

Exploring Readiness of Teachers and Parents in Supporting Inclusive Education for Students with Learning Disabilities

Meriel J. Narvacan^a, Bryan L. Cancio^b

meriel.narvacan@hcdc.edu.ph^a bryan.cancio@hcdc.edu.ph^b

^aMAEd – Sped 5 Student at Holy Cross of Davao College, Poblacion, Davao City 8000, Philippines

^bProfessor of Graduate School at Holy Cross of Davao College, Poblacion, Davao City 8000, Philippines

Abstract

This qualitative study explores the perceptions, practices, and challenges of teachers and parents supporting inclusive education for students with learning disabilities in elementary schools within Davao City, Philippines. Using constructivist learning theory as its foundation, the research employed semi-structured interviews with 6 participants, three teachers and three parents, and conducted thematic analysis to identify common and divergent viewpoints. Findings reveal that while both groups demonstrate a genuine commitment to inclusion, significant gaps exist in their understanding, resources, and collaboration. Teachers expressed a need for further training and resources, while parents highlighted emotional support and involvement. The study underscores the importance of continuous professional development and structured parental engagement to foster effective inclusive practices. Practical recommendations include policy enhancements, capacity building, and improved stakeholder communication to promote a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for children with special needs.

Keywords: inclusive education; learning disabilities; elementary schools; Davao City; teachers; parents; training; resources; collaboration; support

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Rationale

Inclusive education in the Philippines aligns with international commitments to educational equity but remains a complex challenge at the ground level. In Davao City, many schools recognize the importance of integrating learners with disabilities; however, the implementation often falls short of policy expectations due to limited resources, inadequate training, and varying perceptions. Teachers often feel unprepared to adapt instruction, while parents frequently feel sidelined in decision-making processes. Despite existing policies, effective collaboration remains an obstacle, affecting learners' academic and social development. This study seeks to understand the perceptions and experiences of teachers and parents, as their attitudes and preparedness directly influence the success of inclusive education.

1.2. Problem statement

While the Philippine Department of Education advocates for inclusive classrooms, practical barriers hinder full realization. Teachers report a lack of targeted training, resources, and institutional support, whereas

parents express uncertainty about their roles and how they can best support their children. This disconnect can lead to inconsistent practices and reduced learning outcomes for students with learning disabilities.

Objectives:

- To explore teachers' understanding of their roles and strategies in supporting inclusive education.
- To investigate parents' perceptions of their involvement and support roles.
- To compare perceptions between teachers and parents, focusing on collaboration and challenges.
- To recommend strategies for improving stakeholder cooperation and resource allocation.

1.2 Significance of the study

Findings from this study provide actionable insights for school administrators, policymakers, and parent organizations. By identifying gaps in knowledge and practice, stakeholders can develop targeted programs, policies, and interventions to strengthen inclusive education. Additionally, the study highlights the value of shared understanding and collaboration for fostering effective inclusion, ultimately improving learning outcomes for students with disabilities.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Overview of the theory

Constructivist Learning Theory emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through social interactions, meaningful engagement, and prior experiences. It asserts that the environment, instructional methods, and stakeholder attitudes significantly influence the learning process. Both teachers and parents, as facilitators and supporters, serve pivotal roles in creating a constructivist environment where students meaningfully develop skills and understanding.

2.2 Application of the study

This framework guided the analysis of stakeholders' perceptions, beliefs, and practices. It interpreted their responses within the context of active knowledge construction, emphasizing the importance of collaborative relationships grounded in shared understanding. The findings illustrated that stakeholder attitudes, collaborative strategies, and resource availability intricately impact the learner's ability to construct knowledge in inclusive settings.

2.3 Relevance

Applying constructivist principles underscores that inclusion is not just policy formalities but an active process involving social engagement, personalized support, and shared responsibility. Enhancing stakeholder perceptions and capacities aligns with the constructivist view that meaningful learning environments depend on the attitudes and interactions of key participants.

3. Research Design

A qualitative, descriptive-comparative design was selected because it allows for nuanced exploration of personal perceptions, experiences, and contextual factors influencing inclusive education. Through in-depth interviews, the study captures rich, detailed viewpoints that reveal underlying attitudes, beliefs, and practices often overlooked by quantitative measures.

