
EMBRACING DIVERSITY: EMPOWERMENT OF FILIPINO ELEMENTARY TEACHERS FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Executive Summary

The increasing diversity in schools requires in-depth understanding of pedagogical approaches to teach diverse populations. This requirement demands Teacher Education Institutions to develop among teachers' positive attitude towards inclusion and prepare and train them to deliver inclusive practices in a mainstream classroom. This study investigated the attitude towards inclusive education, perceived level of readiness to implement inclusive education and assessment on the effectiveness of teacher education program for inclusive education in terms of collaborative teaching, techniques and strategies and collaborative experiences among teachers in one public integrated school in Gasco & Centina Integrated School, Bato, Toril, Davao City. Using descriptive-survey as research design with researcher-made questionnaire as tool to gather data, results have shown that the respondents have high positive attitude towards inclusive education. Further, the study also revealed that the respondents have high perception on their readiness to implement inclusive education. Lastly, teacher education program for inclusive education along with collaborative teaching and techniques and strategies were highly effective, while effective only in terms of collaborative experiences. Analyses of the findings afforded the researcher to formulate recommendations that higher authorities may use as inputs in formulating and designing programs to better empower future teachers to embrace diversity.

Keywords: Embracing diversity, inclusive education, diversity, elementary teachers, pedagogy

1. INTRODUCTION

Around the globe, the inclusion in a regular classroom setting of children with differences for reasons of disability, development, ethnicity, race, religion, language, gender and poverty became a significant educational policy reform. This development is believed to be the key in helping students with disabilities and special needs hone their own skills and unleash their maximum potentials. Kurth and Mastergeorge (2020), and Matzen, Ryndak and Nakao (2019) acknowledged special students are more engaged in their learning when they are included in a mainstream classroom. Also, alignment of learning to grade level competencies is ensured which can boost their sense of well-being. Teachers are well-prepared and ready to teach diverse learners.

Due to this, the Department of Education (DepEd) driven by the urgency to address this need, therefore promises the right for these children to be given proper education within the regular or inclusive classroom setting (DepEd, 2019). Corollary to this, Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) in the country must produce graduates who are equipped with knowledge and skills to perform non-discriminatory classroom practices. Teacher education programs are encouraged to train competent teachers who are ready to meet the demands of inclusivity (Bilbao, 2021). It is within this premise that the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has mandated all TEIs to include a course relevant to inclusive education in all programs offered.

Despite various initiatives carried out by DepEd, CHED and TEIs, Muega (2019) found out that several educational institutions lack teachers to implement inclusive education. The overall response of the teachers suggests they are not prepared to handle special students in a regular classroom. This data indicates that it is deemed necessary to conduct a research relevant to teachers' attitude and level of readiness to implement inclusive education and the effectiveness of teacher education preparation program for inclusive education. This study was conceptualized with the notion that elementary teachers are important in producing elementary learners ready for inclusive education. The aspiration to mold the next pool of learners who are sensitive enough to the needs of various learners motivated the researcher to conduct a study that focuses on empowering elementary Filipino teachers for inclusive education, with an end of view of offering recommendations to higher authorities to serve as inputs for planning and designing programs to empower elementary teachers for inclusive education. Specifically, this study investigated the attitude of service teachers towards inclusive education; the respondents' perceived level of readiness to implement inclusive education; and lastly, the respondents' assessment on the effectiveness of teacher education program for inclusive education in collaborative teaching, techniques and strategies, and collaborative experiences. For education teachers handling professional education courses in teacher education programs, this study is crucial as this can strengthen obligation and commitment among faculty members in preparing elementary teachers to be a good implementer of inclusive

education. Classroom diversity is a term that can have many different meanings depending on context. As a descriptive term it refers to the wide range of differences in students' attributes and needs. In the context of schooling, relevant differences may consist of students' interests, experiences, aptitudes, abilities, learning styles, exceptionalities, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, immigrant and/or minority background such as cultural, ethnic, national, religious and language backgrounds.

