

Public School Experiences on Teaching Learners with Difficulties: Inclusive Education Program

Esteban Lope N. Tamayo ¹
Esteban.tamayo@deped.gov.ph / 0009-0005-9624-3537

1 – Abra State Institute of Sciences and Technology

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Abstract

Inclusive education is a cornerstone of the Philippine educational system, ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all learners, including those with disabilities and learning difficulties. However, public schools continue to face challenges in effectively identifying and supporting these learners. This study explored the experiences of public schools in teaching learners with difficulties in the La Paz, Danglas, and Lagayan (LaDaLaga) Districts of Abra to develop an Inclusive Education Enhancement Program. An exploratory sequential mixed-methods design was employed involving 45 respondents, consisting of 41 teachers and 4 school heads. Qualitative data were collected through interviews, while quantitative data were gathered using a validated researcher-modified questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, weighted mean, frequency, percentage, and correlation analysis were utilized to analyze the data. The findings revealed that Teaching Instruction obtained the highest implementation rating (mean = 3.68), followed by Instructional Support (3.39), Monitoring and Evaluation (3.30), and Physical Resources Support (2.67). Major challenges included limited access to professional specialists (mean = 4.02), leadership and resource management concerns (3.93), and insufficient teacher training in differentiated instruction (3.53). Qualitative findings identified five major themes: inadequate professional training, insufficient instructional resources, lack of diagnostic and specialist support, teachers' commitment through differentiated instruction and peer support, and the need for stronger collaboration among schools, families, and community stakeholders. Identification practices were generally Practiced (mean = 3.72), while support practices were Moderately Practiced (mean = 3.20). Teaching experience showed inverse relationships with challenges in teaching instruction ($r = -0.575$), instructional support ($r = -0.528$), physical resources support ($r = -0.412$), and monitoring and evaluation ($r = -0.585$), indicating that more experienced educators encountered fewer implementation difficulties. The study concludes that strengthening teacher competencies, specialist support, instructional resources, and collaborative partnerships is essential to improving inclusive education. The proposed **I.N.C.L.U.D.E. Program** provides an evidence-based framework to enhance inclusive practices and support equitable educational opportunities for learners with difficulties in public schools.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education, Learners with Difficulties, Public Schools, Teacher Experiences, School Leadership, Educational Inclusion, LaDaLaga Districts*

Introduction

Inclusive education is a fundamental principle of quality education that ensures all learners, regardless of their abilities or learning needs, have equitable access to meaningful learning opportunities. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has strengthened its commitment to inclusive education through policies and programs that promote learner diversity and equal participation. However, despite these initiatives, many public schools continue to encounter challenges in effectively identifying and supporting learners with difficulties due to limited teacher preparation, inadequate instructional resources, insufficient specialist support, and the absence of systematic monitoring mechanisms. These challenges are more evident in resource-constrained schools, where educators often depend on classroom observations and informal assessments to address learners' needs.

Studies on inclusive education consistently emphasize that teacher competence, school leadership, stakeholder collaboration, differentiated instruction, and adequate learning resources are critical to successful implementation. Research also highlights that continuous professional development and access to multidisciplinary support improve teachers' confidence and effectiveness in handling diverse learners. Nevertheless, gaps remain in translating inclusive education policies into classroom practice, particularly in rural public schools where resources and specialized services are limited. These findings underscore the need for localized research that examines educators' experiences and informs context-specific interventions.

This study focused on the experiences of teachers and school heads in teaching learners with difficulties in the La Paz, Danglas, and Lagayan (LaDaLaga) Districts of Abra. Specifically, it sought to determine educators' experiences in teaching instruction, instructional support, physical resources support, and monitoring and evaluation; identify the challenges encountered in implementing inclusive education; examine the practices employed in identifying and supporting learners with difficulties; determine the relationship between selected demographic variables and educators' experiences; and develop an Inclusive Education Enhancement Program based on the findings.

The study was guided by the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between the respondents' demographic characteristics and their experiences in implementing inclusive education. By identifying the strengths, challenges, and support needs of educators, the study provides empirical evidence for enhancing teacher capacity, strengthening school support systems, and improving inclusive education practices. The findings serve as a basis for developing a sustainable Inclusive Education Enhancement Program that will assist school leaders, teachers, and policymakers in promoting equitable, responsive, and quality education for learners with difficulties in public schools.

Methodology

This study employed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods research design to examine the experiences of public schools in teaching learners with difficulties and to develop an Inclusive Education Enhancement Program. The qualitative phase was conducted first to explore the experiences, challenges, and practices of teachers and school heads in implementing inclusive education. The findings from this phase informed the development of the quantitative survey instrument, which was subsequently used to validate and quantify the identified themes.

