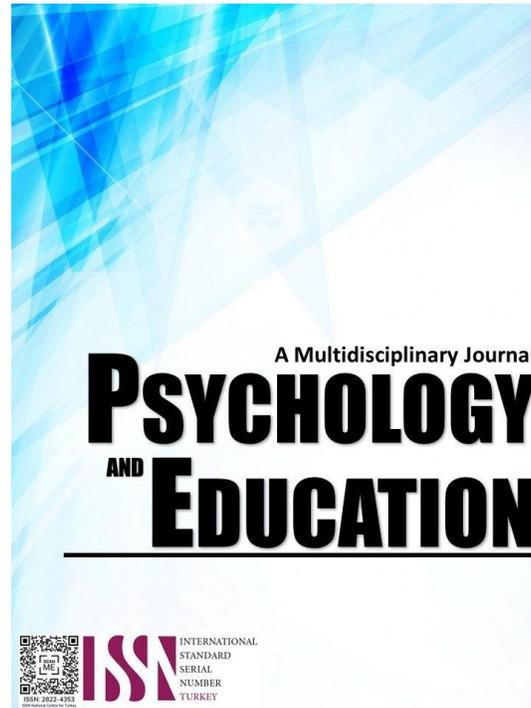


IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICES OF SCHOOL HEADS ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN SOCKSARGEN PHILIPPINES: A SEQUENTIAL EXPLORATORY STUDY



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Implementation Practices of School Heads on Inclusive Education in SOCCSKSARGEN Philippines: A Sequential Exploratory Study

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Abstract

In the implementation of Inclusive Education many learners with special needs still face barriers to equitable and quality education. This study explored the practices of school heads in the implementation of inclusive education, employing a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design. The research aimed to explore inclusive education practices and develop a validated survey tool in the context of inclusive education practices. In the qualitative phase, in-depth interview and focus group discussions were conducted with (twelve) 12 school leaders selected through purposive sampling. The gathered responses highlighted several inclusive education practices, such as inclusive and fair learning environment, identification of learners for placement, assessing special education programs and learners, collaboration with stakeholders, provision of SPED training courses and provision of intervention programs. The integrated qualitative insights lead the development of questionnaire items tested to 200 teachers as respondents for factor analysis and validity testing resulting in 78-items questionnaire with five constructs: Comprehensive Support and Engagement for Inclusive Education, Empowering Teachers through Tailored Instruction and Curriculum Design, Fostering an Inclusive, Safe, and Supportive Learning Environment, Utilizing and Maximizing Allocated Budgets for SPED, and Recognizing Local Government Support. This study contributed to inclusive education practices framework aligned to the school heads' needs. It provided evidence-based insights that may inform teacher empowerment, resource optimization, and the critical role of school heads in advancing inclusive education implementation practices. The highly reliable and validated inclusive education program practices questionnaire stands as a valuable tool, ready to support future research and enhance inclusive education efforts.

Keywords: *practices of school heads, inclusive education, sequential exploratory design, exploratory factor analysis*

Introduction

Inclusive education is a globally recognized commitment aimed at ensuring that all children have access to quality education regardless of their abilities. However, despite policy advancements, the effective implementation of inclusive education remains a significant challenge worldwide (Mokaleng & Möwes, 2020). Many students with disabilities continue to face barriers in accessing education, limiting their opportunities for academic and social development.

Globally, countries such as Russia, Sweden, and Estonia illustrate the complexities of implementing inclusive education. In Russia, teachers frequently lack training in inclusive practices which impedes effective integration of students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms (Kutepova et al., 2021). In Sweden, inadequate support systems such as poorly developed mentoring programs hinder the implementation of inclusive strategies (Borg et al., 2021). Similarly, Estonia faces a shortage of specialists, including special education teachers and psychologists, limiting the capacity to meet diverse learning needs (Rais & Sömer, 2016).

In the Philippines, the introduction of Republic Act 11650 or the Inclusive Education Act of 2022 marks progress in legal frameworks supporting inclusive education (Fernandez & Ortiz, 2018). Nevertheless, challenges such as insufficient resources, untrained teachers, and limited infrastructure persist, hindering effective implementation (Khamari, 2022). The lack of effective inclusive education practices deprives students of disabilities of equitable educational opportunities, which adversely affect their academic achievements and social inclusion. This gap also undermines broader equity and inclusivity educational goals, emphasizing the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to bridge the divide between policy and practice.

