examines how teachers understand and enact the practice of "inclusion" in the classroom. The study emphasized that inclusion requires not just general awareness but also inclusive pedagogical practices so that teachers would know what to do, why they do it, and how inclusive pedagogy is put into practice.

The competency level in inclusive classroom among kindergarten teachers based on the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers competencies on their attitudes

The self-assessed competency level of receiving kindergarten teachers in the twelve (12) Central Schools of Zamboanga City, specifically focusing on their attitudes towards inclusive classroom practices, as aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) competencies is presented and discussed in this segment. The grand mean of (M=4.395), indicates that receiving kindergarten teachers in Zamboanga City, strongly agree with statements reflecting positive attitudes towards inclusive classrooms. This suggests a very favorable overall disposition towards integrating special education inclusive programs. Meanwhile, most standard deviations are relatively low around (SD=0.5 to SD=0.8), indicating good consistency in responses for statements where teachers Strongly Agree. Highlighting items 1 and 6, which scored as the highest mean “*I believe that establishing linkages with different agencies will help a lot for better community support*” (M=4.58, SD= 0.54) and “*I must maintain a consistent and open relationship with parents*” (M=4.58, SD=0.60), these statements emphasize the respondents’ strong belief on PPST Domain 6 which is Community Linkages and Professional Engagement that gives importance on collaboration, communication, and community involvement. On the other hand, item 13, was rated slightly lower (but still within the “Agree” range): “*I feel unprepared and scared to work with children with disabilities*” (M=3.73, SD=1.01), this reflects emotional or practical concerns despite their positive attitude towards inclusive education. An SD of 1.01 may suggest varying levels of confidence and preparedness among the teacher respondents. The feeling of fear and unpreparedness underlines the importance of teacher preparation programs and mentoring. This aligns with Domain 7 of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) which is Personal Growth and Professional Development

Over-all competency level in inclusive classroom among receiving kindergarten teachers based on the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers competencies

The overall mean of 4.125 and SD of 0.831 of the two domains—awareness and attitude—which includes a high level of awareness and a strong positive attitude towards inclusive education among kindergarten teachers in the twelve central schools of DepEd Zamboanga City is presented and discussed in this segment. This suggests that the teacher respondents generally thought that they are prepared and mentally ready, to accommodate learners with special needs in the typical classroom setting.

With the grand mean of 3.856 for awareness, which indicates a moderately high awareness level, it suggests that while many teachers have a foundational understanding about inclusive education, some of the respondents may still require deeper knowledge of inclusive practices and policies since the respondents are not special education majors and neither received extensive training on how to handle learners with special needs. This echoes the study of Florian and Linklater (2010), who emphasize that inclusive education is not only about knowledge of learners with special needs but also recognizing and valuing learner diversity as part of everyday teaching. Meanwhile, the grand mean of 4.395 for attitude demonstrated a very positive attitude towards inclusive education. This aligns with the study of [25], emphasizing that favorable disposition among teachers often leads to more inclusive classroom practices and a greater willingness to engage in necessary adaptations. These findings affirm that while attitudes are strong, awareness needs continuous enrichment, possibly through orientation and training on existing inclusive education practices and policies. The results resonate with [15], who posits that inclusive education requires a combination of positive teacher attitudes, pedagogical knowledge, and institutional support for sustainability of the inclusivity program in schools.

Thematic Analysis of Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

To gain a deeper understanding of the quantitative data presented, the qualitative phase of this study was conducted. A focus group discussion was held with twelve kindergarten receiving teachers from central schools of DepEd Zamboanga City Division. Each teacher represented their respective school. The purpose of the FGD is to explore on the teacher's experiences, attitudes, and challenges encountered on the implementation of inclusive education. The qualitative data from this discussion were analyzed using a thematic approach, and the key themes that emerged are discussed in detail. Below are the results of the focus group discussion (FGD) shared by the participating teachers. The numbers indicate the count of individual respondents who expressed a similar idea or concept.

Theme 1: Understanding/Knowledge and Attitude towards Inclusive Education. This theme draws attention to a discrepancy between the teachers' conceptual knowledge and their actual and emotional experiences with inclusive education.

