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Teachers' Preparedness and Instructional Experiences in the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Public Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study explored teachers' preparedness and instructional experiences in the implementation of inclusive education in public secondary schools. Specifically, the study examined teachers' readiness in handling diverse learners, instructional challenges encountered in inclusive classrooms, and pedagogical practices utilized to support inclusive learning environments. Data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews with twelve purposively selected secondary school teachers from public schools implementing inclusive education. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework was employed in analyzing the data. Findings revealed that teachers demonstrated varying levels of preparedness in inclusive education, particularly in differentiated instruction, classroom management, learner assessment, and handling learners with diverse educational needs. Participants also identified challenges related to limited training, insufficient instructional resources, large class sizes, and inadequate institutional support. Despite these concerns, teachers demonstrated instructional adaptability through differentiated teaching, peer-assisted learning, collaborative classroom practices, contextualized instruction, and emotional support strategies. Participants emphasized the importance of professional development, inclusive pedagogical training, and collaborative stakeholder support in strengthening inclusive education practices. The findings underscore the importance of responsive instructional approaches and institutional support systems in promoting effective inclusive education implementation in public secondary schools.

Keywords: inclusive education, teacher preparedness, instructional experiences, differentiated instruction, public secondary schools, qualitative research, inclusive pedagogy

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Introduction

Inclusive education has become a major educational priority aimed at ensuring equitable access, participation, and learning opportunities for all learners regardless of ability, background, or educational needs. In the Philippine educational system, inclusive education promotes the integration of learners with diverse learning needs into mainstream classrooms while ensuring supportive and learner-centered instructional practices. Public secondary school teachers therefore play a critical role in implementing inclusive education by addressing classroom diversity and responding to learners' varying academic, behavioral, emotional, and social needs.

However, implementing inclusive education presents significant instructional and institutional challenges. Teachers frequently encounter difficulties related to differentiated instruction, classroom management, learner assessment, individualized support, and limited instructional resources. Large class sizes, insufficient training, and lack of specialized support services further complicate the implementation of inclusive practices in public secondary schools. Consequently, teachers are expected to demonstrate instructional flexibility, pedagogical adaptability, and emotional commitment in supporting diverse learners within inclusive classroom environments.

Teacher preparedness significantly influences the effectiveness of inclusive education implementation. Preparedness includes teachers' knowledge, skills, attitudes, instructional competence, and confidence in handling learners with varying educational needs. Teachers who possess adequate training and institutional support are more capable of implementing responsive and inclusive pedagogical practices that promote participation and meaningful learning experiences.

Although inclusive education has been widely promoted in educational policy and practice, limited qualitative studies explore teachers' lived instructional experiences and perceptions regarding preparedness in implementing inclusive education in public secondary schools. Understanding teachers' experiences is essential in identifying instructional realities, institutional concerns, and pedagogical practices that shape inclusive learning environments.

This study explored teachers' preparedness and instructional experiences in the implementation of inclusive education in public secondary schools. Specifically, it examined teachers' readiness, instructional challenges, and adaptive pedagogical practices in supporting inclusive classroom instruction.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to:

1. Explore teachers' preparedness in implementing inclusive education;
2. Examine instructional challenges encountered in inclusive classrooms; and
3. Identify pedagogical practices utilized in supporting diverse learners in public secondary schools.



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Review of Related Literature

Inclusive education emphasizes equitable participation and meaningful learning opportunities for learners with diverse educational needs. According to Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), inclusive pedagogy involves responsive instructional practices that support participation, collaboration, and differentiated learning within mainstream classrooms. Teachers are expected to adapt instructional strategies according to learners' varying abilities, interests, and educational needs.

Teacher preparedness significantly influences inclusive classroom effectiveness. Sharma and Sokal (2020) emphasized that teachers with adequate inclusive education training demonstrate greater confidence and instructional competence in handling diverse learners. However, insufficient professional preparation and limited institutional support remain among the major barriers affecting inclusive education implementation.