Teaching and learning to teach is a complex, multifaceted task, especially against the global backdrop of rapid societal change. The teaching profession is "firstly becoming more and more complex; secondly, the demands placed upon teachers are increasing; and thirdly, the environments in which they work are becoming more and more challenging" (European Parliament, 2019).

There is general consensus that teachers need to be equipped with relevant competences throughout the teacher education continuum if they are expected to fulfil the growing expectations they face. Policy-makers have increasingly sought to define the competences required from teachers by developing frameworks (European Commission, 2019). Such frameworks can offer education systems with a sound basis for planning and providing comprehensive professional development opportunities. However, policy approaches to developing competent teachers are not always coherent with the intended objectives, are often limited in scope or even counterproductive and misguided: "just when the very most is expected of them, teachers appear to be being given less support, less respect, and less opportunity to be creative, flexible and innovative than before" (Hargreaves & Lo, 2019). The growing diversity in classrooms and societies makes these issues even more compelling.

Teacher competence implies professionalism in the multifaceted roles of the teacher on different levels of the individual, the classroom, the school, the immediate community, the society, as well as in relevant professional networks. In the current discourse a certain degree of consensus seems to converge on the notion of competence (Caena, 2019). It can be defined as the ability to meet complex demands, in certain contexts, by drawing on acquired resources. The Council of Europe defines competence as "the ability to mobilize and deploy relevant values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and/or understanding in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities that are presented by a given type of context" (Council of Europe, 2019).

A review of recent literature and policy recommendations reveals a common recognition of diversity competence as a core teacher competence. Appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism, knowledge of issues of diversity and inclusion, and dispositions to promote learning of all are commonly understood as generic competencies (Williamson McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright M., 2019).

The Council of Europe has defined a set of competences that teachers should acquire to effectively engage with diversity in classrooms (Arnesen, Allan and Simonsen, 2018; European Commission, 2019). The framework of teacher competences outlines three key competence areas: (1) knowledge and understanding, (2) communication and relationships, and (3) management and teaching. Correspondingly, this section provides a discussion of a number of key competences based on the structure of the three domains. It then argues for approaches that reach beyond competence categories, and take on the complexity of handling diversity in concrete classroom situations. It suggests to complement predefined competences with pedagogical tact. Teacher competence and pedagogical tact taken together could provide a sound basis for a well-defined and, at the same time, flexible and context-sensitive approach to policy and practice of educating teachers who aspire to excel in teaching in diverse classrooms – irrespective of specific national contexts.

Teachers should be able to effectively address issues of equity and social justice by understanding the historical, structural and political contexts that lead to prejudice and discrimination in education. This involves developing knowledge of the multiple dimensions of diversity and cultural differences, awareness of stereotyping mechanisms in knowledge construction (Cowan & Maitles, 2019), as well as attentiveness to students' social, cultural and linguistic context as it relates to teaching and learning (Keengwe, 2019).

Teachers need to be reflective about their own experiences, attitudes, opinions, preconceived notions and beliefs on cultural and socioeconomic differences (Rychly & Graves, 2019). They come to perceive socio-ethnic-cultural identity as a social, personal, and also educational construct (Ladson-Billings, 2019; Hachfeld et al., 2019; Darling-Hammond, 2019). This context-reflectivity grows as teachers become aware of their own privileges or lack thereof in relation to their students (Byrd, 2020).

Diversity competence of teachers often assumes the case of the culturally mainstream teacher at home confronted with the culturally-other minority or immigrant student. It is therefore based on the premise that teaching efficacy in diverse classrooms depends on the teachers' consciousness of their own enculturation, cultural identities, assumptions, perspectives and biases (Gay, 2019; Guyton & Wesche, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2019). The literature suggests that

teachers tend to introduce their own cultural beliefs into the curriculum and ignore the cultural heterogeneity of their students (Gay, 2019; Sleeter, 2021). When teachers become conscious of their own identities, it is argued, they become culturally efficacious individuals who can move between two or more cultures and also become advocates for those from cultures other than the dominant one (Bennett & Salonen, 2019; Guyton & Wesche, 2019).