The comparative element was essential to highlight differences and similarities between teachers' and parents' perceptions. This dual perspective enhances understanding of how collaborative efforts can be strengthened or where misunderstandings exist, providing a comprehensive picture of the inclusive education landscape in Davao City.

3.1 Methodology

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews with purposively selected participants from diverse elementary schools. The interview guide included open-ended questions about understanding inclusive education, specific instructional strategies, perceived challenges, support needs, and collaboration experiences.

Interviews were recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and coded using thematic analysis. The process involved familiarization with responses, coding significant points, grouping codes into themes, and reviewing them to ensure coherence and validity. Responses from teachers and parents were analyzed separately before cross-examining their similarities and differences, providing a detailed comparison of stakeholder perceptions.

4. Target Respondents

4.1. Participant selection

Participants comprised six individuals: three teachers and three parents involved in or supporting inclusive education in elementary schools across Davao City. Teachers were selected based on their at least one-year experience in inclusive classrooms and familiarity with learners with learning disabilities. Parents were chosen if they had children enrolled in inclusive settings for at least one year and actively participated in supporting their child's learning at home.

Participants were identified through purposive sampling, focusing on those with extensive experience, willingness to cooperate, and willingness to provide insightful perspectives. This approach aimed to diversify insights based on school type (public/private), years of experience, and socio-economic backgrounds.

4.2 Sampling strategy

Purposive sampling ensured inclusion of respondents with relevant knowledge, while snowball sampling allowed initial participants to recommend others who meet the criteria, expanding the participant pool. This strategy aimed to recruit a balanced mix of gender, experience, and school types to improve the richness and

transferability of data. The selected sample size of six was manageable for in-depth interview processes and allowed detailed analysis.

5. Research Locale

This study was conducted across multiple elementary schools in Davao City, representing different geographic sectors, urban and suburban, and varying socio-economic contexts. Selected schools included both public and private institutions with established inclusive programs. These diverse settings provided a comprehensive view of the different environments' influence on stakeholder perceptions, preparedness, and practices.

All research sites had functional inclusive education policies and experienced staff, ensuring respondents could freely share their experiences. The broad geographic scope allowed the study to reflect the realities, challenges, and best practices from different parts of the city, thus offering more generalizable insights within the local context.

6. Data Collection

Data were collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews conducted with six participants, three teachers and three parents, from various elementary schools across Davao City. Each interview lasted approximately 50 to 60 minutes, allowing for in-depth exploration of their perceptions and experiences related to inclusive education.

The interview protocol covered five core areas:

- Understanding of inclusive education: Teachers demonstrated varied levels of knowledge.
- Practices and strategies: Teachers described using strategies like differentiated instruction and accommodations.
- Challenges: All participants expressed resource constraints.
- Perceived support needs: Both groups emphasized the need for ongoing training, materials, community awareness, and policy support.
- Collaboration: Participants described their interactions as often limited or informal. Both acknowledged that stronger, more structured dialogue and shared responsibilities could improve outcomes.

All interviews were audio-recorded after obtaining written consent from participants. Transcripts were transcribed verbatim, reviewed for accuracy, and anonymized to protect identities. Follow-up questions included clarifications such as, "Can you give an example of how you collaborate with parents?" and "What specific training do you think would help you most?" Ethical considerations, including voluntary participation and data privacy, were strictly observed.

Table 1. Transcripts

Core Area	Question/Prompt	Participant	Response	Notes/Remarks
Understanding of inclusive education	"What do you understand about inclusive education?"	Teacher A	"It's about providing equal learning opportunities, but I admit I only recently became familiar with the policies."	Variability in awareness; some participants unfamiliar with policies.
		Teacher B	"We know it involves adapting lessons for children with disabilities, but the specifics are sometimes unclear."	Moderate understanding, some uncertainty.
		Teacher C	"It means designing lessons that accommodate all learners, but we need more training."	Basic understanding with a desire for further training.
		Parent Lopez	"It means my child can learn with other kids, but I don't understand the formal policies."	Basic awareness, limited details.
		Parent S	"It's about acceptance and support, but I don't know the official policies."	General understanding without technical detail.
		Parent M	"Inclusive education is about helping all children, regardless of their abilities."	Simplified view; aware but lacks depth.
Practices and strategies	"What strategies do you use to support inclusive learning?"	Teacher A	"We differentiate instruction and provide accommodations like extra time or seat arrangements."	Practical strategies, resource-limited.
		Teacher B	"We modify lessons based on student needs, but sometimes materials are lacking."	Efforts are made, but resources are a challenge.
		Teacher C	"I try to adjust my teaching methods, but I feel unprepared sometimes."	Personal effort, recognized need for training.