Research Objectives

This study was an attempt to explore the school heads implementation practices and develop a tool on implementation practices on inclusive education in SOCCSKSARGEN. Specifically, this study was guided by the following objectives:

Qualitative Phase

1. What are the implementation practices of school heads on inclusive education in SOCCSKSARGEN?

Quantitative Phase

2. To develop a tool for the implementation practices of School Heads on inclusive education.
3. To determine the validity result of the developed tool on implementation practices of school heads on inclusive education practices.
4. To determine the reliability result of the developed tool on implementation practices of school heads on inclusive education practices.

Literature Review

In response to any potential learning barriers that might exist in the classroom, inclusive education is a system of education that meets the needs of all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, gender, or race. According to Gwala (2016), mentioned that school principals employed at inclusive primary schools did not have sufficient information about inclusion, had insufficient preparations for inclusion, failed to receive any aid and support in inclusion applications, there were no special education teachers in inclusive primary schools, inclusive students were not provided with adequate supportive educational services, and teachers did not meet individualized education sufficiently.

As stated by Mitchell (2020), inclusive education is most successful when schools integrate family and community engagement into their policies, ensuring that students receive holistic support both inside and outside the classroom. Furthermore, Florian and Spratt (2021) emphasize that sustained engagement with all stakeholders leads to the development of innovative teaching strategies, ultimately improving learning outcomes for students with diverse needs. Moreover, Booth and Ainscow (2021) argue that inclusive schools must adopt proactive strategies to support emotional and psychological well-being, as student success is deeply connected to their sense of belonging.

Moreover, Carrington and MacArthur (2022) highlight that well-planned budgeting for SPED ensures that students with disabilities receive appropriate accommodation, assistive technology, and specialized instruction, leading to improved learning outcomes. The internal and external stakeholders play a vital role in ensuring accessibility to education by facilitating infrastructure improvements, teacher training programs, and community engagement efforts.

Methodology

Research Design

In this study, the researcher employed an exploratory sequential mixed methods design to comprehensively investigate the research problem. According to Creswell and Plano-Clark (2017), this approach involves the collection and analysis of qualitative data in the initial phase, followed by the development of a quantitative instrument informed by the qualitative findings. This methodology allowed me to explore the complex and multi-faceted nature of the research problem in depth while providing a generalizable understanding in the later stages. The two-phase approach enhanced the thoroughness of the study by integrating diverse perspectives and insights into a cohesive framework.

Participants

For the qualitative phase, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews and focused group discussion with 12 school heads from the Department of Education Region XII. These participants were selected through criterion-based purposive sampling focusing on those who managed schools receiving SPED PSF and had at least three years of experience.

In the quantitative phase, a survey was carried out to 200 teachers handling students with disabilities in regular classes. The quantitative sample was randomly selected from a population of teachers who had undergone inclusive education training and courses.

Instrument

In the qualitative phase, the research instruments consisted of a semi-structured interview guide and a researcher-made questionnaire. These questions were designed to elicit detailed narratives from school heads about their experiences and strategies in implementing inclusive education. The interviews guide consisted with 3 interview questions and 19 probing questions to gather deeper responses from the participants

In the quantitative phase, the quantitative questionnaire, informed by qualitative findings, contained 107 items to measure the management of inclusive education. The instrument was called "Implementation Practices of School Heads on Inclusive Education in SOCSKSARGEN Philippines: A sequential Exploratory Study. It employed a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

After undergoing expert validation to guarantee content relevancy and clarity, a small sample of school leaders participated in a pilot test of the questionnaire. With a KMO score of 0.935 and a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity exploratory factor analysis of ($\chi^2 = 31077.642, p < .001$), demonstrated construct validity and supported the data's eligibility for factor analysis. Cronbach's alpha was used to confirm internal consistency reliability, and all constructs had scores greater than 0.80.

In conclusion, five major components that characterize how school administrators execute inclusive education were found using the factor analysis. A final set of 78 items, spread across the five factors, remained after 13 items were eliminated for having low factor loadings or insufficient contributions.