Research by Ainscow (2020) further highlighted that successful inclusive education requires collaborative school culture, supportive leadership, differentiated instruction, and learner-centered pedagogies. Teachers who employ flexible instructional approaches and positive classroom relationships are more capable of supporting diverse learner participation and engagement.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Inclusive Pedagogy Theory by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), which emphasizes responsive teaching practices that support participation and learning among diverse learners within mainstream classrooms.

The study also utilized Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory (1978), which explains that learning occurs through social interaction, scaffolding, and collaborative engagement. These theories guided the exploration of teachers' preparedness and instructional practices in inclusive education settings.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore teachers' lived experiences, preparedness, and instructional realities in the implementation of inclusive education in public secondary schools. Phenomenology was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to examine how teachers perceived, interpreted, and gave meaning to their experiences in handling diverse learners within inclusive classroom settings. The design allowed for an in-depth understanding of the instructional, emotional, and professional dimensions of inclusive teaching as experienced by teachers in their natural educational environments.

The study was conducted in selected public secondary schools implementing inclusive education programs. These schools were chosen because they accommodate learners with diverse educational, behavioral, and learning needs within mainstream classrooms. The research locale provided a relevant



context for examining teachers' preparedness and classroom experiences in implementing inclusive pedagogical practices in public secondary education.

The participants of the study consisted of twelve purposively selected secondary school teachers handling inclusive classrooms. The inclusion criteria required participants to: (1) currently teach in public secondary schools implementing inclusive education; (2) have at least three years of teaching experience in inclusive classroom settings; and (3) be willing to share their instructional experiences and perspectives regarding inclusive education implementation. The participants represented different subject areas and grade levels to ensure diversity of instructional experiences and perspectives.

Data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interview guide focused on teachers' preparedness, instructional challenges, classroom management experiences, differentiated instructional practices, learner participation, and perceptions regarding inclusive education implementation. The semi-structured interview format enabled participants to freely express their experiences while allowing the researcher to probe deeper into relevant issues and emerging themes. Interviews were conducted in a conducive and confidential setting to encourage openness and authenticity in participants' responses.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study. Prior to data gathering, informed consent was secured from all participants after explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by withholding participants' identities and using pseudonyms in the presentation of findings. Participants were likewise assured that all gathered information would be used solely for academic and research purposes.

The gathered data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and carefully reviewed multiple times to ensure familiarity with the data. Initial codes were generated and categorized according to recurring meanings, patterns, and significant statements related to teachers' preparedness and instructional experiences in inclusive education. These codes were subsequently organized into broader themes and subthemes that reflected the shared experiences and perspectives of the participants.

To establish the trustworthiness and rigor of the study, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability measures were employed. Member checking was conducted to validate the accuracy of participants' responses and interpretations. Triangulation of responses and careful comparison of emerging themes were also undertaken to ensure consistency and reliability of findings. Audit trails were maintained to document the research process, coding procedures, and analytical decisions. Thick description was likewise utilized to provide detailed contextual accounts of participants' experiences, thereby strengthening the transferability and authenticity of the study's findings.



Results and Findings

Theme 1: Experiencing Instructional Challenges in Managing Diverse Learner Needs

Participants consistently described significant instructional difficulties in addressing the diverse academic, behavioral, emotional, and social needs of learners within inclusive classrooms. Teachers explained that learners demonstrated varying levels of comprehension, learning styles, classroom participation, and support requirements, making instructional delivery more demanding and complex. Participants emphasized that managing inclusive classrooms required continuous adjustment of instructional pacing, classroom activities, and learner support strategies.

One participant shared:

“Mahirap minsan pagsabay-sabayin ang needs ng learners lalo na kapag iba-iba ang learning difficulties nila.”

Another teacher explained:

“Kailangan talagang mag-adjust sa pacing at activities dahil hindi pare-pareho ang learners.”

Participants also highlighted challenges related to balancing instructional attention among learners with varying needs while maintaining classroom participation and lesson continuity. Some teachers observed that learners with special educational needs required additional guidance and monitoring, which sometimes affected the pacing of classroom instruction.

One participant remarked:

“May pagkakataon na mas kailangan ng attention ng ibang learners kaya naapektuhan ang pacing ng klase.”

Another teacher stated:

“Mahirap minsan i-manage ang classroom kapag iba-iba ang level ng understanding at behavior ng learners.”

