

Evaluation of Practice Teachers' Views on Inclusive Education

Charlene Faye A. Agati and Dennis G. Caballes

National Teachers College, Philippines

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Abstract

This study examined the views of practice teachers toward the inclusion of students with special education needs in the regular classroom. A total of 32 practice teachers from University of the East, College of Education, participated in the research. Mixed-Method was utilized which comprised of participants answering a questionnaire and participating in a focus group discussion. The questionnaire, My Thinking about Inclusion Scale, MTAI, (Stoiber et al., 1998) was utilized for the quantitative part of the research; while, a focus group discussion was conducted for the qualitative part which sought to uncover the perceptions of practice teachers concerning their background and training on inclusive education. Only six of the 32 practice teachers were able to join the focus group discussion. The results revealed that there is no significant difference in the practice teachers' views on inclusive education between males and females and their degree programs. Findings also showed that practice teachers held similar positive views on inclusion. The responses of the participants in the focus group discussion unveiled that the practice teachers believed they have adequate theoretical knowledge about inclusive education; however, they still require further in-depth training and hands-on involvement and participation in conducting inclusive practices inside classrooms to effectively apply them in the future as they become licensed teachers. They also saw the importance of the support of the government and the cooperation of schools as well as parents and guardians for the successful espousal of inclusive education.

Keywords— Manila, Inclusive Education, Practice Teachers' Attitudes and Beliefs

I. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has been steadily gaining serious ground in the Philippines in recent years and when then President, Rodrigo Roa Duterte, on 11 March 2022, signed Republic Act No. 11650 also known as *Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education Act*, inclusive education has once again been put in the spotlight. Republic Act No. 11650 provides that no learner shall be denied admission based on their disability. Both private and public schools are mandated to ensure equitable access to quality education for every learner with disability (*Republic Act No. 11650*, n.d.). As such, teachers must prepare, not just the learning environment, but also the mindset of regular learners to fairly cater to the diverse learners inside their classrooms.

Following the mandate to employ inclusive educational approaches and practices in schools, teacher education institutions have to provide adequate training and

experience to practice teachers. A study by Avramidis & Norwich (2002) underscored the importance of training in special or inclusive education as a variable that influences teachers' attitudes.

Over the years, numerous researches conclude that the attitude of teachers towards the schooling of students with disabilities in general classes is one of the key factors of success in inclusive education (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Forlin, et al., 2011; Boyle et al., 2020 in Guillemot et al., 2022). Several studies highlight the fact that teachers with positive attitudes toward inclusion employ instructional strategies beneficial to all students in a classroom (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Forlin, et al, 2007) and that the more positive the attitudes of teachers are, the more inclusive practices become (Sharma & Sokal, 2016).

In the University of the East, practice teachers are required to take a one semester course on Foundation of Special and Inclusive Education as part of their curriculum. Additionally, in their experiential learning courses during

their final year in college, they have to be deployed in both private and public-school settings to observe, assist, and practice various pedagogies. In this regard, it is vital to understand the beliefs of practice teachers toward inclusive education as well as their insights on the adequacy of their training and background on inclusive education as they will become the teachers who are expected to employ inclusive practices in their classrooms in compliance and in support of Republic Act No. 11650.

Statement of the Problem

The focus of this research is the views of practice teachers on inclusive education; specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do beliefs of practice teachers differ with regard to gender?
2. How do beliefs of practice teachers from different degree programs as Bachelor of Secondary Education-English, Bachelor of Physical Education, Bachelor of Special Needs Education, and Bachelor of Elementary Education differ with regard to inclusive education?
3. What are the insights of practice teachers regarding their background and training on inclusive education?

Hypotheses:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the beliefs of practice teachers when it comes to gender.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the beliefs of practice teachers from different degree programs.

II. METHODS

Research Type

In this research, Mixed-Method was utilized. For the quantitative part of the study, the researchers made use of the My Thinking About Inclusion Scale, MTAI (Stoiber et al., 1998); while, for the qualitative part, a focus group discussion was employed.

Research Setting and Participants

The participants of the study were a purposeful sample of 32 practice teachers of the University of the East, College of Education, officially enrolled in the following programs: a. Bachelor of Secondary Education-English (BSED-E), b. Bachelor of Physical education (BPED), c. Bachelor of Special Needs Education (BSNED), and d. Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED). There were 15 practice teachers from Bachelor of Physical Education, 6 from Bachelor of Secondary Education-English, 6 from Bachelor of Special Needs Education, and 5 from Bachelor of Elementary Education. Further, there were 20 females and 12 males. Majority of the participants fall under the age

range of 22 – 23 years old. All of the participants previously took a course in Foundation of Special and Inclusive Education as part of the Professional Education curriculum. Additionally, during the focus group discussion, six practice teachers were able to participate. Two practice teachers from each of the following degree programs, namely: Bachelor of Secondary Education-English, Bachelor of Physical Education, and Bachelor of Special Needs Education were able to join; however, the Bachelor of Elementary Education was not represented.