Procedure

In the qualitative phase, key informant interviews were conducted with school heads to explore their experiences and practices in implementing inclusive education. Consent forms were provided, and participants were assured of confidentiality. Semi-structured

interviews allowed for in-depth discussions, and transcripts were shared with participants for verification and additional input. The focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to gain insights into the practical challenges and opportunities in inclusive education.

For the quantitative phase of this study, a survey of questions was developed based on the key themes that showed up in the analysis of the qualitative data. The researcher crafted a survey questionnaire composed of 107 items constructed from the statements given by the qualitative interview participants. The questionnaire was validated by experts and refined through pilot testing before it was administered to 200 teacher participants. Each participant spends roughly 30 to 40 minutes filling it out on paper during school visits. during school visits in a paper-based format, taking roughly 30 to 40 minutes to complete per participant. In order to confirm the tool's statistical soundness, measures of validity and reliability were calculated after the quantitative data were examined using exploratory factor analysis (EFA).

Data Analysis

In the qualitative phase, transcripts of focus groups and interviews were examined using theme analysis. In order to find trends and new themes pertaining to school leaders' inclusive education implementation practices, this approach entailed classifying and coding the data. For the quantitative phase, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to determine the school heads implementation practices on inclusive education tool's underlying constructs. Statistical analysis was conducted using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure, and sampling adequacy and suitability for factor analysis were assessed using Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. In order to evaluate the instrument's internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha was determined for every factor. The purpose of these statistical approaches was to address the quantitative research concerns related to construct identification, validity, and reliability as well as to validate the tool's structure and reliability.

Ethical Considerations

Respecting ethical norms in research is crucial for encouraging integrity, protecting participants, and enhancing the legitimacy of scientific advancement. Furthermore, ethical clearance from Research Ethics Committee (REC). Further ensured compliance with established research standards. However, I mitigated any risks by ensuring confidentiality and obtaining informed consent from all participants and respondents. There is no significant potential harm anticipated in this study.

Results and Discussion

Qualitative Phase

The thematic analysis utilized in this study revealed that school heads implement practices on inclusive education through providing an inclusive and fair learning environment, identifying of SPED learners for placement, assessing SPED programs and learners' progress, collaborating with stakeholders, providing sped training courses, and providing intervention programs.

Table 1. *Summary of Qualitative Findings*

| <i>Research Question:</i> | <i>Emerging Themes</i> |
|---|--|
| What are the implementation practices of school heads on inclusive education in SOCCSKSARGEN? | Inclusive and Fair Learning Environment Identification of SPED Learners for Placement Assessing SPED Programs and Learners' Progress Provision of SPED Training Courses Assessing SPED Programs and Learners' Progress |

Inclusive and Fair Learning Environment

This first theme that emerged for this study is the establishment of an inclusive and fair learning environment by the school heads. This theme summarizes the active efforts of the school heads to create educational spaces where all learners feel supported and accepted in all aspects. Despite the challenges posed by inadequate facilities, school heads and teachers strive to uphold that the learning environment remains conducive to quality education. In addition to this, teachers work diligently to create a non-bullying environment, recognizing the importance of emotional and psychological safety for students. The acknowledgment of learners' individual differences whether in terms of learning styles, abilities, or backgrounds further highlights the commitment to inclusivity, as teachers adapt their instructional approaches to cater to diverse needs. As deliberately expressed by the participants during the interview:

"We just made sure na tinatanggap namin yung mga bata regardless of their conditions and they are they belong in the school community."

(We ensured that we accept the children regardless of their conditions, and they belong to the school community.) – P4, Line 59

"So, when it comes to inclusive education, we make sure na ang learners natin regardless of their disabilities ay nabibigyan ng equal opportunities sa lahat ng school activities." (So, when it comes to inclusive education, we make sure that our learners, regardless of their disabilities, are given equal opportunities in all school activities.) – FGD 2, Line 407

"Our school is implementing contextualize and modifies instruction aligns to the needs and present performance of our learners."

