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## Assessment of the implementation of inclusive education for students with special needs in a higher education institution

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### Abstract

Inclusive education has been reinforced by various learning institutions to accommodate the needs of students with special needs. However, it is barely advanced in higher education. Hence, this study was conducted to determine the teachers' and students' perceived level of the implementation of inclusive education, the challenges of teachers in handling students with special needs, and their strategies for addressing those challenges. This study utilized mixed-method research using quantitative and qualitative research designs. The study revealed that the perceived levels of implementation of all areas of inclusive education are perceived by the teachers as less implemented while moderately implemented for the students. The study found a significant difference in the level of implementation of every area of inclusive education perceived by the teachers and students. Therefore, an action plan should be implemented to improve inclusive education.

**Keywords:** Assessment of inclusive education, higher education institution, special education, students with special needs, Davao city

### Introduction

Inclusive education has been advocated by many educators and scholars in special education worldwide. Because of the evident need to aid students with special needs, legal laws have been passed to advance this cause. Over the years, many efforts have been conducted as more problems in special education emerged that are necessary to address. However, still, many areas still need improvement since implementation is the main struggle of many institutions. Though many efforts have been made to implement inclusive education in early childhood, primary, and secondary education, higher education has been given lesser attention since the focus is mostly on primary education.

Inclusive education refers to an approach in education that values all types of students, allows them to join in any school events and activities freely, and treats them as members of the community. The guiding principle directs a school to accommodate students with special needs and include them in the institution. Inclusive education strives to address the problems and concerns in the services that a school offers to those students with disabilities and provide them the education they need, same with students without disabilities. A learning institution that practices inclusive education is flexible in various aspects such as management, student services, curriculum, teaching methods, etc. (Messiou, 2017) [7]. These aspects would not be inclusive without the effort of the learning institutions to implement inclusive education and the support of the stakeholders, linkages, and other units in society. However, many parts of the world are still battling problems in inclusive education since various problems are still unaddressed.

Hauwadhanasuk, Karnas, and Zhuang (2018) [3] conducted a study entitled Inclusive Education Plans and Practices in China, Thailand, and Turkey. The study investigated the transitional process of special education programs, services, and public policy toward inclusive education in China, Thailand, and Turkey. It is aimed at presenting the development of educational plans that promote inclusive education and practices in these countries. Furthermore, the results revealed that the special education development and its process in China, Thailand, and Turkey are challenging. China is concerned about reforming special education. Progressive special education projects are being implemented all around

Thailand. In order to promote inclusion for people with impairments, Thailand's and Turkey's educational regulations have addressed issues with children with disabilities.

In the Philippines, three dimensions of inclusive education were explored in order to advance its causes, namely engaging environment, affirming environment, and nurturing environment. An engaging environment refers to high-standard learning outcomes, the promotion of collaboration and communication among learners, teachers, and parents, and their involvement in decision-making. An affirming environment pertains to the practice of expressive and receptive languages, absorption of the sacred practices of class members, and celebration of diversity. Lastly, a nurturing environment can be attained by interdependence and caring for the needs of everyone. These elements are linked together and cannot be taken separately (Raguindin, Custodio, & Bulusan, 2021) [10].

In Davao City, the government has been doing various programs to support the special education needs of students in the city, such as constructing the Davao City Special Needs Intervention Center for Children to accommodate free occupational, physical, and speech therapy, special education, and related early intervention classes and transition programs for children with special needs. The building of the center for children with special needs is under the Presidential Decree or the Child and Youth Welfare Code, which states the right treatment and accommodation that should be given to them (Cudis, 2022) [2].

However, as observed by the researcher, the implementation of inclusive education in higher education institutions has no clear policies, yet they are accepting students with special needs. Hence, this study assessed the level of inclusive education implementation in a higher learning institution in Davao City. Assessing the level of implementation of inclusive education would provide notions and clear insights on how to propose an action plan to improve the implementation of inclusive education and properly accommodate students with special needs.