The study involved 45 respondents from public schools in the La Paz, Danglas, and Lagayan (LaDaLaga) Districts of Abra, consisting of 41 teachers and 4 school heads. Respondents were selected using stratified sampling to ensure adequate representation of teachers and school administrators actively involved in the implementation of inclusive education. For the qualitative phase, participants were purposively selected based on their experiences in handling learners with difficulties.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed and validated questionnaire based on the themes that emerged from the qualitative inquiry and supported by relevant literature on inclusive education. The instrument utilized a five-point Likert scale to assess educators' experiences, practices, and challenges in the areas of teaching instruction, instructional support, physical resources support, and monitoring and evaluation. Semi-structured interview guides were also used to obtain in-depth qualitative data regarding participants' experiences and recommendations.

The research was conducted following the approval of the concerned educational authorities and observance of ethical research standards. After securing informed consent, qualitative interviews were conducted, transcribed, coded, and analyzed to identify emerging themes. The validated survey questionnaire was then administered to the respondents to gather quantitative data.

Data analysis involved the integration of qualitative and quantitative techniques. Qualitative responses were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, weighted mean, and descriptive statistics to describe respondents' experiences and practices. Correlation analysis was employed to determine the relationships between selected demographic variables and educators' experiences in implementing inclusive education. The integration of both qualitative and quantitative findings provided a comprehensive understanding of inclusive education practices and served as the basis for the proposed I.N.C.L.U.D.E. (Inclusive Nurturing and Capacity-Building for Learners' Universal Development and Empowerment) Program.

Results and Discussion

The study examined the experiences of teachers and school heads in implementing inclusive education for learners with difficulties in the La Paz, Danglas, and Lagayan (LaDaLaga) Districts of Abra. Quantitative findings indicated that Teaching Instruction received the highest implementation rating (mean = 3.68), followed by Instructional Support (mean = 3.39), Monitoring and Evaluation (mean = 3.30), and Physical Resources Support (mean = 2.67), suggesting that while instructional practices were generally evident, resource limitations remained a major concern. Identification practices were rated Practiced (mean = 3.72), whereas learner support practices were only Moderately Practiced (mean = 3.20). The most pressing challenges included limited access to professional specialists (mean = 4.02), leadership and resource management issues (mean = 3.93), and inadequate teacher training in differentiated instruction (mean = 3.53). Correlation analysis revealed inverse relationships between teaching experience and implementation challenges in teaching instruction ($r = -0.575$), instructional support ($r = -0.528$), physical resources support ($r = -0.412$), and monitoring and evaluation ($r = -0.585$), indicating that more experienced educators encountered fewer difficulties.

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the four dimensions of inclusive education implementation, while Figure 1 illustrates the comparative mean scores of these domains. Table 2 presents the major implementation challenges, and Table 3 summarizes the correlation analysis between teaching experience and the identified challenges.

The qualitative findings complemented the quantitative results by identifying five major themes: inadequate professional training, insufficient instructional and physical resources, limited access to medical and educational specialists, teachers' commitment through differentiated instruction and peer support, and the need for stronger collaboration among schools, parents, and community stakeholders. These findings support previous studies emphasizing that teacher competence, leadership support, adequate resources, and stakeholder collaboration are critical determinants of successful inclusive education. The results also align with literature indicating that experienced teachers possess greater instructional adaptability and confidence in addressing diverse learner needs.

The findings have important implications for educational practice and policy. They highlight the need to strengthen continuous professional development, increase investments in assistive technologies and instructional resources, improve access to multidisciplinary specialists, and establish stronger school-community partnerships. These results also provide empirical support for implementing the proposed I.N.C.L.U.D.E. Program as a sustainable framework for enhancing inclusive education in public schools.

The study was limited to public schools within the LaDaLaga Districts of Abra and involved a relatively small sample of teachers and school heads. Consequently, the findings may not be generalizable to other educational settings. Future studies may include larger and more diverse samples and assess the long-term effectiveness of inclusive education interventions across different regions.

Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of teachers and school heads in teaching learners with difficulties in public schools within the La Paz, Danglas, and Lagayan (LaDaLaga) Districts of Abra using an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design. The findings revealed that educators demonstrated positive practices in teaching instruction but encountered challenges related to instructional support, physical resources, monitoring and evaluation, teacher training, and access to professional specialists. Qualitative findings highlighted teachers' commitment to inclusive education through differentiated instruction, peer support, and collaboration with parents despite limited resources. Moreover, teaching experience was associated with fewer implementation challenges, emphasizing the importance of professional growth in delivering inclusive education.

The study concludes that strengthening inclusive education requires sustained investments in teacher capacity building, specialized support services, instructional resources, and collaborative partnerships among schools, families, communities, and relevant agencies. The proposed I.N.C.L.U.D.E. (Inclusive Nurturing and Capacity-Building for Learners' Universal Development and Empowerment) Program provides an evidence-based framework for enhancing inclusive practices and improving support for learners with difficulties.

It is recommended that the Department of Education and school leaders expand professional development opportunities, improve access to specialists and assistive technologies, and strengthen monitoring systems to ensure effective implementation of inclusive education. Future studies should involve larger and more diverse samples, include the perspectives of learners and parents, and evaluate the long-term effectiveness of inclusive education interventions across various educational settings to further strengthen policies and practices.

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