(Our school is implementing contextualized and modified instruction that aligns with the needs and present performance of our learners.) – IDI P6, Line 26-32

"Ensuring that every learner is learning and is taken care of all the time, including SPED learners." (Ensuring that every learner is learning and is taken care of all the time, including SPED learners.) – FGD 4, Line 284

"Ang school namin nagbibigay ng full access sa lahat ng school facilities and learning resources for learners with special needs." (Our school provides full access to all school facilities and learning resources for learners with special needs.) – IDI P6, Line 136

Identification of SPED Learners for Placement

As revealed in this study, a critical aspect of inclusive education practices is the accurate identification of Special Education (SPED) learners for placement, thus, emerged to be the next theme of this undertaking. School heads prioritize the careful assessment of SPED students ensuring that their specific difficulties are identified early on. This assessment process is essential as it informs the proper placement or assignment of learners to educational tracks or classes where they can receive targeted support. Moreover, the emphasis on individualized assessment aligns with the goal of providing equitable educational opportunities to ensure that no learner is isolated due to their unique needs. Throughout the interview, the participants made a conscious effort to express that:

"During their summer reading camp we are already identifying students with difficulty because all of the incoming grade 7 will undergo summer reading camp where each student is being diagnosed."

(During the summer reading camp, we are already identifying students with difficulties because all incoming Grade 7 students will undergo summer reading camp where each student is diagnosed.) – P1, Line 18

"Once we identify their specific difficulties, we distribute them in different sections where teachers are aware of their needs."

(Once we identify their specific difficulties, we distribute them in different sections where teachers are aware of their needs.) – IDI P2, Line 23

"So with this assessment situation, since we identify them already we can already give them an intervention intended for the difficulty like as I said while ago na kung halimbawa ang isang bata ay hindi makapagsalita."

(So with this assessed situation, since we already identified them, we can already give them an intervention intended for the difficulty like, as I said a while ago, for example, if a child cannot speak.) – FGD P1, Line 52

"Before the start of classes, since we identified them already, all of the teachers are aware of how to handle them."

(Before the start of classes, since we identified them already, all of the teachers are aware of how to handle them.) – IDI P3, Line 57

"After identification of needs, we create specific interventions to cater to the identified needs of SPED students, distributing them across sections."

(After identifying the needs, we create specific interventions to cater to the identified needs of SPED students, distributing them across sections.) FGD 2, Line 79

Assessing SPED Programs and Learners' Progress

The regular assessment of SPED programs and the continuous monitoring of learners' progress are fundamental to maintaining the quality and effectiveness of inclusive education, hence, the third theme for this study. School heads conduct systematic feedback and performance assessments to ensure that SPED learners are meeting their developmental and educational goals. This ongoing process of evaluation allows for timely adjustments to teaching strategies, program structures, and learner interventions. Moreover, school heads actively engage in conducting regular meetings with stakeholders including teachers, parents, and specialists, to review the progress of SPED programs. Finally, advocacy for inclusive education goes beyond the school, as school heads work to involve the community in supporting SPED initiatives, thereby cultivating a more inclusive and informed societal perspective. During the course of the interview, it was deliberately conveyed by the participants that:

"The progress of their learner or learners, we give them also feedback."

(We also give feedback on the progress of the learners.) – P1, Line 113

"Regular evaluations are conducted to ensure effectiveness, and adjustments are made based on students' progress."

(Regular evaluations are conducted to ensure effectiveness, and adjustments are made based on the students' progress.) – P3, Line 206

"Assessment results guide modifications in the learning competencies to address the functional and academic needs of the learners."

(Assessment results guide modifications in the learning competencies to address the functional and academic needs of the learners.)

– P4, Line 60

"We conduct SMEPA quarterly to monitor the learners' progress, identify issues, and provide interventions when needed." (We conduct SMEPA quarterly to monitor the learners' progress, identify issues, and provide interventions when needed.) – P6, Line 139

"We utilize a school-based comprehensive progress report to update and assess the learners' development, guiding teachers in supporting them."

(We use a school-based comprehensive progress report to update and assess the learners' development, guiding teachers in supporting them.) – P6, Line 83

Collaborating with Stakeholders

For the next theme, effective collaboration with a wide array of stakeholders has been found to be essential to the success of inclusive education programs. As revealed in this theme, school heads recognize that the support of external stakeholders, such as local government units (LGUs), non-governmental organizations, and community groups, plays an important role in strengthening the sustainability and growth of SPED programs. These collaborations facilitate not only financial and material support but also the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the programs in place. In particular, LGUs are acknowledged for their vital contributions to resource allocation, program oversight, and policy advocacy. School heads also emphasize the strategic utilization of the allocated budget for SPED for funds to be maximized to benefit learners and address gaps in infrastructure, teaching materials, and teacher training. During the discussion, the participants intentionally highlighted that:

"Collaborating with parents through mentoring and monitoring is vital to ensure the development of learners." (Collaborating with parents through mentoring and monitoring is vital to ensure the development of learners.) – P4, Line 32

"We engage parents and stakeholders through regular meetings, discussing learners' progress and interventions." (We engage parents and stakeholders through regular meetings, discussing learners' progress and interventions.) – FGD 1, Line 271

"Our Barangay Council helps by reinforcing our child protection policies and supporting inclusive education efforts." (Our Barangay Council helps by reinforcing our child protection policies and supporting inclusive education efforts.) – FGD 1, Line 276

"The involvement of internal and external stakeholders is essential for the success of our SPED programs." (The involvement of internal and external stakeholders is essential for the success of our SPED programs.) – FGD 6, Line 319

"We hold appreciation days for parents of LSENs to acknowledge their role in supporting their children's education and development." (We hold appreciation days for parents of LSENs to acknowledge their role in supporting their children's education and development.) – P6, Line 98

Provision of SPED Training Courses

As opined in this theme, the provision of continuous professional development for SPED teachers is identified as a key strategy in enhancing inclusive education practices. School heads emphasize the importance of equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively address the diverse needs of SPED learners. The training courses provided focus not only on the theoretical aspects of special education but also on practical strategies for modifying and contextualizing instructional materials and methods. This guarantees that teachers are well-prepared to design and implement differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of each learner. Furthermore, the training promotes a deeper understanding of inclusivity encouraging teachers to view learners holistically and to adopt innovative teaching practices that foster both academic and personal growth. In the interview, the participants explicitly articulated that:

"Actually, kung training needs lang, maraming-maraming kailangan ang teachers in terms of training needs that will answer the difficulty of the learner." (Actually, in terms of training needs, teachers require a lot of training that would address the difficulties learners face.) – P1, Line 153

"We send teachers to trainings at both the regional and national levels, but our SLAC sessions only provide limited time for SPED topics."

(We send teachers to training at both the regional and national levels, but our SLAC sessions only provide limited time for SPED topics.) – P6, Line 147

"The teachers who are trained at the division level must echo their learnings to the other teachers at the school level."

(Teachers trained at the division level must reecho their learnings to other teachers at the school level.) – P4, Line 44

"We make efforts to provide SPED training for teachers, despite limited resources and time constraints." (We make efforts to provide SPED training for teachers, despite limited resources and time constraints.) – FGD 6, Line 353

"Our school actively sends teachers to national-level SPED training to ensure they are equipped to handle learners with special needs."



(Our school actively sends teachers to national-level SPED training to ensure they are equipped to handle learners with special needs.) – P4, Line 61

Provision of Intervention Programs

The final theme for this research objective shows that a core component of the inclusive education framework is the provision of well-designed intervention programs tailored to the individual needs of SPED learners. School heads play a key role in the development and implementation of these programs, focusing that they are both responsive and relevant to the specific challenges faced by the learners. The intervention programs are often designed with a focus on customizing the curriculum to align with the learners' abilities, interests, and developmental levels. This includes the creation of specialized instructional materials and resources that facilitate meaningful learning experiences. In addition to this, the development of intervention programs extends to the design of targeted support strategies such as remedial instruction and specialized therapies that address the cognitive, emotional, and social needs of SPED learners.

"We design interventions based on the reading assessments conducted during the summer reading camp to address the learners' needs."

(We design interventions based on the reading assessments conducted during the summer reading camp to address the learners' needs.) – P1, Line 18

"In our school, we have implemented specific intervention programs to help learners who struggle with literacy and numeracy."

(In our school, we have implemented specific intervention programs to help learners who struggle with literacy and numeracy.) – FGD 6, Line 446

"We hold SPED Fun Day every year where learners participate in activities designed specifically for them." (We hold SPED Fun Day every year where learners participate in activities designed specifically for them.) – P6, Line 73

"We focus on survival and employment skills for our older learners with special needs, tailoring our intervention programs accordingly." (We focus on survival and employment skills for our older learners with special needs, tailoring our intervention programs accordingly.) – P6, Line 107

"Specific interventions are designed based on the students' identified needs to ensure skill development." (Specific interventions are designed based on the students' identified needs to ensure skill development.) – P1, Line 52

Quantitative Result

Moving forward, the transition from qualitative findings to quantitative analysis was designed to deepen the understanding of school heads' implementation practices in inclusive education. Insights derived from the thematic analysis of interviews provided the foundation for the development of a comprehensive survey instrument.