**Methods and Materials**

This study used a quantitative research design, particularly a descriptive-comparative study, which compares the perceived level of the implementation of inclusive education between the teacher and student respondents. This study was conducted in a higher education institution in Davao City with respondents comprised of students with special needs, the teachers who are teaching them, and the students from

the college department where those students with special needs are enrolled. The study employed stratified sampling based on the number of students with special needs and the number of teachers teaching them. The research instrument used for this study is a modified research instrument from Yusuf and Yeager (2011) [14], which measures the level of the implementation of inclusive education using the six areas, namely *management, students, curriculum, instruction, evaluation, and support*. The survey instrument was answered by both the teachers and student respondents. This study followed the data-gathering procedures and the ethical standards in conducting a research study by asking for permission from the school administration and consent from the respondents. The respondents answered the survey through online, particularly Google Forms. This study satisfied the validity and reliability tests of the research instrument to establish its logic, soundness, truthfulness, and consistency. Therefore, this study was subjected to processes that tested its acceptability and preciseness. The data gathered on the level of implementation of inclusive education were analyzed by a statistician and treated with statistical tools, particularly *weighted mean*, which analyzed the exact mathematical center of the distribution of ratings by the respondents of the study, *standard deviation*, which analyzed the square root of the quotient of the total squared deviation of the mean and the total number of respondents, *f-test*, which aids the researcher in inferring conclusions about the data obtained from a certain group, and *t-test*, which determines whether two populations are statistically different from each other.

**Results and Discussion**

Determining the level of implementation of inclusive education is crucial to knowing how higher education institutions advocate and practice inclusive education. Hence, it is necessary to gain knowledge of the situation to have a better understanding of how to help colleges and universities practice inclusive education.

**Level of Implementation of Inclusive Education**

This study also determined the level of implementation of inclusive education in a higher education institution. The level of implementation of inclusive education was measured through the instrument of Yusuf and Yeager (2011) [14] using these six areas or parameters, namely management, students, curriculum, instruction, evaluation, and support. This study analyzed the data that were provided by the teacher and student respondents.

**Table 1:** Level of Implementation of Inclusive Education Perceived by the Teachers and Students

Areas of Inclusive Education	Teachers		Students	
	Mean	Description	Mean	Description
Institutional Management	2.44	Less implemented	2.88	Moderately implemented
Students	2.28	Less implemented	2.83	Moderately implemented
Curriculum	2.13	Less implemented	2.93	Moderately implemented
Instruction	1.41	Not implemented	2.57	Moderately implemented
Evaluation	1.98	Less implemented	2.91	Moderately implemented
Support	2.16	Less implemented	2.93	Moderately implemented
Overall Mean	2.17	Less Implemented	2.84	Moderately Implemented

**Institutional Management**

The perceived level of implementation of inclusive education in the area of institutional management among the

teacher respondents is 2.44, with a standard deviation of 0.31. This means that for the teachers, this area is less implemented. However, the perceived level of

implementation of inclusive education in the area of institutional management among the student respondents is 2.88, with a standard deviation of 0.69. This means that for the students, this area is moderately implemented. The findings revealed that the institutional management of the higher education institution needs to improve the management and organization of the school in order to advance its inclusivity for all students. This is an indication that the school has already initial activities in the advancement in the periodic monitoring and evaluations and involvement of the stakeholders in the implementation of inclusive education on the campus. The school should have a strategic plan for inclusion, regular coordination meetings, and an appointed inclusive education coordinator. The school should also conduct socialization practices wherein parents are included. Further, it should restructure the institutional organization that encourage more inclusion among the stakeholders. Stepanova, Tashcheva, Stepanova, *et al.* (2018) <sup>[12]</sup> claimed that it takes creativity to organize inclusive practice. Everyone who engages in this process will have the chance to contribute. There is a need to transform the educational environment to establish new forms and ways of arranging the learning system, considering the individual distinctions between children and adults, even in the most inclusive approach.

### Students

The perceived level of implementation of inclusive education in the area of students among the teacher respondents is 2.28, with a standard deviation of 0.25. This means that for the teachers, this area is less implemented. However, the perceived level of implementation of inclusive education in the area of students among the student respondents is 2.83, with a standard deviation of 0.71. This means that for the students, this area is moderately implemented. The findings revealed that the higher education institution needs to enhance its student services and accommodations that can cater to all types of students to progress its inclusive education. It is evident that the school should implement more availability of individual data about students with special needs. Moriña, (2017) <sup>[8]</sup> claimed that many institutions have established offices to address the educational needs of students with disabilities, have adopted new technologies, and/or have introduced inclusive educational practices in response to these laws and policies. However, these activities are insufficient to guarantee students' right to a high-quality education that is free of discrimination and based on inclusive education principles.