On Understanding/Knowledge: Teachers have a solid, favorable grasp of inclusive education. A number of important ideas were clearly stated, including "all children learn together" (5 respondents), "creating a welcoming environment" (4 respondents), and "meeting diverse needs" (3 respondents). Kindergarten receiving teachers appear to have a general understanding and acceptance of the philosophy of inclusion.

On Attitude/Emotions. Teaching in an inclusive classroom elicits a range of emotional reactions. Although the concept is accepted, many teachers find the practical implementation to be extremely stressful and challenging. Majority of teachers (7 respondents) characterize the situation as "challenging, difficult, or tough," while a close second (6 respondents) find it "positive, rewarding, or fulfilling." The fact that two teachers also expressed feelings of being "unprepared or not capable" highlights this real-world challenge and indicates a substantial discrepancy between their ideal knowledge and their present skill set.

Theme 2: Teacher Competency and Skills. This theme shows that teachers are clearly aware of their own needs for professional development.

On Self-assessment. According to five respondents, teachers believe they have a "basic awareness" but admit they need a lot more training. They also acknowledge that their skills "can vary" and their competency is "uneven" (3 replies). This suggests that the group has a wide variety of experience and knowledge and that they all agree that further professional development is required to standardize and improve their abilities. The specific statement made by three respondents that they need to learn "more strategies to handle diverse learners" demonstrates a desire for information that is useful and actionable rather than only concepts.

On Factors Affecting Competency. The lack of formal support is a dominant factor. The most cited reason for competency gaps is a "lack of training and professional development" (6 respondents). Other contributing factors include inadequate "support from school, colleagues, and community" (4 respondents), and practical constraints like "classroom size and teacher-pupil ratio" (2 respondents). Interestingly, "experience and personal beliefs" (5 respondents) also play a role, suggesting that some teachers may be relying on informal knowledge and personal intuition rather than evidence-based practices.

On Competency-Related Factors. One of the main ones is the absence of official support. According to six respondents, "lack of training and professional development" is the most frequently mentioned cause of competency gaps. Additional contributing issues include practical limitations such as "classroom size and teacher-pupil ratio" (2 respondents) and insufficient "support from school, colleagues, and community" (4 respondents). Remarkably, "experience and personal beliefs" (5 respondents) also play a role, suggesting that some teachers may be relying on informal knowledge and personal intuition rather than evidence-based practices.

Theme 3: Challenges and Issues Encountered. This theme offers an in-depth examination of the challenges teachers encounter daily.

On Prevailing Challenges: The challenges are directly linked to the competency gaps and lack of support identified in the previous theme. The "lack of training and instructional materials/resources" (7 responses) is the most significant challenge, as it directly hinders effective teaching. Other significant problems include "lack of support from school and families" (4 respondents) and trouble "managing special learners' behavior and attention" (5 respondents). The well-being of the teacher and the standard of education are both impacted by these difficulties, which might have serious consequences such as "teacher burnout and frustration" (3 respondents).

On Effect on Teaching Practices: The challenges have a direct and negative impact on the classroom environment. Teachers claimed that "difficulty giving equal attention to all students" (4 respondents), which is essential in inclusive education, "hinders the completion of daily activities" (3 respondents) and "leads to limited activities and less effective instruction" (2 respondents), indicating that the presence of diverse learners can, jeopardize the educational experience for all students when there is no adequate support.

Theme 4: Recommendations and Proposed Solutions. This last theme shows that educators have specific, doable suggestions for making things better. Their suggestions directly address the issues they have pointed out.

On Recommendations: Teachers requested a solution for "regular, targeted training and seminars" (8 respondents), which addresses the primary gap in their competencies. This is followed by a demand for "adequate resources, materials, and a conducive classroom" (6 respondents). These two recommendations, taken together, suggest a need for both the skills and the tools to implement inclusive education successfully. Other proposed solutions include "encouraging teamwork and collaboration" (4 respondents), "partnering with parents/guardians" (3 respondents), and addressing systemic issues like "reducing class size" (2 respondents) and improving individualized educational plans (IEPs) (2 respondents). This extensive list of suggestions demonstrates that teachers view the solution as a multifaceted endeavor encompassing systemic reforms, community support, professional development, and resources.