Table 1. *Factor Constructs that Significantly Described the Implementation of Inclusive Education Practices of School Heads*

| <i>Items/ Constructs</i> | <i>Factors and Factor Loadings</i> | | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> | <i>5</i> |
| 28. hosts workshops for parents to learn about supporting their child's learning at home. | .533 | | | | |
| 31. has effective processes in place to identify the difficulties faced by SNED learners. | .700 | | | | |
| 32. is trained to recognize signs of learning difficulties in learners. | .753 | | | | |
| 33. identifies SPED students' needs thoroughly and accurately. | .772 | | | | |
| 34. conducts comprehensive evaluations to identify specific learning and developmental challenges. | .779 | | | | |
| 35. works with specialists to refine the identification process and ensure accurate diagnosis. | .763 | | | | |
| 36. utilizes data from multiple sources, including classroom observations and standardized tests, to identify difficulties. | .752 | | | | |
| 37. helps to effectively assesses learners to place them to appropriate classes. | .721 | | | | |
| 38. decides placement of learners based on a thorough evaluation of each learner's needs. | .734 | | | | |
| 39. develops and uses a comprehensive assessment tool to guide effective place learners. | .728 | | | | |
| 40. engages in collaborative planning with teachers to ensure appropriate placement based on detailed learner profiles. | .730 | | | | |
| 41. monitors and adjusts placement decisions throughout the year based on ongoing assessments and student progress. | .733 | | | | |
| 42. regularly checks and provides feedback on the progress of SPED learners. | .723 | | | | |
| 43. closely monitors learners' performance to modify teaching strategies as | .762 | | | | |



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| needed. | |
| 44. collaboratively informs parents on their child’s progress through regular communication. | .728 |
| 45. establishes a system for regular progress updates and feedback to support continuous improvement. | .746 |
| 46. coordinates with teachers and parents to set actionable goals and track progress toward them. | .696 |
| 47. uses data-driven insights to adapt and refine support strategies for individual learners. | .709 |
| 48. conducts regular meetings to evaluate the effectiveness of SPED programs. | .666 |
| 50. seeks input from stakeholders during SPED program evaluations. | .656 |
| 51. schedules regular review sessions to assess program effectiveness and make necessary adjustments. | .649 |
| 52. includes diverse perspectives from teachers, parents, and specialists in evaluation meetings | .631 |
| 53. documents and communicates findings from evaluations to guide future planning and improvements. | .592 |
| 55. informs community members about the benefits of inclusive education. | .565 |
| 56. engages with the community to support SPED initiatives. | .564 |
| 57. organizes community outreach events to increase understanding of SPED programs and their benefits. | .675 |
| 58. creates informational materials and campaigns to educate the public about inclusive education. | .671 |
| 59. establishes partnerships with local media to highlight success stories and promote SPED awareness. | .635 |
| 60. collaborates with stakeholders to monitor and support SPED programs. | .578 |
| 61. works with external organizations to enhance support for SPED learners. | .594 |
| 62. regularly communicates with stakeholders about the needs and progress of SPED students. | .618 |
| 64. engages in regular dialogue with community leaders to align efforts and enhance support for SPED students. | .594 |
| 65. creates a stakeholder feedback loop to continuously improve and adapt SPED programs based on community input. | .628 |
| <hr/> | |
| 82. provides ongoing professional development opportunities tailored to the evolving needs of SPED teachers. | .539 |
| 83. encourages teachers to share their knowledge and best practices with colleagues through peer-led training sessions. | .587 |
| 84. promotes modified instructional strategies to meet the diverse needs of SPED learners. | .599 |
| 85. implements contextualized materials to be relevant to the learners’ environment and experiences. | .586 |
| 86. supports teachers in adapting the curriculum for SPED learners. | .631 |
| 88. supports teachers in implementing flexible teaching methods that respond to real-time classroom dynamics. | .670 |
| 89. encourages feedback from students to refine and improve instructional approaches. | .647 |
| 90. helps designed curriculum to cater to the individual needs of SPED students. | .721 |
| 91. is involved in the process of curriculum development for SPED learners. | .700 |
| 92. ensures curriculum is flexible enough to accommodate different learning paces and styles. | .724 |
| 93. works with curriculum developers to ensure materials are inclusive and meet the needs of all learners. | .691 |
| 94. incorporates feedback from teachers and students to continuously improve curriculum relevance and effectiveness. | .724 |
| 95. ensures curriculum adaptations align with educational standards and learner requirements. | .795 |
| 96. evaluates intervention programs are tailored to the specific needs of each SPED learner. | .692 |
| 97. collaborates in designing intervention programs for students with disabilities. | .735 |
| 98. evaluates the effectiveness of intervention programs is regularly and adjusted as needed. | .697 |
| 99. collaborates with specialists to develop evidence-based intervention programs tailored to student needs. | .635 |
| 100. evaluates the impact of intervention programs regularly to ensure they meet their intended goals. | .702 |