Data Collection Process

Both the quantitative and qualitative data collection process was conducted during May 2023 with the consent of the dean. The MTAI questionnaire was sent to the participants' official university email addresses via Google Forms; while, the focus group discussion was conducted via Google Meet. Participants were duly informed that their participation in the research was voluntary and that their integrity was protected.

Of the 43 questionnaires sent via email, only 32 were answered fully. Yielding a 74.42% response rate. Data analysis was performed using the standard Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) and multiple statistical tests were conducted, namely frequencies, standard deviation, t-tests, univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA), and Levene's test for equality. Additionally, only 13.95% of the 43 practice teachers, were able to participate in the focus group discussion.

Resources, Materials, and Tools

Demographic data of the participants such as their age, gender, and degree program were culled and analyzed in the first part. The second part was the My Thinking About Inclusion Scale or MTAI (Stoiber et al., 1998), and finally, the third part was the focus group discussion.

The My Thinking About Inclusion Scale or MTAI was developed in 1998 by Karen Callan Stoiber, Maribeth Gettinger, and Donna Goetz, to investigate beliefs on early childhood inclusion. It is a 28-item comprehensive measure composed of three subscales: core perspectives, expected outcomes, and classroom practices (Stoiber et al., 1998). MTAI used a 5-point Likert scale for scoring where in (1) stands for strongly accept and (5) signifies strongly reject.

Questions for the focus group discussion were related to inclusive education which were reviewed and validated by three experts in the fields of special education and inclusive education. Although all 43 practice teachers from the various degree programs from the College of Education were invited, only six were able to participate. The focus group discussion was video and audio-recorded

with permission from the participants and lasted for one hour and 18 minutes.

Data Analysis Process

In the quantitative part of the study, data were collated and tabulated for statistical analysis. the mean and standard deviation were tested between genders. Levene’s Test for Equality of variances, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and t–test for equality of means were also utilized to get the t- value and f-value as well as the significance level value. In addition, for the focus group discussion, qualitative content analysis was utilized to methodically analyze data. The qualitative data collected were manually transcribed, coded, and categorized. Themes

and sub-themes related to the study emerged from the categories.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research titled, “Evaluation of Practice Teachers’ Views on Inclusive Education” presents the results, arranged in order as stated in the research questions.

A total of 32 practice teachers participated in this study. The following were gathered for the demographic profile: a. age, b. sex, c. degree programs. The table below shows the demographic profile of the participants.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Practice Teachers (n = 32)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age	3	9.4
20-21 yrs old	27	84.4
22-23 yrs old	1	3.1
24-25 yrs old	1	3.1
26-27 yrs old	3	9.4
Sex		
Male	12	37.5
Female	20	62.5
Degree Program		
Elementary Education	5	15.6
Physical Education	15	46.9
English	6	18.8
Special Needs Education	6	18.8

Results of the analysis of the data revealed that there is no significant difference in the practice teachers’ views on inclusive education between males and females. For the male practice teachers, the mean score was 2.19 with a standard deviation of 0.286. On the other hand, for the females, the mean score was 2.27 with a standard deviation

of 0.427. The tests resulted to a t-value of -.566 and sig.value of 0.576. Hence, the null hypothesis was accepted which conveyed that regardless of gender, the beliefs of the male and female participants regarding inclusive education are the same.

Table 2 Result of Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances on Gender of Practice Teachers (n =- 32)

Gender	Mean	Standard deviation	t value	Sig. value	Interpretation	Decision to Ho
Male	2.19	0.286	-	0.576	Not Significant	Accept
Female	2.27	0.427	0.566			

α = 0.05 Level of Significance

To test the relationship among the different degree programs, Analysis of Variance or ANOVA was utilized to compare the variances across the means of the different degree programs. For Bachelor of Elementary Education, the mean was 2.0280 with a standard deviation of .53383; for Bachelor of Physical Education, the mean was 2.1907 with a standard deviation of .35594; for Bachelor of Secondary Education Major in English, the mean was

2.4117 with a standard deviation of .40276; and for Bachelor of Special Needs Education, the mean was 2.3867 with a standard deviation of .15371. The tests resulted to a f-value of 1.376 and sig.value of 0.270. Hence, the null hypothesis was accepted which signified that regardless of the degree program of the practice teachers, their beliefs on inclusive education is the same. The table below, presents the descriptive statistics for the different degree programs.

Table 3 Result of ANOVA on Degree Programs of Practice Teachers

Degree Program	Mean	Standard deviation	F value	Sig. value	Interpretation	Decision to Ho
Elementary Education	2.0280	.53383	1.376	0.270	Not Significant	Accept
Physical Education	2.1907	.35594				
English	2.4117	.40276				
Special Needs Education	2.3867	.15371				

As stated earlier, of the 32 practice teachers that completed the survey, only six participated in the focus group discussion. To protect the privacy of the focus

group participants, all names have been changed throughout the discussion of the results. The demographic data is presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Description of Focus Group Discussion Participants

Participants	Degree Program
BSED-E 1*	Bachelor of Secondary Education Major in English
BSEDE 2*	
BPED 1*	Bachelor of Physical Education
BPED 2*	
BSNED 1*	Bachelor of Special Needs Education
BSNED 2*	