From these reflective standpoint teachers can treat diversity as an asset and a source of growth rather than a hindrance to student performance (Burns & Shadoian-Gersing, 2020). By valorising students' diverse heritages, they can represent educational resources benefiting students from all backgrounds (Gay, 2020)

Teachers also need to be reflective not only about their own experiences, attitudes, opinions, preconceived notions and beliefs on cultural and socioeconomic differences, but also of the experiences, identities and sense of belonging of their students as they grow, develop and change over time. Teachers who bring empathy to the classroom are perceptive of how their students experience school life and situations in classroom life. The Gallup Organization found that "sensitivity and anticipation of student feelings mark teachers who bring empathy to the classroom" (Gordon, 2019). "Students are more ready to accept themselves and to establish relationships when they work with teachers who acknowledge and understand their feelings" (Gordon, 2019). And importantly, teachers' empathy (often characterized as care) constitutes a decisive factor in students' performance, especially for students and student populations prone to marginalization: "as teacher's caring for high achievers increases, so does student performance, while the performance of low achievers becomes even worse when teachers ... are uncaring" (Gay, 2019).

Pedagogical tact, a term coined by Herbart at the turn of the 19th century, describes when teachers are engaged in making quick judgments and decisions in the interest of their students – in the midst of action. Teachers see, assess, judge, decide and act in response to a myriad of situations in their daily interactions with their students. "Teaching children or young people is difficult, not merely because teachers are constantly busy and they have to act; it is difficult because teachers continually have to act in ways that are pedagogically tactful. A teacher who is more than a mere instructor is constantly required to know instantly what is pedagogically the right thing to say or do" (Van Manen, 2019).

How do teachers know what to do? How do they opt for the one or the other response? How do they choose the course of action? Pedagogical tact is a notion that helps answer these questions. Tact is the mediator between educational theory and practice as the teacher scans the situation, decides how to meet the necessities of the individual case at hand, and acts accordingly (Muth, 2019; Van Manen, 2019; Van Manen, 2020). Such pedagogical tact, which can be developed only in the practice, has to do with the mind-set and the disposition of the educator, and is a result of thoughtfulness, genuine interest and moral commitment, which in turn leads to successful pedagogical practice.

Helping teachers to become more competent in teaching diverse classrooms needs clearly defined frameworks, but also notions and concepts that directly relate to what teachers do. The rationale of drawing on the construct of pedagogical tact is that it brings attention to what teachers do in a pre-reflective mode. Tact is a teacher's contingent, contextual acting as he or she is handling a situation. In the moment of handling, a teacher does not have the quiet moment to devise a thorough plan of action. Afterwards, in a moment of quiet he may revisit what just happened in class, and how he handled it. The concept of pedagogical tact helps signify what happens, allowing concrete instances of handling a situation in the flow of teaching to be reflected upon, analyzed and improved. Effective teaching calls for transformative competencies, which are complex, where each competency is intricately inter-related with the others. Teachers' diversity competence is developmental in nature, and thus learnable. The ability to develop competences is itself something to be trained and learned. The OECD Learning Framework 2030 puts forward a "sequenced process of reflection, anticipation and action as a mode of developing complex competencies. Such reflective practice is the ability to take a critical stance when deciding, choosing and acting, by stepping back from what is known or assumed and looking at a situation from other, different perspectives" (OECD, 2019). "Anticipation mobilizes cognitive skills, such as analytical or critical thinking, to foresee what may be needed in the future or how actions taken today might have consequences for the future. Both reflection and anticipation are precursors to responsible actions" (OECD, 2019).

In terms of professional development for teaching in diverse classrooms, concepts are needed that help teachers look back at what happened in class and identify significant instances to interpret what happened, and to provide a structure and space to anticipate alternative improved action, to draw conclusions for future action, and to think about and plan for how to proceed. Teachers can thus continually and systematically cultivate responsible pedagogical judgements and actions. The concept of pedagogical diversity tact can serve this purpose.