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| 101. provides resources and training for staff to implement and monitor intervention programs effectively. | .671 |
| 102. provides the necessary resources to develop instructional materials for SPED learners. | .664 |
| 103. ensures instructional materials developed are accessible and user-friendly for SPED learners. | .656 |
| 104. encourages innovation in the creation of instructional materials for SPED learners. | .657 |
| 105. collaborates with experts to create instructional materials that are engaging and accessible for SPED learners. | .642 |
| 107. incorporates feedback from SPED teachers and students to refine instructional materials and ensure their effectiveness. | .677 |
| <hr/> | |
| 2. adapts teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of all learners. | .612 |
| 3. promotes a culture of respect and inclusion for all learners. | .677 |
| 4. facilitates peer tutoring and collaborative projects to integrate learners with varying abilities. | .684 |
| 5. provides differentiated resources to support diverse learning needs in the classroom. | .661 |
| 6. ensures that classroom environments and activities are designed to be universally accessible. | .724 |
| 7. maintains a high-quality learning environment even with limited facilities. | .724 |
| 8. practices resourcefulness in using available materials to ensure effective learning. | .728 |
| 9. supports teachers in overcoming facility challenges to provide quality education. | .767 |
| 10. prioritizes maintenance and creative use of existing facilities to support diverse learning needs. | .763 |
| 11. leverages community partnerships to enhance available resources and support. | .672 |
| 12. encourages teachers to implement flexible teaching strategies to overcome facility limitations. | .771 |
| 13. actively monitors and prevent bullying incidents among learners. | .556 |
| 15. has strong emphasis on creating a safe and supportive environment for all learners. | .706 |
| 16. provides regular training for staff and students on recognizing and preventing bullying. | .516 |
| 17. implements a clear reporting system for students and parents to address bullying incidents. | .576 |
| 18. creates a school-wide culture of kindness and empathy through ongoing awareness campaigns. | .556 |
| 19. recognizes and respect the individual learning needs of each learner. | .612 |
| 20. provides supervision for differentiated instruction to cater to various learning styles and abilities. | .635 |
| 21. values and celebrates the unique contributions of each learner. | .548 |
| 22. conducts regular assessments to understand each learner's unique needs and strengths. | .543 |
| 24. celebrates academic and personal achievements of students to build self-esteem and motivation. | .599 |
| 27. designs activities to foster collaboration between students with and without special needs education. | .546 |
| <hr/> | |
| 72. allocates budget and used effectively to support learners. | .825 |
| 73. includes teachers in the planning of the utilization of budget. | .830 |
| 74. ensures transparency in the use of SPED funds. | .841 |
| 75. monitors budget expenditures closely to ensure funds are used effectively and transparently. | .851 |
| 76. seeks additional funding opportunities and grants to supplement the allocated budget for SPED. | .688 |
| 77. involves teachers and administrators in budget planning to align spending with actual needs. | .763 |
| <hr/> | |
| 66. acknowledges the contributions of local government units (LGUs) to SNED programs. | .795 |
| 67. is aware of the support provided by LGUs for inclusive education. | .773 |
| 68. effectively utilizes the resources provided by LGUs to enhance SPED services. | .773 |
| 69. organizes recognition events to acknowledge and appreciate the contributions of LGUs to SPED efforts. | .774 |

