

Teacher Perceptions of Inclusive Education and Student Engagement in Learning: The Mediating Role of Classroom Management

Laude Grace S. Gorreon^a

^a*laudegrace.gorreon@hcdc.edu.ph*

^a*Graduate School Student, Holy Cross of Davao College*

Abstract

Low students' engagement in learning is critical issue. The mediating role of classroom management on the relationship between teacher perception of inclusive education and student engagement in learning was verified. Predictive research design, total enumeration, survey, and mediation analysis were the methods used. The data from 209 respondents revealed that classroom management fully mediated the relationship between teacher perception of inclusive education and student engagement in learning. This result partly supported the Social Cognitive Theory. Potential mediating variables which may be extracted from qualitative approaches, can be utilized to trace the remaining 42.7% unidentified variance. School administrators may prioritize professional development in instructional management such as differentiated instruction, scaffolding, and inclusive lesson planning to strengthen teaching practices and enhance students' cognitive engagement in inclusive classrooms.

Keywords: *Teacher perceptions of inclusive education, student engagement in learning, mediating role of classroom management*

1. Introduction

Low student engagement has become a persistent issue in education, as many students show decreased participation, weak motivation, and limited classroom interaction, which negatively affect academic performance (Li et al., 2023). Similarly, research shows that low student engagement in learning tasks is associated with reduced academic performance, even among capable students (Meyer et al., 2025). Recent international research highlights that low student engagement in learning remains a significant issue in education (HariRaja et al., 2024).

Redmond et al. found that low student engagement in learning in the United Kingdom reduces motivation, lowers participation, and creates difficulties in adapting to modern teaching approaches. In the same way, in China, low student engagement in learning has also become a concern due to academic pressure and traditional teaching methods. Research shows that students tend to participate less and think less critically in classrooms that depend heavily on lecture-based instruction. (Zhang & McNamara, 2022). Furthermore, in Canada, studies have shown that low students' engagement in learning is influenced by classroom climate and teacher-student relationships, with disengagement often occurring when students feel disconnected or unsupported in learning environments (Willms et al., 2020).

In the Philippines, schools highlight that low student engagement in learning is affected by instructional practices and classroom conditions. When teaching strategies are not interactive or student-centered, learners tend to become passive participants in the learning process (Raguindin, 2021). Additionally, traditional teacher-centered approaches and a lack of interactive learning strategies contribute to low student engagement,

reduced motivation, and reduced participation, particularly among students who often struggle to maintain interest in subjects perceived as repetitive or disconnected from their lived experiences (Aldanese & Limpot, 2023).

The consequence of low student engagement in learning is increased absenteeism and dropout rates. Students who are not emotionally or cognitively connected to school are more likely to skip classes or drop out of school (OECD, 2021). Moreover, low student engagement in learning has serious consequences for academic performance and learning success (Obenza-Tanudtanud & Obenza, 2023). Although this issue is significant, limited public information is available, especially in the local context. This gap highlights the need for further research to develop sustainable solutions, which served as the basis for conducting this study.

Statement of the Problem

This study explored how classroom management mediates the relationship between teachers' perceptions and students' learning engagement. In particular, it sought to achieve the following research objectives:

1. To determine the levels of teachers' perceptions of inclusive education in terms of sentiments, attitudes, and concerns; classroom management in terms of behavioral and instructional management; and students' engagement in learning in terms of affective and cognitive engagement.
2. To determine the significant relationships between teachers' perceptions of classroom management and the students' engagement in learning.
3. To determine the significance of the indirect effect of teachers' perceptions on students' engagement in learning through classroom management.

Hypotheses

This research study had the following null hypotheses tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

- Ho1: Teachers' perceptions of inclusive education and classroom management do not significantly correlate with students' engagement in learning.
- Ho2: The direct effect of teachers' perceptions on inclusive education on students' engagement in learning, controlling classroom management, is not significant.
- Ho3: The indirect effect of teachers' perceptions on students' engagement in learning through classroom management is not significant.
- Ho4: The total effect of teachers' perceptions on students' engagement in learning is not significant.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Albert Bandura developed the Social Cognitive Theory to explain that human development results from the interaction of personal, environmental, and behavioral factors.