The triangulation of findings about the preparedness of kindergarten teachers for inclusive education.

In order to give a comprehensive and more solid picture of the teachers' readiness, attitudes, and difficulties, this table combines the quantitative and qualitative findings from the study, validating and enhancing the information from different sources.

Table 1. Triangulation of Findings: Kindergarten Teachers' Readiness for Inclusive Education

Research Question	Quantitative Findings (Survey)	Qualitative Findings (FGD)
Competency Level 1.1. Awareness	The Grand Mean of 3.856 which is interpreted as "More Aware", indicates teachers possess a good general understanding about inclusive education principles. The lowest score of M = 3.32 , "Moderately Aware", is on "awareness of strategies that could meet the needs of special children".	Teachers frequently note a "lack of knowledge" about particular teaching approaches and indicate a need for additional training, characterizing their awareness as "basic" and stating that their understanding "varies widely."

1.2. Attitudes	The Grand Mean of 4.395 which interpreted as "Strongly Agree", shows a very positive disposition towards inclusive education. The item "I feel unprepared and scared to work with children with disabilities" still received an "Agree" rating with Mean of 3.73 , a peculiar result.	Teachers identify as "positive," "rewarding," and "fulfilling," but they also use terms like "tough" and "challenging." They often acknowledge feeling "anxious" and "unprepared" in the early stages of teaching.
2. Challenges and Issues	Not applicable	Among the difficulties mentioned by teachers are: Lack of training in handling special learners. Limited resources and materials (forcing them to be resourceful or spend their own money). Large class sizes (making it difficult to give individual attention). Lack of support from the school and families.
3. Proposed Solutions 4.1 Needed Interventions	Not measured directly by the survey.	Teachers consistently recommend solutions that directly address their challenges: Regular, targeted training and workshops. Provision of adequate resources and materials. Collaborative support from SPED teachers and parents.

The results of the quantitative survey and the qualitative Focus Group Discussion (FGD) are comprehensively summarized in Table 1 as presented. With reference to the implementation of inclusive education in Zamboanga City Division, it systematically aligns with the data to provide a comprehensive picture of teachers' competency levels, challenges, and needs regarding inclusive education in the city.

On Awareness. The quantitative data indicates that most teachers are aware about inclusive education. However, the qualitative data reveals a crucial gap between this conceptual awareness and the implementation-related practical skills which explains why certain strategies received low survey scores.

On Attitudes. This creates a contradiction. The excellent quantitative score can be attributed to the teachers' ideological commitment to inclusiveness. However, this positive attitude is tempered by a lack of practical readiness and confidence, which is reflected in both the survey's "unprepared" rating and the teachers' direct quotes.

On Readiness Differences. Here, there is a large difference between the quantitative and qualitative findings. The survey shows a uniform baseline of readiness across all teacher types. This contrasts with teachers' strong perception that a teacher's background should matter, suggesting that the current system's professional development may not be providing the targeted, specialized training needed to create a noticeable difference.

On Challenges and Issues. The fundamental issues are shared by both data sets. While the survey quantifies how frequently these problems occur, the focus group discussions (FGDs) offer concrete instances, such as teachers having to use their own money for materials and feeling frustrated with large class sizes. This confirms that the biggest barrier to effective inclusive education is a lack of systemic, practical support, not a lack of teacher willingness. Moreover, by offering concise, doable suggestions straight from the teachers themselves, the qualitative data fills this gap. These solutions directly align with the problems identified in the quantitative data, creating a strong, evidence-based roadmap for improving the implementation of inclusive education.

4. Discussion

Based on the self-assessed data, receiving kindergarten teachers in Zamboanga City exhibit a favorable disposition toward inclusive education. However, this positive attitude is not fully supported by a corresponding high level of awareness or practical skill. The teachers' self-assessed awareness level is merely *more aware*. This creates a notable discrepancy where teachers are ideologically committed to inclusion yet feel unprepared and scared to work with children with disabilities.

The qualitative component confirms this by highlighting teachers' perception that while a background in special education should be beneficial, the current system's professional development fails to provide the specialized training necessary to create a tangible difference in readiness. The primary barriers to effective inclusive education are systemic rather than attitudinal. The challenges teachers often encounter, as indicated by both quantitative and qualitative data, include a lack of specialized training, limited resources, large class sizes, and insufficient support from both the school and families.