Many teachers enter the profession because they want to make a positive difference in their students' lives through education (Kiriacoou et al., 2020; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2021; Watt & Richardson, 2019). However, there are tensions

between teachers' desire and teachers' capabilities to help all their students – especially those students prone to marginalization – to advance and succeed. One reason is that teacher education has not adequately prepared teachers to be diversity-responsive practitioners. Many teachers are simply ill prepared to teach students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Gay, (2020; 2018); and (Darling-Hammond, 2019; Adair, J. K., Tobin, J. & Arzubiaga, 2019). For example, more than two-thirds of teachers interviewed in France, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Spain and the United Kingdom agreed slightly, moderately or strongly that adapting to meet the needs of immigrant students increased workload and caused frustration: 52% felt there was insufficient support from management for managing diversity (Fine-Davis & Faas, 2019).

There is no exact blueprint for building diversity competence in teachers. While concepts of diversity permeate all aspects of education, introducing diversity competence as a constitutive element of teacher education is a particularly slow and complex process. The extent to which teacher education programs include diversity varies by country. For example, in the Netherlands, New Zealand and Norway, teacher candidates take mandatory courses in supporting students from diverse backgrounds. Courses in the Netherlands include training in intercultural education, expectations about immigrants and their specific learning needs, and knowledge about cultural diversity and its implication for teaching and learning. Similar courses are absent or offered ad hoc in France, Japan and Spain (OECD, 2018). Completing such courses in initial teacher education is usually optional in Europe (Van Briel, Darmody & Kerzil, 2022).

A review of publicly available information on initial and continuing teacher education for diversity provides a snapshot of teacher training for cultural diversity in a selected number of low, medium and high-immigration countries. Through a broad review of 105 initial and in-service teacher training programs on cultural diversity, migration and displacement across 49 countries, results indicate that only 28.5% of the training programs are supervised, offered or funded by the governments, emphasizing initial teacher education. Moreover, only 19% of all training programs identified are mandatory (UNESCO, 2019). A review of European countries found little evidence that strategic policies on diversity training were in place or that initial teacher education programs helped teachers develop relevant competences (European Commission, 2019).

Training programs cover a range of topics such as cross-cultural knowledge, cultural awareness and sensitivity, intercultural and professional communication skills, culturally responsive pedagogical approaches and psychosocial interventions (April et al., 2018). Whereas cross-cultural approaches and courses on cultural awareness, sensitivity and intercultural skills convey knowledge and basic skills, programs with a culturally responsive pedagogical approach cover more student-centered pedagogical approaches in which learning is determined by the learner, who must be considered in the teaching and learning processes. In such programs teachers incorporate personal and adapted questions, discuss authentic problems and put the emphasis on fulfilling the needs of learners (April et al., 2019). There is a difference between knowing, understanding and applying knowledge. Pedagogical approaches demonstrate deeper understanding through the application of culture-specific knowledge, which can otherwise remain disconnected if knowledge is only imparted in terms of general cross-cultural awareness. Being a diversity-responsive teacher is more than knowing about cultural differences, stereotypes and ethnocentrism. It “is not just an issue of relating instructional techniques and/or adapting instruction to integrate assumed traits or customs of specific culture groups...[rather,] it is acquiring a mind-set that consciously seeks out and promotes diversity in the learning experience” (Ragoonaden, Sivia and Baxan, 2020).

Diversity training programs for pre-service and in-service teachers worldwide cover a range of formats such as topic-specific online resources, toolboxes, conferences, apps for teachers, action-research, learning modules, seminars, theoretical and practical courses, workshops, immersive training courses, fast-track training courses, small-scale projects, coaching processes including train-the-trainer courses, implementation of core groups for coaching and networks to develop resources to advise and to support members, case studies, critical incidents, problem-solving activities, and lesson planning (April et al., 2019). Programs that are more effective in training teachers for diverse classrooms share a few common characteristics, which are described below together with an example of a program or policy.