Teachers further described difficulties associated with classroom management, behavioral concerns, and sustaining learner engagement among students with varying abilities and emotional needs. Participants emphasized that inclusive classrooms required patience, flexibility, and continuous instructional adaptation to ensure meaningful participation among all learners.

The findings suggest that classroom diversity significantly affects instructional delivery, learner engagement, and classroom management in inclusive education settings. These findings support Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), who emphasized that inclusive classrooms require responsive pedagogical practices capable of addressing learner diversity and participation. Similarly, Ainscow (2020) noted that inclusive education implementation becomes more complex when teachers handle learners with varying educational and behavioral needs within mainstream classroom environments.

Theme 2: Demonstrating Instructional Adaptability Through Differentiated and Learner-Centered



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Practices

Teachers emphasized the importance of differentiated instruction, scaffolded activities, peer-assisted learning, flexible assessment strategies, and learner-centered pedagogical approaches in supporting diverse learners within inclusive classrooms. Participants explained that modifying instructional materials, simplifying activities, and adapting classroom tasks according to learners' abilities improved participation, comprehension, and classroom interaction.

One participant stated:

“Nag-aadjust kami ng activities depende sa capability ng learners.”

Another teacher remarked:

“Malaking tulong ang peer support at collaborative activities sa inclusive classrooms.”

Participants described using visual aids, simplified instructions, contextualized examples, hands-on activities, and collaborative group work to accommodate learners' varying comprehension levels and learning styles. Teachers observed that differentiated instructional practices encouraged learners to participate more actively and confidently during classroom discussions and activities.

One participant shared:

“Kapag visual at interactive ang activities, mas naiintindihan ng learners ang lesson.”

Another teacher explained:

“Kailangan minsan hatiin ang activities ayon sa level ng learners para mas makasabay sila.”

Participants further highlighted the effectiveness of peer-assisted learning and collaborative classroom activities in promoting learner participation and social interaction. Teachers explained that learners became more engaged and comfortable when they received support from classmates during classroom tasks.

One participant remarked:

“Nakakatulong ang peer tutoring kasi mas nagiging cooperative at supportive ang learners.”

The findings highlight the importance of learner-centered, differentiated, and collaborative pedagogical approaches in inclusive education. These findings align with Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, which emphasizes social interaction and scaffolding in promoting meaningful learning experiences. Similarly, Sharma and Sokal (2020) emphasized that differentiated instruction and collaborative pedagogies improve learner participation and instructional responsiveness in inclusive classrooms. Research by Tomlinson (2019) further revealed that flexible and differentiated teaching practices effectively support learners with diverse educational needs.

Theme 3: Navigating Limited Training and Institutional Support

Participants identified insufficient professional training, limited access to specialized instructional materials, inadequate institutional support, and lack of inclusive education resources as major barriers



affecting inclusive education implementation. Teachers expressed concerns regarding their limited preparation in handling learners with special educational needs, behavioral concerns, and differentiated instructional planning.

One participant shared:

“Kulang pa rin ang training namin sa handling ng learners with special educational needs.”

Another teacher explained:

“Minsan limitado ang resources kaya kailangan talagang mag-improvise.”

Participants emphasized that although they were willing to support inclusive education, many felt inadequately prepared due to limited seminars, insufficient professional development opportunities, and lack of specialized instructional guidance. Teachers explained that inclusive classrooms required additional competencies related to differentiated assessment, behavior management, and individualized learner support.

One participant remarked:

“Kailangan pa talaga namin ng mas maraming training tungkol sa inclusive strategies at classroom management.”

Another teacher stated:

“Mahirap minsan dahil wala kaming sapat na materials para sa learners with different needs.”

Participants further highlighted the importance of collaboration among teachers, school administrators, parents, guidance personnel, and specialists in strengthening inclusive classroom support systems. Teachers believed that inclusive education implementation becomes more effective when institutional support and collaborative partnerships are strengthened.

One participant explained:

“Importante ang support ng administration at parents para mas matulungan ang learners.”