In this study, teachers' perceptions of inclusive education, as reflected in their sentiments, attitudes, and concerns, constitute the personal factors outlined in the theory. Classroom management, as indicated by behavioral and instructional management of environmental factors, and students' engagement in learning, as indicated by affective and cognitive engagement, define the human development factors in the theory. However, behavioral factors were excluded from the study, as it focused only on human development, personal, and environmental factors. Hence, this study focused only on the human development, personal, and environmental factors explained in the theory. The researcher excluded the theory's behavior from the study.

2. METHODS

This chapter presents research design, sample and sampling, data gathering technique, data analysis and ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study utilized a predictive research design, which examines relationships among variables to determine whether certain factors can statistically predict an outcome variable, rather than describe or explain it. It was commonly used in educational and social science research to anticipate academic performance, behavior, or engagement based on measurable predictors (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

It was suitable for this study as it was applied when the researcher wanted to use existing data to predict future outcomes and identify important influencing factors (Hair et al., 2022). Its advantages provide data-driven evidence that can guide decision-making. In education, school administrators and teachers can use predictive findings to improve teaching strategies, classroom management, and intervention programs (Fraenkel et al., 2023).

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in secondary schools located in Kabacan, Cotabato, under the Department of Education Region XII, Cotabato Division, Amas, Kidapawan City. The school serves a diverse learner from various cultural backgrounds, including Ilocano, Maguindanaon, Ilonggo, Cebuano, and Indigenous Peoples. With 6 secondary schools and 248 teaching staff, they offer inclusive education across all levels, including specialized programs such as Special Science Classes and Special Program in the Arts in Junior High School, as well as academic and vocational tracks in Senior High School. The chosen locale is appropriate for the study because it reflects the realities of public secondary education in the Philippines, particularly in areas with cultural diversity and varying educational needs. The findings provide valuable insights into student engagement challenges and may help educators develop strategies applicable to similar educational settings nationwide.

Sample and Sampling Technique

This study included a total of 248 teacher-respondents from Grades 7 to 12 in the Department of Education Division of Cotabato in the Municipality of Kabacan. These 248 teachers were assigned to six secondary schools in the Municipality of Kabacan. All participants were regular teachers employed for the 2025–2026 school year, represented various fields of specialization, and were actively teaching.

Given the manageable population size, total enumeration sampling was employed, but only 209 responded to the survey questionnaires. The total enumeration sampling technique involves including all members of the population in the study to ensure complete coverage and eliminate sampling error (Taherdoost, 2022). It also eliminated sampling bias by ensuring that every individual had an equal chance of being selected, a key advantage of probability sampling techniques (Zickar & Keith, 2023).

Data Gathering Technique

The survey technique was used in gathering data. The survey technique is a data-gathering method that involves collecting standardized information from respondents through questionnaires, allowing researchers to

systematically and comparably measure attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics (Check & Schutt, 2021). The survey technique was used when researchers collected standardized data from large numbers of respondents using structured questionnaires to measure opinions, behaviors, or characteristics (Fowler, 2022). It was advantageous in research because it enabled efficient and systematic data collection from a large number of respondents (Dillman et al., 2022).

In this study, three adapted and modified survey questionnaires were used. The first instrument, teachers' perception of inclusive education, was adapted from Forlin et al. (2011) and comprised 15 items designed to assess sentiments, attitudes, and concerns about inclusive education, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.877. Secondly, classroom management was adapted from Aliakbari and Heidarzadi (2015), comprising 23 items and yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.943. Lastly, the students' engagement in learning was adapted from Pappa (2014) and comprised 22 items, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.944.

Data Analysis

In this study, the data analysis techniques used were descriptive, correlation, and mediation analyses. Descriptive analysis is used to summarize and present data in a meaningful form through numerical measures such as mean, frequency, and percentage, allowing researchers to clearly describe the characteristics of the dataset (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2021). The researchers used the mean and standard deviation as statistical tools. Moreover, correlation analysis is used to assess the strength and direction of relationships between variables, helping researchers determine whether changes in one variable are associated with changes in another (Schober et al., 2021). The Pearson product-moment correlation statistical tool was used. Lastly, mediation analysis is used to determine whether the effect of an independent variable on an outcome variable is transmitted through a mediating variable (Hayes, 2022). The beta-estimate statistical tool was used to estimate the direct, indirect, and total effects of the determinant.