Content and focus of professional development programs commonly relate to knowledge and methods of teaching specific subjects, and to the pedagogical dimension of teaching. There is widespread recognition of the importance of investment in professional development aimed at developing diversity competence, especially as teachers are increasingly teaching more heterogeneous student populations, including immigrant students and students who may not be proficient in the country's principal language (OECD, 2018). Based on the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), only 16% of lower secondary teachers in 34 education systems had undertaken training in multicultural or multilingual education in the preceding year (OECD, 2019). In France 20% of lower secondary

teachers worked in schools where more than 10% of students had home languages other than the language of instruction. Yet only 4% of teachers had benefited from professional development in multicultural or multilingual training. Furthermore, teachers especially in Latin American countries and Italy report a great need for professional development for teaching in a multicultural or multilingual setting (46% of Brazilian teachers, 24% of Chilean teachers, 27% of Italian teachers and 33% of Mexican teachers) (OECD, 2019).

Countries and classrooms have become more diverse in terms of migration-induced diversity, which often is a source of ethnic, cultural, religious and socio-economic diversity. While there might be a growing tendency to recognize the benefits that cultural, linguistic, religious and social diversity can bring to schools and to society (European Commission, 2019), embracing the super diversity and complexity also leads to particular challenges for teachers on how to respond effectively to more diverse classrooms. For example, one challenge might be on how to embrace diversity while also promoting social cohesion within classrooms and schools.

Teacher quality is a significant factor in effective and meaningful schooling. To fulfil the growing expectations, they face, teachers need to be equipped with relevant knowledge, capabilities, dispositions, values and skills, such as understanding diversity issues, reflectivity about identities, perspectives and practices, sense of agency and autonomy, empathy and pedagogical judgement, and tact. But how can initial teacher education and professional development programs prepare teachers effectively for teaching in diverse classrooms? This paper suggests that initial teacher education could consider diversity as an asset and create spaces for reflection on action and anticipation of future professional action for teachers. It could also better link theory and practice, integrate diversity into the curriculum and incorporate technologies into training.

In terms of professional development, allowing teachers to drive their program, and foster conceptually framed practice-oriented learning, could help design more effective programs for teaching in diverse classrooms. Supporting the work of teachers through mentorships, collaborations with peers and school leaders is helpful. This paper has presented a number of examples on how this could be done.

The concept of the social system is meaningful for investigating how inclusion and exclusion in education occur. A social system is created through social communication. Communication consists of information, messages, and understanding and is performed through linguistic and physical actions. Once a system is created, it communicates meaning. Meaning acts as the internal node around which communication in the system is centered, and it defines what types of communication and ideas are included in the system and what types are excluded. For example, activity in a classroom can communicate many different meanings and, therefore, consist of many different social sub-systems. The environment puts pressure on a system by asking it to include different types of meaning. Because a system is built on a particular meaning, it cannot incorporate contradictions. Therefore, the system reacts by ignoring the pressure or differentiating into several sub-systems, which again strengthens the argument that educational systems consist of many social sub-systems.

Moreover, the concept of socially constructed reality is important. This concept maintains that social interactions between human beings create norms and institutions that later on are a part of the further construction of reality. We suggest that social systems are socially constructed not only by human beings but also by norms and institutions such as laws, policies or general popular opinions. The latter understanding stems from neo-institutional theory, which maintains that ideas travel and are translated into educational systems, objectified into various types of policies, and are used to focus on inclusion in education. Formal institutions are often loosely coupled, and structural elements are loosely linked to each other. Talk, decisions and act is not always in line with the institutional rules; formal structures are constantly violated. In conjunction with inclusion, the social construction of institutions can appear on different levels. Hence, institutionalization is not only a construction made by individuals who interact with each other but is also a process that depends on society.

In the background of the presented theoretical frame, an empirical question concerning what type of social systems (and sub-systems) create inclusion and exclusion is presented. The question is relevant since sub-systems also depend on society, context, culture, schools, and groups of children. For example, a student who has an injury that prevents them from taking part in physical activities would be excluded from sport-related communication but included in communication about injuries. That type of exclusion sometimes also leads to social exclusion (Rapp, 2019).

