

Accommodation Without Transformation: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Teacher Attitudes Toward Inclusion and Student Performance in the Philippine Context

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Abstract

Inclusive education has been part of Philippine educational policy for decades, but there is a persistent gap between what the policy says and what actually happens inside classrooms. This study looks at that gap through the lens of language. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), specifically Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, it examines how teacher attitudes toward inclusion are constructed in two texts: DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009, which is the country's main inclusive education policy, and Fajardo et al.'s (2025) phenomenological study of non-SPED teachers in Philippine inclusive classrooms. The analysis focuses on four areas: how the teacher's role is constructed in each text, how students with disabilities are described, how responsibility is distributed between teachers and institutions, and where the two texts contradict each other or leave important things unsaid. The findings show that both texts place the weight of inclusive practice on individual teachers while leaving the institution largely unaccountable. The study argues that changing teacher attitudes toward inclusion requires changing the language of inclusion itself, starting with the policy texts and institutional communications that shape how teachers understand their role.

Keywords: *inclusive education; Critical Discourse Analysis; teacher attitudes; DepEd; student performance; Philippines; Fairclough*

1. Introduction

Inclusive education has been a global priority for decades. Countries around the world have committed to making sure that students with disabilities and diverse learning needs are educated alongside their peers in regular classrooms. This commitment is grounded in international frameworks like the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006). These frameworks are clear: students with disabilities have the right to be part of regular schools and should not be separated from them. And yet, having a policy in place does not automatically mean that inclusion happens the way it is supposed to. Research consistently shows that teacher attitude is the single most important factor in whether inclusive education works or not (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Horne & Timmons, 2009).

Teacher attitudes are not formed in a vacuum. They are shaped by professional training, institutional culture, personal experience, and, importantly, the language teachers encounter in policy documents, curriculum materials, and institutional communications. A teacher who reads about inclusion as a compliance requirement will approach it differently from one who understands it as a human rights commitment. Those different approaches lead to different classroom environments, and different classroom environments lead to different outcomes for students.

In the Philippines, inclusive education has been formalized through several policy instruments, most significantly DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009, which set the framework for Special Education (SPED) in the country. Studies have found, however, that implementation has been uneven and that many Filipino teachers report feeling underprepared, under-resourced, and unsupported when it comes to handling students with diverse learning needs (Muega, 2016). These attitudinal barriers have real consequences for student performance, especially for learners with disabilities who rely on teacher disposition as a gateway to academic participation.

Most existing studies on this topic use surveys or questionnaires, which tend to capture what teachers say they believe rather than what actually drives their behavior. This study takes a different approach. By applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to two Philippine educational texts, DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009 and Fajardo et al.'s (Fajardo et al., 2025) phenomenological study of non-SPED teachers, it examines how the language of inclusion constructs teacher attitudes and what those constructions mean for student performance.

1.1 Research Questions

This study aimed to examine, through Critical Discourse Analysis, the discursive construction of teacher attitudes toward inclusion in selected Philippine educational texts, and to analyze how these constructions relate to student performance outcomes. Specifically, it sought answers to the following:

1. How does DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009 construct the teacher's role in inclusive education, and what assumptions about teacher attitudes are built into that construction?
2. How does Fajardo et al. (2025) frame the experience of inclusive teaching among non-SPED practitioners, and what attitudinal positions does that framing normalize or push aside?
3. What tensions exist between the language of the policy text and the language of the practitioner research, and what do those tensions mean for student performance?
4. How do the dominant discourses of inclusion in both texts distribute responsibility between the state, the teacher, and the student?

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing field of educational discourse studies in Southeast Asia. CDA has not been widely applied to Philippine policy and practitioner texts, and this study shows what that kind of analysis can reveal that survey-based methods cannot. The findings are directly relevant to teacher educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers. If the language of official documents is unintentionally constructing inclusion as a burden rather than a commitment, then any professional development program built on that same language will end up reproducing the problem it is trying to solve.

The study also connects to the sustainable development agenda, speaking to SDG 4 (Quality Education) by examining barriers to inclusive and equitable schooling, SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by analyzing how institutional language privileges some learners over others, and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by asking whether institutional texts are actually delivering on their stated commitments to inclusion.