The following served as the basis for interpreting the descriptive levels of the variables.

<i>Scale</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Teachers' Perception On Inclusive Education</i>	<i>Classroom Management</i>	<i>Students' Engagement in Learning</i>
1.0 – 1.74	Very Low	Very Poor	Very Poor	Very Low
1.75 – 2.49	Low	Poor	Poor	Low
2.50 – 3.24	High	Good	Good	High
3.25 – 4.00	Very High	Very Good	Very Good	Very High

Standard Deviation Value and Interpretation

<i>Range</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
SD ≤ 0.50	Highly Consistent Responses	Strong and uniform perception
SD = 0.51 – 1.00	Moderately Consistent Responses	Acceptable consistency
SD = 1.01 – 1.50	Low Consistency Responses	Differing views or experiences
SD > 1.50	Very Low Consistency Responses	High variability and lack of consensus

In this study, the significance of the correlation was tested at 0.05 confidence level. The following was the standard measure for the interpretation scale of r -value, the following scheme was used:

<i>Computed r</i>	<i>Descriptive Interpretation</i>
+/- 1.00	Perfect correlation
Between +/- 0.75 – +/- 0.99	High correlation
Between +/- 0.51 – +/- 0.74	Moderately high correlation
Between +/- 0.31 – +/- 0.50	Moderately low correlation
Between +/- 0.01 – +/- 0.30	Low correlation
0.0	No correlation

The standard measure for the interpretation of the strength of the mediation was as follows:

<i>Proportion Mediated</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
< 0.20	Weak Mediation
0.20 – 0.50	Moderate Mediation
> 0.50	Strong Mediation

Ethical Consideration

This study adhered to strict ethical research standards to safeguard the rights, dignity, and privacy of all participants. Before data collection, the researchers obtained formal approval from the appropriate authorities, including the Schools Division Superintendent and school principals, to conduct the study in the selected institutions. Participation was voluntary, and all respondents provided informed consent. Prior to participation, the researchers provided a written explanation of participants' right to withdraw at any time and of the measures implemented to ensure confidentiality. Throughout the study, the researchers maintained the integrity and privacy of participants. The researcher sought approval from the Society for Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE) of Holy Cross of Davao College. After the approval was obtained, the Dean endorsed the researcher, and a formal request was submitted to the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) of the Department of Education - Cotabato Division, Amas, Kidapawan City, to obtain authorization to conduct the study within the division. The researcher finally obtained permission to conduct the research and immediately administered the research instruments to the target respondents.

3. RESULTS

Presented in this chapter are the results of the descriptive, correlation, and mediation analyses. The summary of findings is also presented.

Descriptive Results

Shown in Table 1 are the descriptive results of the study. Contained in the table are the variables involved, namely, teachers' perceptions of inclusive education, classroom management, and students' engagement in learning and the number of samples, standard deviation, mean and descriptive level specifically corresponding with each of the variables.

Specifically, the table shows that teachers' perceptions of inclusive Education yielded a mean score of 3.46, indicating very high levels. This indicates that the respondents are very good at their teachers' perceptions. All indicators obtained a very high level. The standard deviation of 0.373 is described as highly consistent, indicating strong and uniform perception. Furthermore, classroom management reached a very high level, with an overall mean of 3.47, indicating very high performance. This denotes that classroom management for the respondents is very good. All indicators obtained a very high level. The standard deviation of 0.396, which is considered highly consistent, indicates strong, uniform performance. Finally, the students' engagement in learning variable had a mean of 3.56, indicating very high engagement. This indicates that the respondent's student engagement in learning is very good. The standard deviation of 0.369 indicated a strong, uniform perception.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics (n = 209)