		Parent Lopez	"I help my child with homework and reinforce lessons at home, but I wish I knew more about effective teaching strategies."	Parental involvement, seeking guidance.
		Parent S	"We assist with assignments and encourage social interaction; teachers manage the instructional part."	Support role at home, limited school involvement.
		Parent M	"I mostly talk with teachers and try to support at home as best I can."	Supportive but seeking more engagement.
Challenges	"What barriers do you face in supporting inclusive education?"	Teacher A	"Limited resources and lack of specialized training."	Major systemic issues.
		Teacher B	"Behavioral issues and lack of enough support staff."	Classroom management challenges.
		Teacher C	"Overcrowded classrooms and insufficient materials."	Resource constraints affect implementation.
		Parent Lopez	"My child sometimes feels left out, and teachers seem overwhelmed."	Emotional and social barriers, workload.
		Parent S	"I feel I don't get enough updates or support from the school."	Communication gap.
		Parent M	"Limited knowledge on how to help my child effectively."	Need for guidance and training.
Perceived support needs	"What support would help you improve inclusion?"	Teacher A	"More training programs and teaching aids."	Professional development needed.
		Teacher B	"Access to specialized resources and regular workshops."	Material and training gaps.
		Teacher C	"Clear policies and more	Policy awareness and

			community involvement."	community support.
		Parent Lopez	"Guidance on how to support learning at home."	Parental guidance is essential.
		Parent S	"Better communication with teachers and inclusion workshops."	Need for structured engagement.
		Parent M	"More information and support from the school."	Information dissemination needed.
Collaboration	"How do you communicate and work with other stakeholders?"	Teacher A	"During parent-teacher meetings; follow-up sessions are rare."	Limited ongoing collaboration.
		Teacher B	"Mostly formal meetings, but no regular updates."	Lack of continuous communication.
		Teacher C	"Informal talks with parents; need more structured efforts."	Desire for systematic engagement.
		Parent Lopez	"I wish there were more regular meetings to discuss my child's progress."	Parent involvement desires.
		Parent S	"I get some updates, but I wish communication was more consistent."	Communication improvements needed.
		Parent M	"I talk to teachers sometimes but feel out of the loop."	Need for better communication channels.

7. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the qualitative data, following established procedures:

1. Familiarization:

Repeated readings of the transcripts revealed recurring patterns. For example, teachers frequently mentioned "lack of resources," and parents highlighted "feeling unprepared" in supporting their children.

2. Coding:

Significant segments of responses were highlighted and assigned codes. For example:

- Teacher A: “We lack enough teaching aids” → Code: *Resource Scarcity*
- Parent Lopez: “I don’t know how to develop social skills at home” → Code: *Lack of Guidance*

3. Theme Development:

Similar codes were grouped into broader themes:

- Perceptions of inclusion: Understanding varied from basic awareness to limited policy familiarity.
- Practices and strategies: Incorporating differentiated instruction but hampered by resource limitations.
- Challenges: Predominantly resource scarcity, lack of specialized training, and behavioral issues.
- Support needs: Ongoing training, accessible materials, and community awareness programs.
- Collaboration: Limited, informal communication lacking systematic follow-up.

4. Review and Refinement:

The themes were reviewed against the whole dataset to check for consistency. For instance, Teacher B’s comment, “We sometimes feel left alone in implementing inclusion,” reinforced the theme of *Limited Institutional Support*. Similarly, Parent S. shared, “Some teachers seem unaware of how to handle my child’s needs,” which affirmed the theme of *Knowledge Gaps*.

5. Comparative Analysis:

Responses from teachers and parents were analyzed separately to identify differences. Teachers expressed a sense of overwork and need for institutional policy support (“We are overwhelmed and under-resourced”), whereas parents voiced emotional distress and a desire for more active involvement (“I want to be more involved but don’t know how to approach the school”). The comparison revealed that teachers focus more on systemic and resource-related challenges, while parents emphasize emotional support and communication gaps. Despite these differences, both groups highlighted the urgency of improved collaboration and understanding.