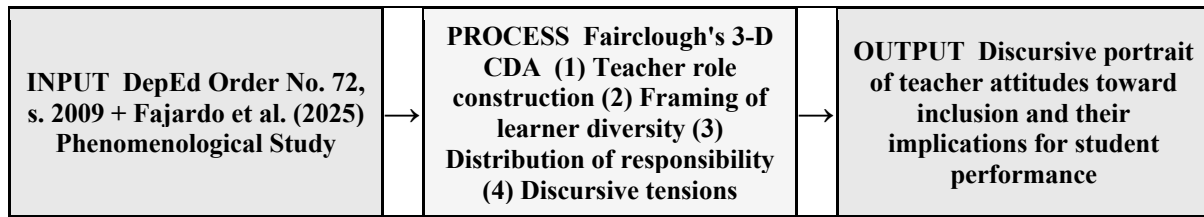
1.3 Theoretical Lens

This study uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), specifically the three-dimensional framework developed by Norman Fairclough ([Fairclough, 1992](#); [Fairclough, 2003](#)). Fairclough's framework treats language not as a neutral carrier of information but as a social practice that both reflects and shapes social relations, identities, and power structures. The framework works on three levels: the textual level, which looks at specific language choices; the discursive practice level, which examines how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed; and the social practice level, which situates texts within broader institutional and ideological contexts.

CDA has been used productively in educational research. [Gee \(2014\)](#) showed how classroom discourse constructs social identities and normalizes institutional hierarchies. [Rogers \(2011\)](#) applied it to literacy policy documents, revealing how technical language can hide ideological commitments. In the Philippine context, [Tupas \(2015\)](#) used discourse analysis to examine how language policy reproduces social inequality. Two concepts are especially important to this study: interdiscursivity, which refers to how texts mix and rework existing discourses, and hegemony, which, following Fairclough's reading of Gramsci, refers to how certain framings become so normalized that they no longer seem like choices at all.

1.4 Paradigm

The study's analytical framework moves from input through process to output. The input consists of the two selected texts: DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009, representing the official institutional voice on inclusion, and Fajardo et al. (2025), representing the voice of practitioners in the field. The analytical process applies Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework across four categories: how the teacher's role is constructed, how students with disabilities are represented, how responsibility is distributed, and where tensions and silences appear within and between the two texts. The output is a picture of how the language of inclusion shapes teacher attitudes and what students with disabilities actually experience in Philippine classrooms.

Fig. 1. Paradigm of the study: analytical flow from text selection through CDA to discursive portrait

Note: Figure generated to represent the study's conceptual framework.

2. Method

This study used Critical Discourse Analysis as both the theoretical framework and the method. CDA is a qualitative research approach that treats discourse as social practice and examines how language builds, maintains, and sometimes challenges social inequality and power relations (Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 2015). The analytical categories were derived from Fairclough's three-dimensional model before analysis began, making the approach deductive and theory-driven.

Policy documents are not neutral descriptions of educational reality; they actively construct it (Ball, 1993). As Wodak and Meyer (2016) point out, CDA is particularly effective at revealing how dominant discourses normalize inequality, which is exactly what this study sets out to examine.

2.1 Materials Used

Two texts were selected for analysis. The first is DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009, formally titled "Inclusive Education as Strategy for Increasing Participation Rate of Children." This document is the Department of Education's main policy framework for inclusive education and has been the operational basis for SPED programs in public schools since it was issued.

The second text is Fajardo et al.'s (2025) study, "The Realities of Inclusive Teaching: Insights from Seasoned Teachers," published in the *British Journal of Special Education* (Fajardo et al., 2025). The study was conducted at Philippine Normal University-Mindanao using descriptive phenomenology and semi-structured interviews with 20 non-SPED teachers who had been teaching in inclusive classrooms for over ten years. Together, the two texts allow for a comparative analysis of how inclusion is framed at both the policy level and the level of lived practice.