This study utilized the Model for Inclusive Teacher Preparation proposed by Whitworth (2019) as its frame of reference. The aforementioned model presents a system and practices for TEIs to follow in order to empower teachers to deliver instruction in inclusive classroom settings. According to him, a teacher education program preparation must focus on strengthening understanding and appreciation of diversity among teachers to be effective. Three components such as collaborative teaching, techniques and strategies, and collaborative experiences are vital for inclusive

approach to teacher preparation. These components suggest that future teachers must be trained on how to select, plan, organize and implement various instructional approaches, arrangements and tools to properly accommodate students with diverse needs and adapt to classroom changes. The third component focuses on field-based experiences of the teacher. This calls for a teacher preparation to include varied learning opportunities, both inside and outside the university, to better work and observe an actual inclusive education implementation.

Asserting its significance in this study, this model reflects the necessary components all Teacher Education institutions (TEIs) need in order to prepare and train future teachers for inclusive education. Nguyet and Ha (2020) said that teacher candidates must be equipped with knowledge and understanding of learners' special needs and abilities, as well as pedagogic skills to include varied teaching strategies, instructional accommodation and activity differentiation. However, Corpuz and Gloria (2019) and Kim (2021) acknowledged that teacher education program preparation is not enough for inclusive education to be successful; it is equally important that teachers develop a positive attitude towards inclusive education. They must be firmly convinced of the benefits it could bring to students' welfare and well-being for both regular students and those with disabilities. This indicates that TEIs must also formulate the course of activities to increase students' awareness and attitudinal change on inclusivity. The study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the attitude of the elementary teachers towards inclusive education?
2. What is the Level of Readiness to Implement Inclusive Education?
3. What is the Effectiveness of Teacher Education Program for Inclusive Education in terms of Collaborative Teaching, Techniques and Strategies; and Collaborative Experiences?

2. METHODOLOGY

Descriptive-survey research design was used in this study since it gathered data on teachers' attitude, level of readiness, and effectiveness of teacher education preparation program for inclusive education using a researcher-made questionnaire. The questionnaire was downloaded from the internet.

This research paper was focused on descriptive correlation design definition and goals. This quantitative research method aims to describe two or more variables and their relationships. Statistical tools were used to compute the data that was gathered. The presentation used tables to present the data gathered.

A total of 65 respondents participated in this study. These are 19 elementary teachers, 35 junior high school learners, 2 administrators, and 9 teachers who teach in junior in Gasco and Centina Integrated School in Bato, Toril, Davao City during the Academic Year 2022-2023. These respondents are the next pool of teachers to work in diverse settings; hence, they are purposively chosen as respondents with a belief that their role is important in implementing inclusive education (Nguyet & Ha, 2020). Moreover, they successfully finished and passed courses relevant to special and inclusive education which made them more suitable to be respondents of this study.

A three-part researcher-made questionnaire downloaded from the study of G.P. Lualhati (2020) was utilized to gather relevant information needed in this study. The research instrument was made up of 3 parts: Part I is a 10-item questionnaire to reveal the attitude of the respondents towards inclusive education; part II is composed of 11 items to determine the level of readiness on inclusive education; and lastly, a 15-item questionnaire to determine the effectiveness of teacher education preparation program for inclusive education in terms of collaborative teaching, techniques and strategies, and collaborative experiences.

In answering each specific research question, an appropriate statistical tool shall employ using Mean, and Standard deviation. The mean and standard deviation was used to the respondents' perceived level of readiness to implement inclusive education; and lastly, the respondents' assessment on the effectiveness of teacher education program for inclusive education in collaborative teaching, techniques and strategies, and collaborative experiences.

To facilitate the interpretation of the computed mean, the mean ranges with their corresponding interpretations at .05 level of confidence were used. Three experts in inclusive education assisted the researcher to ensure the instrument's content validity. Through the help of a statistician, the instrument was reliable as manifested by the obtained .849 alpha co-efficient.

3. RESULT

Attitude of the elementary teachers towards inclusive education

The goal of every higher education institutions is to produce teachers who may serve as catalyst for inclusivity; hence, it is significant to understand initially the future teachers' developed attitudes towards inclusive education.