The findings suggest that institutional support, instructional resources, and continuous professional development are essential in strengthening teacher preparedness for inclusive education. These findings support Ainscow (2020), who emphasized that inclusive education requires collaborative school culture, institutional support, and teacher capacity-building initiatives. Similarly, Sharma and Sokal (2020) found that teachers who receive inclusive education training demonstrate greater confidence and instructional competence in handling diverse learners. Research by UNESCO (2020) further highlighted that inadequate training and insufficient educational resources remain among the major barriers affecting inclusive education implementation globally.

Theme 4: Strengthening Inclusive Learning Through Empathy and Positive Classroom Relationships

Teachers emphasized that patience, empathy, emotional support, respect, and positive classroom relationships significantly influenced learner participation, confidence, and classroom inclusivity.



Participants viewed inclusive teaching not only as an instructional responsibility but also as a relational and emotional process requiring understanding, acceptance, and commitment to learner welfare.

One participant remarked:

“Kailangan talagang maintindihan at tanggapin ang differences ng bawat learner.”

Another teacher explained:

“Kapag supportive ang classroom environment, mas nagiging confident ang learners.”

Participants described creating safe and supportive classroom environments where learners felt accepted, respected, and encouraged to participate despite their differences and learning challenges. Teachers observed that positive emotional support improved learner confidence, classroom interaction, and willingness to engage in learning activities.

One participant shared:

“Kapag ramdam ng learners na accepted sila, mas nagiging active sila sa klase.”

Another teacher remarked:

“Importante talaga ang patience at encouragement lalo na sa learners na may struggles.”

Teachers further explained that respectful classroom interactions and empathetic communication helped reduce learners' anxiety and strengthened positive peer relationships in inclusive classrooms. Participants viewed emotional encouragement and learner support as essential in promoting meaningful participation and inclusive learning experiences.

The findings indicate that empathetic and supportive classroom practices strengthen inclusive learning environments, learner confidence, and classroom participation. These findings align with Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), who emphasized that inclusive pedagogy involves fostering participation, belongingness, and positive learning relationships among all learners. Similarly, Gay (2018) highlighted that supportive and culturally responsive classroom environments significantly improve learner engagement, emotional well-being, and academic participation. Research by Jennings and Greenberg (2019) further revealed that emotionally supportive classroom climates positively influence learner confidence, motivation, and social inclusion in diverse educational settings.

Discussion

The findings revealed that teachers in public secondary schools encounter significant instructional challenges in implementing inclusive education, particularly in addressing diverse learner needs, classroom management concerns, and limited institutional support. Despite these difficulties, teachers demonstrated pedagogical adaptability through differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, flexible assessment strategies, and learner-centered teaching approaches.

Participants further emphasized that inclusive education requires not only instructional competence but also empathy, patience, and positive classroom relationships. Teachers' emotional commitment and



willingness to adapt instructional practices contributed significantly to creating supportive and inclusive learning environments.

The study also highlights the importance of continuous professional development, institutional support systems, and collaborative stakeholder engagement in strengthening inclusive education implementation in public secondary schools.

Conclusion

The study concluded that teachers in public secondary schools demonstrate varying levels of preparedness in implementing inclusive education. Teachers encounter instructional challenges related to classroom diversity, differentiated instruction, limited resources, and insufficient professional preparation. These concerns significantly influence inclusive classroom practices and instructional effectiveness.

Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated resilience and instructional adaptability through differentiated teaching, scaffolded instruction, collaborative learning activities, and learner-centered pedagogical practices. Teachers also emphasized the importance of empathy, flexibility, and supportive classroom relationships in promoting inclusive learning environments.

The findings underscore the importance of strengthened teacher training, institutional support, and inclusive pedagogical development programs in improving inclusive education implementation in public secondary schools.

Implications of the Study

The findings may guide school administrators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in strengthening teacher preparedness programs, inclusive pedagogy training, and institutional support systems for inclusive education implementation. Schools may further enhance collaborative support mechanisms involving teachers, parents, guidance personnel, and specialists in supporting diverse learners.

The study also highlights the importance of differentiated and learner-centered instructional practices in promoting equitable and meaningful learning experiences in inclusive classrooms. Future studies may further examine the long-term impact of inclusive pedagogical practices on learner participation and academic outcomes across diverse educational settings.

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