3. Results

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis of DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009

3.1.1 Construction of the Teacher's Role

The most important discursive pattern in the policy text is how it positions the teacher in relation to inclusive education. Throughout the document, teacher responsibility is framed around technical compliance rather than professional judgment. Teachers are told to "accommodate," "adapt," and "modify," verbs that position them as adjusters of pre-given systems rather than as rights-affirming educators exercising professional agency. The policy states that "classroom teachers shall make the necessary accommodations to meet the learning needs of all pupils/students," placing the full weight of inclusive practice on the individual teacher while saying nothing specific about what institutional conditions are needed. This reflects what Ainscow (2020) identifies as a recurring problem: the tendency to treat inclusion as a teacher-level challenge rather than a system-level commitment (Jordan et al., 2009).

3.1.2 Framing of Learner Diversity

There is a notable tension in the policy text between how it talks about inclusion at the level of principle and how it talks about inclusion at the level of implementation. At the declarative level, children are described as having the "right to quality basic education." At the operational level, however, students with disabilities are consistently grouped under categorical labels like "children with special needs" and "exceptional children." As Slee (2018) argues, this categorical framing reproduces the logic of special education even within a document that claims to move beyond it.

3.1.3 Distribution of Institutional Responsibility

The obligations assigned to classroom teachers are detailed and specific: they "shall prepare individualized education programs," "shall conduct home visits," and "shall coordinate with parents." The obligations assigned to administrators and the central office are general and vague: they "shall support," "shall provide," and "shall monitor." By being specific at the teacher level and vague at the institutional level, the policy transfers accountability downward while diffusing it upward. The result, as [Barton \(2003\)](#) describes, is the construction of the "responsible teacher," a professional subject expected to carry the weight of systemic failure individually.

3.1.4 Discursive Tensions and Silences

DepEd Order No. 72 contains no substantive discussion of professional development for regular classroom teachers, no benchmarks for teacher training in inclusive practice, and no accountability mechanism for schools or administrators who do not create inclusive environments. Most strikingly, the word "attitude" does not appear in the document at all, despite the research literature consistently identifying teacher attitude as the most critical variable in inclusive education outcomes. This reflects an institutional preference for framing inclusion as a structural and procedural matter rather than an attitudinal one.

3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis of Fajardo et al. (2025)

3.2.1 The Discourse of Frustration

Among the first group of participants in [Fajardo et al. \(2025\)](#), the dominant way of talking about inclusive teaching is through a language of accumulation: inadequate training stacked on scarce resources stacked on excessive workload. The phrase "excessive workload" frames inclusive teaching as an additional quantity of labor rather than a reconception of the teaching role, mirroring the policy text's own construction of inclusion as a set of accommodations added on top of regular practice. Notably, the absence of administrative support is framed not as a policy failure but as a background condition, suggesting that the discourse of individualized teacher responsibility built into DepEd Order No. 72 has been thoroughly internalized.

3.2.2 The Discourse of Enrichment

The second group of participants in [Fajardo et al. \(2025\)](#) tells a different story, organized around empathy, adaptability, and personal fulfillment. The attitudinal shift in this group is traced not to policy incentives or professional development but to direct experience with individual students over time. This confirms what [Forlin \(2010\)](#) and [Sharma et al. \(2012\)](#) have shown: contact experience with students with disabilities is a more powerful driver of positive teacher attitudes than training alone.

3.2.3 Qualified Endorsement and Student Performance

Across both groups, [Fajardo et al. \(2025\)](#) conclude with a qualified endorsement: inclusion is valuable, but only if the conditions are right. Those conditions are routinely absent in Philippine public schools. Research by [Hattie \(2012\)](#) and [Florian and Black-Hawkins \(2011\)](#) consistently shows that teacher-student relationship quality and consistency of high expectations are among the strongest predictors of academic achievement for students with disabilities. A teacher whose commitment to inclusion is contingent on conditions the system does not provide is unlikely to maintain consistent expectations across the school year.

3.2.4 The Structural Echo

Reading the two texts together reveals a consistent pattern: both construct the teacher as the primary and essentially sole agent of inclusion. In neither text does the institution appear as a reliable and accountable partner. The student, in both texts, ends up as the beneficiary or the casualty of an individual teacher's attitude rather than as the rights-bearing subject that the Salamanca Statement envisioned.