* names have been changed for anonymity

The focus group discussion yielded three broad themes which were identified as they emerged during the

qualitative content analysis. The themes and sub-themes are given in Table 5 below:

Table 5 Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Thoughts on Inclusive Education	Essential Equal opportunities
2. Training on inclusive education practices	Exposure in diverse learners with needs Knowledge of inclusion practices Experiential learning courses Confidence
3. Inclusive practices in future classroom	Government support and resources Parents/guardian follow-up

Thoughts on Inclusive Education

Generally, the participants in the focus group discussion have positive views regarding inclusive education. The participants view inclusive education as essential in supporting diverse learning environments. The participants expressed that inclusive education benefits students with disabilities and teachers by providing ample opportunities to apply learned strategies and validate theories from a previous course taken on Foundation of Special and Inclusive Education. It was mentioned that in that particular course, students were taught the various disabilities they might encounter in a classroom, instructional adaptations for said disabilities, as well as international and local laws supporting inclusion among others.

Training on Inclusive Education Practices

In their responses during the focus group discussion, it can be surmised that even if they have background knowledge on inclusive education, they are still concerned with their level of skills in working with learners with disabilities in a regular classroom. One participant, BPED 1, even stated that:

It would be pretty challenging even though I have experience as a student teacher and as a coach. With inclusive education, I understand that there's diversity and knowing that, malalaman mo na marami dapat i-consider (you will know that there are many things you need to consider). Mahirap pa para sa akin ang mag-handle ng isang class sa hinaharap (It will still be difficult for me to handle a class in the future); since, knowing something is different from handling actual students.

This statement was supported by the other participants as seen below:

BSNED 1: *Upon thinking about it, I am not really ready to enter a classroom with that (inclusion) set up. But since I am a graduating student looking for a job, I will hone my skills in teaching and adapting inclusive education in a classroom setting.*

BSNED 2: *Even if I have experience in handling learners with needs in the regular class, I was not exposed to teaching students with different disabilities. I was only exposed to some. I still lack background on how to handle other students with needs. I still need to attend trainings and seminars.*

Based on the participants responses, we can infer that they require more thorough exposure in settings where inclusion in the classroom is practiced. One practice teacher, BSED-E 1 mentions:

Inclusivity has several facets and layers. Medyo mahirap siya (It is quite challenging). Trainings are not enough. We came from online classes because of the COVID-19 pandemic and then pagbalik (when we returned to onsite classes), we had to immediately enroll in Field Study and Teaching Internship. Yes, we were able to learn the theories, philosophies, laws, and concepts about inclusive education but when you're already in the actual situation, you might get disconcerted or even experience mental block. With our experiences in the private and public schools during our internship, we did not see inclusion being practiced that much because we were not exposed to learners with disabilities in the classroom. We were asked to conduct reading intervention to some learners but they were pulled out from the class.

The statements of the participants support the idea that practice teachers need to gain both theoretical and practical knowledge about inclusion (Booth, Nes, & Stromstad, 2003, as cited in Sharma et al. 2014). They expressed the need to be immersed in actual practice to augment and validate their theoretical knowledge. It can also be noted that the effect of the two-year online classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic also had an effect on the confidence of the practice teachers in the probability of practicing inclusion in their future classrooms.

Inclusive Practices in Future Classrooms

Since all the participants in the study were enrolled in the teaching internship course during the duration of the data gathering procedure, they were able to observe and experience firsthand how classes were conducted in both the private and public school settings as part of their deployment. The participants in the study recommended that the government provides intensive training on inclusive education as well as build more classrooms, and supply materials to the teachers, especially those in the public schools. They also mentioned that the population of students in the classroom must be decreased. According to BSED-E 2, "There are several students inside the classroom. How can you effectively practice inclusion if there are 50 individuals cramped inside a small room?"

The participants also emphasized the importance of partnership and collaboration not just with students but also with teachers, with school administrators, and even with the parents and guardians. They agreed that in order for them to successfully adopt inclusive practices in their future classrooms, they will need the support of the stakeholders.

IV. CONCLUSION

The goal of this study is to evaluate the views of practice teachers toward inclusive education. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in the practice teachers' views on inclusive education between males and females. The null hypothesis is accepted. Moreover, when degree programs were compared, it was revealed that there is no significant difference on the practice teachers' views on inclusive education. Hence, the null hypothesis is also accepted.

The responses of the participants in the focus group discussion revealed that the practice teachers believe they have adequate knowledge about inclusive education; however, they still require more in-depth training and hands-on involvement and participation in conducting inclusive practices inside classrooms to effectively apply them in the future as they become licensed teachers. They also saw the importance of the support of the government and the cooperation of schools as well as parents and guardians for the successful espousal of inclusive education.

In this light, the researchers recommend that the government, specifically, the Department of Education, find effective ways to build more schools and hire more teachers to address the problems of scarcity of classrooms and high student-teacher ratio; additionally, colleges and universities should review their curriculums, especially the experiential learning courses, to ensure that practice teachers are provided with intensive and extensive exposure in inclusive classrooms; finally, more research can be conducted on the beliefs, attitudes, and confidence of practice teachers on inclusive education to determine whether the results from different respondents vary significantly.

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