### Curriculum

The perceived level of implementation of inclusive education in the area of curriculum among the teacher respondents is 2.13, with a standard deviation of 0.28. This means that for the teachers, this area is less implemented. On the other hand, the perceived level of implementation of inclusive education in the area of curriculum among the student respondents is 2.93, with a standard deviation of 0.69. This means that for the students, this area is moderately implemented. It is evident that the school should modify the teaching materials used in conducting classes. Hence, the curriculum should be modified so that it can accommodate the graduate competence standards of all types of students, including students with special needs. The

school should also invest in sports and special programs for students with special needs. Mara and Mara (2012) <sup>[6]</sup> argued that the term "equality of access to education" refers to a teaching-learning process tailored to the students' abilities and requirements rather than referring to all available learning. The idea of change underpins the differentiated and personalized education paradigm. Individuals, not organizations, are responsible for bringing about change. Teachers must evolve to stay up with the change process by acquiring skills and capacities for a challenge. Although a new program or innovation in education is being implemented, the focus is first and foremost on materials, finances, strategy, and the attitudes and feelings of education stakeholders.

### Instruction

The perceived level of implementation of inclusive education in the area of instruction among the teacher respondents is 1.41, with a standard deviation of 0.14. This means that for the teachers, this area is less implemented. On the other hand, the perceived level of implementation of inclusive education in the area of instruction among the student respondents is 2.57, with a standard deviation of 0.86. This means that for the students, this area is moderately implemented. The findings revealed that the higher education institution should advance its instruction in order to support the learning of students with special needs. It is evident that the school needs to provide special equipment, media, and resources for students with visual impairments, physical impairments, speech and hearing impairments, and social and emotional problems. The school also needs to supply special equipment, media, and resources for gifted/talented students. According to Harpell and Andrews (2010, as cited in Murphy, 2016), teachers in inclusive schools collaborate to plan and educate. They make service delivery decisions based on the unique requirements of students with disabilities. They also think about the most effective teaching approaches to help students learn more effectively. When done correctly, coteaching can be a very successful strategy to fulfill the needs of students with and without impairments in inclusive environments.

### Evaluation

The perceived level of implementation of inclusive education in the area of evaluation among the teacher respondents is 1.98, with a standard deviation of 0.80. This means that for the teachers, this area is less implemented. In contrast, the perceived level of implementation of inclusive education in the area of evaluation among the student respondents is 2.91, with a standard deviation of 0.74. This means that for the students, this area is moderately implemented. The findings revealed that the evaluation processes of the higher education institution should be enhanced in order to advance the inclusive education of the school. It is evident that the school should allow students with special needs to graduate and have a college degree. The school implements more of a system of accommodation for students with special needs and maintains their retention. Given the far-reaching implications of schools' selection functions on students from disadvantaged social groups, it may also be important to explore their influence on the education of another vulnerable student category, namely those with special educational needs (Barton & Slee, 1999;

Khamzina *et al.*, 2021) [15]. More specifically, because the inclusive education policy aims to keep these students in school and recognizes that merit alone is insufficient for learning in the regular system, we argue that there would be a conflict between this policy and a selection process ostensibly based on such individual merit (Batruch *et al.*, 2019; Khamzina *et al.*, 2021) [16, 5].

**Support**

The perceived level of implementation of inclusive education in the area of support among the teacher respondents is 2.16, with a standard deviation of 0.85. This statistical finding means that the teachers’ perception of the level of inclusive education in this area is less implemented. In contrast, the perceived level of implementation of inclusive education in the area of support among the student respondents is 2.93, with a standard deviation of 0.77. This means that for the students, this area is moderately implemented. The findings revealed that the higher education institution should reinforce more support for the endeavors of students with special needs to promote inclusivity further. It is evident that the university involved all the stakeholders in implementing programs for students with special needs as it got the highest mean with Moderately Implemented. However, more has to be done in the involvement of all stakeholders in planning Inclusive education. The stakeholders of the university should also provide emotional support to students with special needs. The school shall coordinate with all stakeholders for the inclusion and services of students with special needs, such as sharing ideas and suggestions on improving the implementation of inclusive education. The school must provide more facilities for the students with special needs and encourage and allow them to socialize. Mortier *et al.*

(2010, as cited in Ackah-Jnr, 2018) [1] discovered that children, instructors, support people, and parents all thought resources were beneficial. Finance and materials are explicit resources, but accumulations and repertoires of knowledge and skills and internal motivation are implicit resources. Without system resources, inclusive education could be challenging and problematic for teachers, as much of the actual inclusion work takes place in the school or classroom. Schuelka (2018) [11] affirmed that school transformation and system change are required for successful inclusive education. However, much of this improvement is centered on design rather than resource consumption. It is critical to underline that inclusive education means that all children spend the majority of their day in mainstream classrooms. This has improved student success and social well-being in all students and is significantly more efficient and effective than special schools and classes. Furthermore, inclusive education is a continual process of educational reform. A defined set of equity indicators, such as those developed by UNESCO (2021), can aid in implementing inclusive education. The success of inclusive education should be measured in terms of educational quality, outcomes, and experiences rather than simply counting pupils to evaluate access. It is also crucial to comprehend and evaluate teaching approaches.