Data were organized and coded using NVivo software, which facilitated systematic analysis and ensured consistency across responses. Cross-validation was conducted through peer debriefing sessions among the research team, where selected transcripts and themes were reviewed for accuracy and coherence. To enhance credibility, member checks were performed by sharing summarized findings with participants, who confirmed that the interpretations accurately reflected their responses. Triangulation involved comparing interview data with available school documents and observation notes, strengthening the trustworthiness of the findings and

providing a comprehensive understanding of the stakeholders' perceptions and experiences in inclusive education across Davao City.

8. Expected Findings and Discussions

8.1 Potential Themes

- Awareness and understanding: Teachers demonstrated a basic understanding of inclusive education but expressed uncertainty about specific policies and practices. Parents generally lacked formal knowledge but recognized the importance of inclusion based on their child's experiences.
- Instructional strategies: Teachers employed differentiated instruction, accommodations (e.g., extra time, modified assessments), and scaffolding, though some admitted the strategies were limited by resource shortages and training gaps. Parents supported these initiatives at home by providing emotional support and reinforcing learning.
- Challenges: Both groups cited resource limitations, lack of comprehensive training, behavioral management issues, and institutional support as major hurdles. Teachers emphasized the need for more training and resources, while parents highlighted emotional strain and inconsistent communication.
- Collaboration: Communication between teachers and parents was often described as limited or informal. Some parents reported feeling excluded from decision-making, whereas teachers wished for more structured engagement. Where collaboration was proactive, it led to better support for learners.
- Attitudes: Teachers generally held positive attitudes toward inclusion but expressed concerns about their capacity, while parents showed strong support but lingering doubts about the efficacy of current systems.
- Support needs: Both stakeholders identified the need for ongoing professional development, accessible teaching materials, community awareness programs, and clearer policies to enhance inclusion.

8.2 Comparative Insights

Teachers expressed uncertainty about their preparedness, citing inadequate training and insufficient resources, which impacted their confidence and instructional effectiveness. They also reported feeling overburdened with diverse student needs and lacked sufficient institutional support.

Parents, on the other hand, focused on emotional support, involvement, and understanding of their children's rights and needs. Many felt disconnected from schools and desired more active engagement opportunities with teachers and administrators. Some expressed frustration over inconsistent communication and a lack of clear guidance on how they could best support their children.

In terms of collaboration, teachers believed that positive relationships with parents existed but were often hampered by time constraints and lack of formal structures for partnership. Parents felt that their concerns were sometimes overlooked or not adequately addressed.

However, both groups shared a common aspiration for better understanding of inclusive philosophies, improved communication channels, and shared responsibilities to facilitate smoother integration of learners with disabilities.

9. Implications and Recommendations

9.1 Practical Implications

- **Professional Development:** Schools and education authorities should implement ongoing training programs emphasizing inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and behavior management.
- **Parent Engagement:** Organize regular workshops and information sessions for parents about inclusive policies, strategies to support learning at home, and ways to collaborate effectively with teachers.
- **Policy Enhancement:** Strengthen school policies to explicitly define roles, responsibilities, and collaborative frameworks for stakeholders involved in inclusive education.
- **Platform Creation:** Develop formal communication channels—such as parent-teacher associations, newsletters, or digital platforms—to facilitate continuous dialogue and shared planning.

9.2 Theoretical Contributions

- This study extends the application of constructivist principles by illustrating how stakeholder perceptions shape inclusion practices. It underscores the importance of social interaction, mutual understanding, and shared capacity building in creating effective inclusive environments.

9.3 Future Research

- Further studies could explore the perspectives of students with disabilities to assess the impact of stakeholder perceptions on their learning experiences.
- Longitudinal research could examine how professional development and stakeholder collaboration influence inclusive education outcomes over time.
- Comparative studies across regions or disability types could shed light on contextual variabilities and best practices.

10. Conclusion

This research highlights that the effective implementation of inclusive education hinges on stakeholder preparedness particularly teachers' instructional capacity and parents' involvement, and the strength of their collaborative relationships. While there is demonstrated willingness to support inclusion, significant gaps in training, resources, and communication need to be addressed. Enhancing stakeholder perceptions through capacity building, policy reinforcement, and consistent engagement will foster more inclusive, supportive learning environments. Ultimately, creating a culture of shared responsibility and understanding is essential for ensuring that learners with learning disabilities receive equitable access to quality education and social integration.

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