Variables	Standard Deviation	Mean	Descriptive Level
Teachers' perceptions of Inclusive Education	0.373	3.46	Very High
<i>Sentiments</i>	<i>0.38</i>	<i>3.68</i>	<i>Very High</i>
<i>Attitude</i>	<i>0.49</i>	<i>3.27</i>	<i>Very High</i>
<i>Concerns</i>	<i>0.37</i>	<i>3.42</i>	<i>Very High</i>
Classroom Management	0.396	3.46	Very High
<i>Behavioral Management</i>	<i>0.39</i>	<i>3.49</i>	<i>Very High</i>
<i>Instructional Management</i>	<i>0.40</i>	<i>3.47</i>	<i>Very High</i>
Students' Engagement in Learning	0.369	3.56	Very High
<i>Affective Engagement</i>	<i>0.39</i>	<i>3.63</i>	<i>Very High</i>
<i>Cognitive Engagement</i>	<i>0.41</i>	<i>3.49</i>	<i>Very High</i>

The finding revealed that all of the variables were at very high levels, indicating that the respondents generally felt that teacher maintain a highly positive outlook and strong emotional readiness toward implementing inclusive practices in their classrooms, highly proficient in maintaining order and delivering lessons effectively in an inclusive setting and that students were not only emotionally connected to their learning environment but were also highly invested in the mental processes required for their academic tasks.

Correlation Result

Table 2 is a correlation table. It presents the predictors and criterion variables. It shows the r-value, the decision on the null hypothesis, and the corresponding interpretation.

Table 2: Correlational Table ($n = 209$)

Variables	Students' Engagements in Learning			
	r-value	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Teachers' Perception of Inclusive Education	0.517	0.000	Reject H_0	Moderately high and significant correlation
Classroom Management	0.750	0.000	Reject H_0	High and significant correlation

Level of Significance: 0.05, Decision Rule: Reject H_0 if $p < 0.05$

Specifically, the table shows that the correlation between teacher perception of inclusive Education and student engagement in learning obtained a p-value of 0.000, which is lower than the 0.05 level of significance (Arsenal, N. et.al., 2021); thus, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating a statistically significant result (Ronan, L. et al., al. 2022). The correlation is statistically significant. The r-value of 0.517 indicates a moderately high, significant correlation between teachers' perceptions of inclusive Education and students' engagement in learning. This finding implies that as teachers' perceptions of inclusive education increase, students' learning engagement also increases. Similarly, classroom management yielded a p-value of 0.000, which is also lower than the 0.05 level of significance. The obtained value exceeded the threshold; hence, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that the findings are statistically significant. The r-value of 0.750 reflects a strong positive correlation between classroom management and student engagement in learning. This suggests that both factors play a crucial role in enhancing student participation and commitment. Moreover, teachers' perceptions of inclusive education and classroom management both showed positive relationships with students' learning engagement, indicating that higher levels of these factors are associated with greater engagement.

Mediation Results

Table 4 is a mediation table. It contains the path/effect, estimate Beta, standard error, z-value, p-value, decision on null hypothesis and corresponding interpretation.

Table 3. Mediation Table ($N = 209$)

Label	Path / Effect	Estimate (B)	SE	Z-value	p-value	Decision on H_0	Interpretation
A	Teachers' Perception → Classroom Management	0.616	0.10	6.17	0.000	Reject H_0	Significant
B	Classroom Management → Student Engagement	0.633	0.64	9.92	0.000	Reject H_0	Significant
c'	Teachers' Perception → Student Engagement (Direct Effect)	0.122	0.66	1.83	0.67	Fail to Reject H_0	Non-Significant
a × b	Teachers' Perception (Mediation)	0.390	0.053	7.34	0.000	Reject H_0	Significant
(a × b) - c	Classroom Management → Teachers' Perception → Student Engagement (Total Effect)	0.512	0.095	5.39	0.000	Reject H_0	Significant

Level of Significance: 0.05

Decision Rule: Reject H_0 if $p < 0.05$

The table specifically shows that the direct effect of classroom management on student engagement in learning, controlling for classroom management, yielded an estimating Beta of 0.122. The corresponding p-value of 0.067 which is greater than 0.05 level of significance; hence, the null hypothesis was accepted. This indicates that the direct effect of classroom management on student engagement in learning, even when the classroom management is controlled, is not significant. In contrast, the indirect effect of teacher perception of inclusive education on student engagement in learning through classroom management obtained a Beta of 0.390. The corresponding p-value of 0.000, which is lower than the 0.05 level of significance leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicates that the indirect effect of teacher perception of inclusive education on the criterion through the mediator is significant. Lastly, the total effect of teacher perception of inclusive education on student engagement in learning resulted in an estimated Beta of 0.512. The corresponding p-value is 0.000. Such value is below the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

