



ADVANCING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: ADDRESSING CHALLENGES AND PROMOTING ACTION IN PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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HIGHLIGHTS

- ✓ Teachers and school heads demonstrate a proficient understanding of inclusive education principles, practices, and strategies, but struggle to translate theory into practice.
- ✓ Public elementary schools exhibit a fair level of conformity (partially satisfy the minimum standards) to inclusive education provisions, compelling improvements across all areas especially in physical facilities.
- ✓ Serious challenges persist in implementing inclusive education, including resource constraints, inadequate training, and limited community involvement.
- ✓ The study identifies six key themes for successful inclusive education: personalized learning support, inclusive learning environments, community engagement, diverse teaching strategies, supportive learning environments, and effective assessment.



INTRODUCTION

In recent years, inclusive education has emerged as a focal approach in the field of education, emphasizing the importance of equitable access to quality learning experiences for all learners, regardless of their diverse needs and backgrounds. It values diversity and addresses varied needs through flexible teaching, curriculum adjustments, and supportive school culture, aiming for educational equity, social inclusion, and holistic learner development (UNESCO, 2009). Despite the increasing recognition and advocacy, for inclusive education in public elementary schools and the increase of research on inclusive education, several gaps remain unsettled which suggest a conduct of an evaluation of the implementation of inclusive education. For instance, teachers and school heads still lack understanding of how to implement inclusive education practices and strategies in actual in which evaluation research is recommended. This is highlighted by a study by Boot and Capper (2017) which found that while teachers acknowledge the importance of inclusive education, they often lack the knowledge and understanding of how to implement it effectively. Briones and Venzon (2018) also recommended that further research is needed to assess the preparedness of Filipino teachers to implement inclusive education practices, including their knowledge, attitudes and skills.

In addition, teacher and school heads are encountering serious problems in implementing inclusive education. Slee (2018) cited that teachers and school heads encounter serious degrees of difficulty in addressing the diverse needs of learners within inclusive classrooms. Similar results were found by Briones and Venzon (2018) that teachers and school heads encountered significant challenges and difficulties in implementing inclusive education in the Philippines.

INFORMING POLICY & PRACTICE

Moreover, schools are not able to attain a high level or full conformity in implementing inclusive education due to several factors. UNESCO (2019) highlights that while progress has been made in promoting inclusive education globally, many countries still face challenges in achieving full conformity with inclusive education principles. The findings are similar with the results of the study of Geron and Guevara (2018) which revealed that despite policy mandates and initiatives, schools in the Philippines struggled to achieve a high level of conformity in implementing inclusive education practices.

Several research agree that teachers and school heads encounter challenges in employing inclusive practice and strategies like: they are not able to implement inclusive practices and strategies due to lack of the necessary training and professional development opportunities to effectively implement inclusive practices (Slee, 2018); lack resources and support services to meet the diverse needs of learners (Briones and Venzon, 2018); resistance to change and have negative attitudes towards inclusive education (Geron and Guevara, 2018); ineffective collaboration and communication among stakeholders, including teachers, school heads, parents, and support staff (Rouse and Florian, 2019); and policy constraints and administrative burdens in implementing inclusive practices and strategies within bureaucratic systems (Fernandez, 2019).

This study evaluated the level of knowledge of the teachers and school heads on inclusive education principles, practices and strategies; degree of seriousness of the problems encountered by the teachers and school heads in implementing inclusive education in terms of curriculum, instruction, assessment and community involvement; level of conformity of the public elementary schools in implementing inclusive education based on the provisions of inclusive education in terms of educational programs and activities, human resources, and physical facilities; and determine the inclusive education practices that are being employed in public elementary schools.



METHODOLOGY

This study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative descriptive research design. In a combined research approach, researchers utilize both quantitative and qualitative methods within a single study. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, ocular inspections, and observations providing insights into the current state of inclusive education implementation. The respondents of the study were 492 public elementary school teachers with at least three years of teaching experience and school heads with at least three years of administrative experience in the School Divisions of Benguet for School Year 2023-2024. The 492 respondents were 425 teachers and 69 school heads who participated in answering the questionnaires. From the total number of respondents, 80 participants, which consisted of 58 teachers and 22 school heads, were able to answer the interview guide. The respondents were selected using the Stratified Cluster-Random Sampling. In this study, the Division of Benguet was clustered into four horizontal strata to ensure representation from different parts of the locale. Within each stratum, one district was selected creating clusters. Finally, the respondents were randomly selected from the selected districts.

FINDINGS

The study revealed that teachers and school heads possess a proficient understanding of inclusive education principles. However, a gap exists between theoretical knowledge and practical application. In addition, schools demonstrate a fair level of conformity to inclusive education provisions, they struggle with resource constraints, inadequate training, and infrastructure deficiencies, particularly in physical facilities. Moreover, serious challenges persist in curriculum development, instructional practices, assessment methods, and community involvement, calling for comprehensive reforms and targeted interventions. Furthermore, schools employ diverse practices and strategies such as personalized learning support, creating inclusive learning environments, community engagement and collaboration, teaching and learning strategies, supportive learning environment, and assessment and progress monitoring, but they encounter challenges in execution.

The research identified several challenges hindering effective implementation, including:

- Limited resources for inclusive education materials and support services.
- Inadequate professional development opportunities for teachers.
- Resistance to change and negative attitudes towards inclusive education.
- Ineffective collaboration between schools, families, and communities.

The study also identified six key themes employed by schools for successful inclusive education:

- **Personalized Learning Support:** Tailoring instruction and support to meet individual needs.
- **Creating Inclusive Learning Environments:** Fostering welcoming and accessible classrooms.
- **Community Engagement and Collaboration:** Partnering with families and communities for support.
- **Teaching and Learning Strategies:** Employing diverse teaching methods to cater to all learners.
- **Supportive Learning Environment:** Promoting positive reinforcement and student engagement.
- **Assessment and Progress Monitoring:** Utilizing effective assessment practices to track progress and identify areas of improvement.



Figure 1. Six Key Themes



CALL TO ACTION



Educational leaders may provide comprehensive training sessions for teachers for them to acquire foundational knowledge and skills related to inclusive education focused on translating theoretical knowledge into practical application.



The government may allocate resources for inclusive education materials, support services, and infrastructure improvements.



Education leaders may establish community forums and group discussions involving teachers, school heads, families, and community members that can facilitate open dialogue, knowledge sharing, and collaboration, fostering a collective effort towards promoting inclusive attitudes and practices within schools and communities.



Revisiting existing policies or developing new ones to align with inclusive education principles and goals, and establishing clear guidelines for implementation may be conducted by policy makers.



Schools may conduct targeted advocacy campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of inclusive education.



MAJOR REFERENCES

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ABOUT THE MATERIAL

Informing Policy and Practice is published quarterly by the Institute of Social Research and Development and R & E Publications Office of Benguet State University. It synthesizes findings from research and development activities, or presents results of quick survey and opinion poll on social, economic, and policy issues and concerns affecting the Cordillera region. It also distills the key messages and provides recommendations for the information and consideration of relevant stakeholders and policymakers.

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