The respondents strongly agreed (3.99) that integrating students with disabilities in a regular classroom helps them develop emotionally and socially. Moreover, they also strongly agreed that (3.82) that it is everyone's right to learn in a regular classroom. These findings may imply that the faculty members fostered among teachers the right values and

attitudes towards students with disabilities through training and experiences. This acquired behavior and belief could be a good indicator that these teachers may facilitate inclusive practices inside their classrooms. According to Duka (2019), the appropriate way to address and modify educators' negative attitudes towards inclusion is through pre-service training.

In general, the respondents' attitude towards inclusive education was highly positive (3.57). The result showing that they have highly positive attitude towards inclusive education suggests that they can maximize opportunities for fostering a classroom environment friendly and supportive to SWD. The studies of Goddard and Evans (2019) and Varcoe and Boyle (2019), which also revealed generally positive attitude towards inclusive education among teachers, reinforce the result.

Level of Readiness to implement inclusive education

Quality teacher education preparation to meet the learning needs of SWD is vital for a successful inclusive education. This portion shows the respondents' perceived level of readiness to implement inclusive education.

Teachers strongly agreed (3.81) that they are ready to adjust curriculum and instruction by providing adaptations and/or accommodations. This mirrors that SWD has an opportunity to explore and learn the course material and may have meaningful access to the lesson in a regular setting because the respondents are ready to provide instructional accommodations and adaptation for them. Bohning (2020) said that teachers made adaptations in a regular classroom whenever it is appropriate while there is a need for placement decisions considering the resources available.

Meanwhile, they strongly agreed (3.78) that they can observe differentness or educational problems of the students. The result showed that they are capable to observe students' behavior inside the classroom and implies that they can identify students who might need support and intervention.

However, the respondents agreed (3.38) that they can make comprehensive anecdotal records, referral forms and endorsement letters. This lowest rated item suggests that the teachers may be further exposed to training relevant to students' behavior records. The capability to do objective observation and effective collection of data on students' behavior are two important skills that teachers must possess because these may help facilitate which among the students needed supports and the kind of intervention or program needed to address the concern. Drogan and Knoster (2019) mentioned that educators should prioritize behaviors that are deemed the greatest concern and make a list of data collection procedures suitable to the situation.

Overall, the respondents highly perceived that they are ready (3.63) to implement inclusive education. This means that the respondents received training and preparation to carry out the roles and responsibilities of a teacher in an inclusive classroom.

Effectiveness of Teacher Education Program for Inclusive Education

in terms of Collaborative Teaching, Techniques and Strategies;

and Collaborative Experiences

Generally, the table shows that the respondents' assessment on the effectiveness of teacher education program for inclusive education in terms of collaborative teaching was high (3.51). The highly effective result shows that the teacher education program has trained the respondents to co-teach classes and make collaborative learning arrangements and activities. This also suggests that these teachers can heighten educational experience and learning outcomes. Mulholland (2019) mentioned that primary teachers are aware of collaboration and its importance which is favorable because this can foster cooperation among teachers and help in achieving desired results.

The table reflects that the student-respondents agreed (3.50) that the teacher education program is effective in teaching them suitable learning goals and assessment while the remaining indicators were strongly agreed upon by the respondents. The lowest ranked item signifies that the faculty members handling the program may further reinforce lessons and discussion regarding setting SMART goals and selecting assessment design and analysis. These competencies are important because this will guide learners' improvement plus improving the instruction as well. According to Galevska and Pesic (2019), assessing the educational improvement of SWDs requires accurate and unique guidance in applying the evaluation practices in the inclusive classrooms.

The overall computed mean (3.55) indicates that the teacher education program is highly effective in training them suitable techniques and strategies for inclusive education. This result means that the program has equipped them with knowledge and skills on teaching and learning modes appropriate to actively engage, include, and challenge regular students and SWDs. Bender (2022) stated that to satisfy the learning needs of SWD, teachers must work together to differentiate instruction and modify instructional practices. The respondents strongly agreed (3.60 and 3.56) that the program allows them to perform simulation, role play and collaborative works. These results suggest that the respondents are exposed to classroom activities that allow them to do simulations and cooperative learning tasks. On

the other hand, the students agreed (3.39) that the college invites special education teacher as resource person. This means that the college may regularly invite experts in the area of special and inclusive education. This may supplement the lessons given by the regular classroom teacher. In her article, Bouillet (2019) stated that few specialists support teachers and students through giving comprehensive lectures concerning inclusive practices in schools.