The results showed that the determinant variable had a significant direct effect and non-significant direct effect on the criterion variable through the mediating variable, resulting in a significant total effect. Based on the findings, the mediation was interpreted as full mediation because only the indirect pathway is significant, indicating that classroom management fully explained the relationship between teacher perception of inclusive education and student engagement in learning.

4. DISCUSSION

Discussed in this chapter are the findings of the study. Also, the conclusion and recommendation are presented.

Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusive Education and Students' Engagement in Learning Correlation

The finding, teacher perception of inclusive education has significant high level of correlation with student engagement in learning supports the previous study stating that teachers' ability to effectively engage in an inclusive classroom is influenced by the breadth and depth of student's needs and multiple factors related to the teachers' formal education, professional development, hands-on experience, and perceptions of personal confidence exhibited in the inclusion setting who emphasized by Johnstone (2022). Moreover, the current finding corroborates with Santos (2024) that teachers' positive perceptions of inclusive education are significantly associated with improved instructional practices and supportive classroom environments, which are key predictors of student engagement in learning. On the other hand, this finding contrasts the study of Piliotas et al. (2026), who found out that educators' perspectives on inclusive education are predominantly favorable towards the concept of inclusion; yet, their implementation is inconsistent due to disparities in training, resources, and classroom requirements. Notably, the study of Piliotas had 150 samples, whereas the current finding was generated from 209 samples.

Classroom Management and Student Engagement in Learning Correlation

The finding that classroom management significant moderately high positive correlation with student engagement in learning affirms prior study stating that classroom management is significantly associated with student engagement in learning and suggests that when teachers implement effective classroom management strategies such as establishing clear rules, maintaining structured routines, and fostering positive teacher–student relationships students are more likely to participate actively in learning activities, remain attentive, and demonstrate higher levels of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Cambay & Paglinawan, 2024). Likewise, this current finding affirms Ye (2024), who emphasized that a well-structured and supportive classroom environment shaped by effective management practices plays a significant role in enhancing student engagement in learning. On the contrary, this current finding contradicts Paynandos et al. (2025), who found that variations in classroom management approaches did not significantly influence students' engagement in learning. While Paynandos et al. utilized 100 respondents, the present study was established using 209 respondents.

Teachers Perception of Inclusive Education and Student Engagement as Mediated by Classroom Management

The finding of this study asserting that classroom management mediate the correlation between teachers' perception of inclusive education and student engagement in learning affirms the study of Zhang et al. (2024)

highlighting that teachers' strategies influence student engagement through students' perception of teachers' emotional engagement, classroom management. Moreover, the current finding supports the idea that classroom environments and student engagement in learning as supported by Aldanese et al. (2023), who found out that classroom management fully mediated the relationship between differentiated instruction and student engagement in learning. In contrast, the current finding questions Gao et al. (2024), who found out that teacher support enhances engagement through alternative mediators such as learner grit and intended effort, further suggesting that classroom management is not always a necessary explanatory pathway.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is concluded that classroom management fully mediates the correlation between teacher perception of inclusive education and student engagement in learning. This assertion partly supports the Social Cognitive Theory, explaining that human development results from the interaction of personal, environmental, and behavioral factors.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, the following are recommended:

1. Further studies may explore other mediating variables to account the remaining 42.7% variance in the strength of the mediation on the correlation between teacher perception of inclusive education and student engagement in learning.
2. Qualitative research may be conducted to identify emerging themes that could serve as potential mediators, the sub-themes may be used later as indicators of the mediating variable.
3. The school administrators may prioritize professional development programs focusing on instructional management strategies, such as differentiated instruction, scaffolding techniques, and inclusive lesson planning. Strengthening teachers' instructional management skills will directly enhance student engagement, particularly cognitive engagement, in inclusive classrooms.

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