**Difference in the Perceived Level of Implementation of Inclusive Education between the Respondent Groups**

Evaluating the difference in the perceived level of implementation of inclusive education between the teacher and student respondents can help understand their varied understanding and experience with inclusive education. It is instrumental in knowing their varied perceptions since they are two of the important stakeholders of the school.

**Table 2:** Difference in the Perceived Level of Implementation of Inclusive Education

Indicators	F-test to Compare Two Variances	Interpretation	P-value	Interpretation
Institutional Management	6.853e-0.8	Assumed unequal variances for t-test	1.79e-10*	Significant
Students	2.943e-11	Assumed unequal variances for t-test	2.2e-16*	Significant
Curriculum	1.999e-09	Assumed unequal variances for t-test	2.2e-16*	Significant
Instruction	2.2e-16	Assumed unequal variances for t-test	2.2e-16*	Significant
Evaluation	0.4575	Assumed equal variances for t-test	7.856e-13*	Significant
Support	0.3431	Assumed equal variances for t-test	4.891e-09*	Significant

Based on the results in Table 2, the p-value in institutional management is 1.79e-10, which means there is a significant difference. The p-value in students, curriculum, and instruction is 2.2e-16, which means there is a significant difference. The p-value in evaluation is 7.856e-13, which means there is a significant difference, while the p-value in support is 4.891e-09, which means there is a significant difference. Therefore, the null hypothesis of not having a significant difference is rejected and concludes that there is sufficient evidence to claim that the responses between teachers and students in all variables are statistically different. Moreover, there is a significant difference in the perceived level of implementation in all areas of inclusive education between the teacher and student respondents in the higher education institution.

Based on the results of the study, the teachers and students have different perceptions about inclusive education and its implementation by the university. It is also evident that the teachers have higher standards in terms of the implementation of the indicators of each area in inclusive

education since the results indicate that all areas are less or not implemented. At the same time, the students perceived the situation differently. Though the students perceived that the areas in inclusive education, such as institutional management, students, curriculum, instruction, evaluation, and support, are moderately implemented, teachers are not convinced that they are well implemented. For the teachers, the inclusivity of the university is not put into action. Moreover, the teachers are more aware of the current situation of the university's level of implementation of inclusivity in various processes, programs, services, accommodations, and management. According to Hunter-Johnson, Newton, and Cambridge-Johnson (2014) [4], teachers play a critical role in inclusive education; their attitudes toward the practice must be analyzed to implement required features to meet the requirements of both students and teachers. While many instructors are excited about the transition, others may be confused about the expectations of their new role as inclusive educators.

In conclusion, teachers’ perceptions concerning the situation

of inclusive education are essential to promote and advance the improvement of the complete services of the school. Their valuable insights are imperative to address the areas that need to be revisited and reformed to respond to the requirement to be all-inclusive to all types of students regardless of their special condition. Hence, teachers can help make policies and decisions to address the problems in the implementation of inclusive education. Furthermore, teachers are the curriculum developers and the student's primary contact. Thus, they have more ideas on accommodating students with special needs and helping them achieve the learning competencies and holistic learning they need.

### Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, the teachers in the higher education institution perceived that all the dimensions of implementation of inclusive education, namely *institutional management, students, curriculum, instruction, evaluation, and support*, are less implemented while the students perceived all the dimensions are moderately implemented. This means that the higher education in Davao City should attend inclusive education holistically with the help of the stakeholders to improve its services to all types of students, including those with special needs. All the dimensions of inclusive education should be equally focused and provided with utmost importance to advocate and progress inclusivity in all areas of educational services. Therefore, developing these dimensions is necessary to raise the level of implementation of inclusive education. Moreover, there is a significant difference in the perceived level of implementation of inclusive education the higher education in Davao City between teachers and students. This means that teachers and students have different perceptions and implies that teachers have a clearer picture of the condition of the institution about its practices in inclusivity. However, both respondent groups agreed that all dimensions in inclusive education should be enhanced or improved. The insights of the teachers and students are crucial to assess the situation of the school in the implementation of inclusive education. In conclusion, it is necessary for the higher education institution in Davao City to design an action plan or the improvement of the implementation of inclusive education in all areas to provide more services and accommodations to students with special needs. Hence, the action plan should focus on all dimensions of inclusive education since the findings suggest that all of them need improvement.

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