In general, the students' assessment on teacher education program in terms of collaborative experiences was effective (3.49). The effective result signifies that the teacher education program may further provide collaborative experiences among the teachers. Doing this could result to enhanced awareness and knowledge on the kind of professional support and resources they need to better satisfy the needs of SWDs. As mentioned by Kuusisaari (2019), there are barriers to teacher collaborations due to inadequate focuses during team discussions and a lack of curriculum leadership.

Analysis

Teachers must plan very carefully to ensure that all students participate in high-interest educational activities that are personally relevant. Failure to recognize and address students' unique backgrounds could result in a large portion of the future adult population of this country who cannot participate successfully as global citizens. Academic experiences and parental perceptions impact students' attitudes toward education. To create enthusiastic, lifelong learners, effective teachers show students that what they are learning in school will equip them with the knowledge, confidence, and skills necessary to have fulfilling lives.

Teachers' expectations have a powerful effect on students' performance. Effective teachers hold high, realistic expectations for themselves and all students. They believe in their ability to create a caring classroom climate and in their students' ability to succeed. If teachers act as though they expect their students to be hard working, interested, and successful in class, they are more likely to be so. Researchers have found that students who feel they have supportive, caring teachers are more motivated to engage in academic work than students with unsupportive, uncaring teachers (Newman, 2019).

Teachers communicate their expectations and attitudes toward their students through their actions and words. Students' perceptions of teachers' expectations and attitudes can affect their motivation and self-concept. Oftentimes, teachers show favoritism to high achievers by interacting with them more frequently, giving them more time to answer questions, and increasing the amount of positive feedback given to them. Conversely, low-achieving students are often seated toward the back of the room, have less opportunity to respond to questions, receive more criticism for incorrect responses, and are interrupted more frequently. Generally, teachers tend to be more supportive and positive toward capable students.

Students' academic performance and self-esteem are enhanced when teachers set high expectations and hold them to these expectations. Therefore, teachers need to set realistic expectations for all students when making assignments, giving presentations, conducting discussions, and grading examinations. "Realistic" in this context means that the standards are high enough to motivate students to do their best work but not so high that students will inevitably be frustrated in trying to meet those expectations. Teachers should guard against setting too low or too high expectations for students with special needs and too low expectations for gifted students. To develop the drive to achieve, students need to believe that achievement is possible—which means that teachers need to provide plentiful opportunities for success.

Effective teachers help students set achievable goals and encourage them to focus on long-term improvement, not just grades on current assignments. Students learn to evaluate their progress, critique their own work, analyze their strengths, and address their weaknesses.

4. DISCUSSION

To be ready for the demands of inclusivity, TEIs must produce graduates who can teach in settings that can meet the needs of diverse students. It is within this notion that this study had been conducted. This study revealed that the respondents have positive attitude and high perception on their readiness to implement inclusive education. Moreover, this study discovered that the teacher education program for inclusive education along with collaborative teaching techniques and strategies were highly effective, while effective only in terms of collaborative experiences.

In consonance with the results, maintaining positive attitude towards inclusion among teachers is encouraged to be done through continuous training and workshops, development of mass media activities and materials, and integration of inclusion in various courses. Further, it is suggested that the teachers may be further exposed to preparation relevant to objective observation and effective collection of data on students' behavior. Schools may invite teachers and other professionals as resource persons to teach them how to write documents like anecdotal records and referral forms. Also, these invited experts may teach the teachers how to craft, plan and implement Individualized Education Plans.

Further, the teacher education program has only one professional education course relevant to special and inclusive education, hence, it is suggested that the Council of Deans may review and revisit the curriculum for additional courses relevant to inclusion. Faculty members are encouraged to integrate inclusive education across all courses to better equip the teachers with essential pedagogic knowledge and skills to accommodate SWDASNs in the regular classroom.

Lastly, a follow-up study using other variables may be conducted to further gather data on teachers' attitude and readiness to implement inclusive education.

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