Table 1. Summary of CDA Findings Across Both Texts

Analytical Category	DepEd Order No. 72	Fajardo et al. (2025)	Implication for Students
Teacher role construction	Technical compliance; accommodation-focused directives	Split: frustration vs. enrichment; role ambiguity	Inconsistent instructional quality
Framing of learner diversity	Categorical deficit labels ("exceptional children")	Individual students named; disability individualized after contact	Low baseline expectations; attitudinal shift is relational
Distribution of responsibility	Detailed teacher obligations; vague institutional duties	Administrative absence normalized; teacher bears full burden	Burnout; fragile inclusive commitment
Discursive tensions	Rights language vs. compliance language; silence on attitude	Empathy gains vs. inadequate support; qualified endorsement	Performance contingent on untenable teacher conditions

Note: CDA = Critical Discourse Analysis.

4. Discussion

4.1 DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009

The discourse of DepEd Order No. 72 reflects a tension that [Ainscow \(2020\)](#) identifies as structural: systems that declare inclusion as a goal without restructuring resource allocation, class sizes, and professional development will inevitably produce teachers who experience inclusion as a personal burden. By assigning specific obligations to classroom teachers while leaving institutional supports vague, the text builds a discursive architecture that predisposes teachers toward attitudes of resistance or resignation. This is consistent with findings by [Muega \(2016\)](#), whose study of teachers, administrators, and parents in Philippine inclusive schools found that teachers consistently cited insufficient preparation and lack of institutional support as their primary barriers. [Fajardo et al. \(2025\)](#) confirm this pattern: across their 20 participants, the absence of administrative support was not experienced as a policy failure but as a taken-for-granted feature of the landscape.

4.2 Fajardo et al. (2025)

The findings of [Fajardo et al. \(2025\)](#) confirm and deepen what the policy analysis reveals. The two contrasting groups are not just two different personal responses to the same situation. They are two different subject positions produced by the same institutional architecture. This is consistent with [Fairclough's \(2003\)](#) argument that hegemonic discourse works precisely because it does not feel like discourse: teachers in the frustration group describe their situation as the reality of working in a public school, not as a consequence of a policy architecture. Teachers in the enrichment group credit their attitudinal shift to the students themselves, not to the relational work they did to fill a structural vacuum.

If positive attitudes toward inclusion are most reliably produced through sustained contact with individual students, then pre-service and in-service training programs need to be redesigned around structured, supported practicum experiences in inclusive settings. This aligns with the recommendations of [Forlin and Chambers \(2011\)](#) for teacher education in the Asia-Pacific region, and with [Paguirigan \(2020\)](#), who found that Filipino teachers with direct exposure to students with diverse learning needs reported considerably more positive perceptions of inclusive practice than those without.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how inclusive education is talked about in two Philippine educational texts, DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009 and [Fajardo et al. \(2025\)](#), and what those ways of talking mean for teacher attitudes and student performance. Both texts construct inclusion as something individual teachers are responsible for rather than something the institution is responsible for sustaining. The conditions that would make that sustainable appear in the texts as either vague, absent, or conditional.

When the language of inclusion positions teacher commitment as contingent on conditions the system does not reliably provide, students with disabilities end up dependent on individual teacher attitudes rather than on a

consistent institutional commitment. Teacher attitude is one of the strongest mediators of inclusive education outcomes, and this study shows that attitude is not simply a personal disposition. It is constructed and sometimes undermined by the language systems teachers inhabit.

Changing how Filipino teachers feel about inclusion requires changing how inclusion is talked about in the texts that shape their professional world. That means writing policy documents that are as specific about what institutions owe teachers as they are about what teachers owe students, and using language that frames inclusion as a collective commitment rather than an individual accommodation task. The gap between inclusion in policy and inclusion in practice is, at its root, a language problem.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Holy Cross College of Davao for the institutional support provided throughout the development of this study. The authors also extend their appreciation to Reynaldo O. Cuizon, PhD for his valuable contributions and guidance.

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