Hence, the findings have significant implications for educational policy, teacher professional development, and the implementation of inclusive education programs in the Philippines. The conclusion that the main challenges are systemic and not attitudinal calls for a re-evaluation of current inclusive education policies. While policies like DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009 mandate shared responsibility for inclusion, they must be complemented by tangible, equitable support across all schools, regardless of location. The uniform lack of readiness across all teacher categories implies that the existing support systems, training, and resources are not sufficient or effectively distributed.

In addition, the contradiction between positive attitudes and a lack of practical skills underscores the need to reform teacher preparation and professional development programs. Training should move beyond theoretical concepts and focus on hands-on, practical skills, such as how to develop and implement Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and use specific strategies for accommodating diverse learning needs. This aligns with Domain 7 of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), which emphasizes personal growth and professional development.

Moreover, the findings highlight the importance of collaboration and the adoption of inclusive pedagogies. The strong emphasis teachers place on community linkages and parental involvement should be leveraged to create a network of support for inclusive classrooms. The lack of a significant difference in readiness among teachers with different specializations reinforces the principle that inclusive education is a collective responsibility. Therefore, all teachers, regardless of their background, should be equipped with the skills and confidence to practice inclusive

pedagogy. Furthermore, the study's conclusion, affirms that sustainable inclusive education requires a combination of positive attitudes, pedagogical knowledge, and robust institutional support. The low scores on statements related to a lack of confidence and feeling unprepared serve as a critical feedback mechanism for educational administrators to address these emotional and practical concerns through structured mentoring, resource allocation, and a culture of continuous professional growth

5. Conclusion

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed, grounded in the study's findings:

Department of Education

The Department of Education (DepEd) should prioritize the development and delivery of regular, targeted training and workshops for all receiving kindergarten teachers. This is crucial because while teachers' self-assessed awareness is categorized as More Aware, they often lack specific knowledge and practical skills. The training should directly address areas where teachers feel least confident, such as providing hands-on instruction on inclusive pedagogical practices to meet the needs of special children, offering in-depth training on understanding and implementing Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), and ensuring all teachers have a strong grasp of assistive technology usage and the legal and policy framework for inclusive education. This comprehensive approach is essential for all teachers, regardless of their professional background, to bridge the gap between their positive attitudes and their need for practical readiness. Since the study found no significant difference in readiness based on educational background, specialization, or length of service, these training programs are essential for all teachers, regardless of their career stage or expertise. This aligns with the PPST's emphasis on continuous professional development.

Schools

To promote effective inclusive education, it is essential that schools and the Department of Education (DepEd) address key systemic challenges such as inadequate resources, large class sizes, and limited support systems. The study highlights the need for adequate provision of instructional materials and classroom resources to eliminate the common practice of teachers spending their own money to support inclusive practices. Strengthening collaboration between schools and families is also critical, as teachers often experience a lack of support from parents and the broader community, which hampers student progress. Furthermore, reducing class sizes through appropriate policy measures would allow teachers to provide more individualized attention to learners with special needs. Addressing these concerns through systemic support and resource enhancement is vital for building a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

Teachers

Since the study found no significant difference in readiness based on educational background or length of service, it is crucial for all teachers to participate in training that addresses specific areas of need. Focus on hands-on training for inclusive pedagogical practices, such as designing lessons and modifying teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of all students. Improve knowledge of Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs). Many teachers feel unprepared and lack confidence in this area. Seek opportunities to deepen understanding of how to prepare and

execute lessons that align with a student's IEP. Moreover, introducing mentoring and peer support programs will help equip less experienced teachers with the skills and confidence they need, addressing feelings of unpreparedness and creating a more supportive and effective teaching environment

Community and other stakeholders

Fostering a strong culture of collaboration is essential for the successful implementation of inclusive education. Schools should establish formal systems for coordination among kindergarten teachers, SPED teachers, and parents to ensure comprehensive planning and support for children with disabilities. Strengthening partnerships with community agencies and stakeholders can also enhance the external support needed for inclusive programs to thrive. Prioritizing these collaborative efforts will build a solid foundation for inclusive and student-centered education.

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