| | | | | | |
|---|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 70. maintains open communication channels with LGUs to ensure ongoing support and collaboration. | | | | | .764 |
| 71. shares success stories and outcomes with LGUs to demonstrate the impact of their support on student achievements. | | | | | .695 |
| Number of Items | 33 | 24 | 22 | 6 | 6 |
| Eigenvalue | 53.277 | 5.554 | 4.975 | 2.797 | 2.180 |
| % of Variance | 57.288 | 5.972 | 5.349 | 3.008 | 2.344 |
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy = .935 | | | | | |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity $\chi^2 = 31077.642$; $df = 4278$; p -value < .001 | | | | | |

A total of 91 items were analyzed through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to identify the key constructs underlying the implementation of inclusive education practices by school heads. Before analyzing the data, two important assumptions were verified to ensure the factorability of the responses. First, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy was computed, yielding a value of 0.935, which indicates that the sample size was highly suitable for factor analysis. Additionally, Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, with a χ^2 value of 31077.642 ($df = 4278$, $p < .001$), confirming that correlations between variables were adequate for structure detection.

Following these tests, factor analysis was conducted using the maximum likelihood estimation method with orthogonal Varimax rotation, which converged after 24 iterations. The analysis suggested a five-factor solution, with each factor having an eigenvalue greater than one. Factor loadings of 0.5 or higher were considered significant and items with lower factor loadings were removed from the analysis. Based on these criteria, some items were discarded due to insufficient loading or the failure to meet the minimum number of items per factor. A construct should generally contain at least four to six items to be considered significant. Hence, 16 items (items 1, 14, 23, 25, 26, 29, 30, 49, 54, 63, 78, 79, 80, 81, 87, 106) were removed, leaving a finalized scale of 91 items grouped into five factor structures.

Comprehensive Support and Engagement for Inclusive Education, the first factor, explained 57.29% of the total variance and consisted of 33 items. This factor highlighted the critical role school heads play in assessing and monitoring learners, and in collaborating with teachers and parents to ensure inclusive education. For example, item 34 focused on conducting comprehensive evaluations to identify learning challenges, while item 39 emphasized the development of assessment tools to guide appropriate learner placement. Item 43 indicated the importance of regular monitoring of learners' performance to modify instructional strategies as needed.

The second factor, named Empowering Teachers through Tailored Instruction and Curriculum Design, accounted for 5.97% of the variance and included 24 items. This factor reflects the emphasis on providing teachers with the necessary skills and resources to implement inclusive education. Item 83 highlighted peer-led training sessions, where teachers can share best practices, while item 92 emphasized the importance of flexible curricula that cater to diverse learning paces and styles.

Fostering an Inclusive, Safe, and Supportive Learning Environment, the third factor, explained 5.35% of the variance with 22 items contributing to this construct. This factor is primarily concerned with creating a school environment that promotes respect, safety, and inclusivity. Item 6 reflects the importance of designing classroom environments that are accessible to all learners. Similarly, item 13 focuses on the prevention and monitoring of bullying incidents.

The fourth factor, Utilizing and Maximizing the Allocated Budget for SPED, accounted for 3.01% of the variance and comprised 6 items. This construct highlights the critical role of financial management in inclusive education. Item 75 emphasized the importance of closely monitoring budget expenditures to ensure transparency and effective use, while item 76 stressed the need to seek additional funding to supplement existing resources for SPED programs. The fifth and final factor, Recognizing the Support of Local Government Units (LGUs) to the School, explained 2.34% of the variance, with 6 items loading onto this construct. This factor emphasizes the collaboration between schools and local government units in supporting inclusive education. Item 69 highlighted the organization of recognition events to appreciate LGUs' contributions, while item 68 focused on effectively utilizing LGU-provided resources to enhance SPED services.

In summary, the factor analysis identified five key constructs that describe the implementation of inclusive education by school heads. After discarding 13 items due to low factor loadings or insufficient contributions, a finalized set of 78 items remained, distributed across the five factors.

Discussion

This study presents a comprehensive analysis of the study's findings and the conclusions drawn from them. It offers actionable recommendations based on the qualitative and quantitative data to address the identified research objectives effectively.

The findings from this study reveal the critical practices of school heads in implementing inclusive education in SOCCSKSARGEN as

illuminated through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The analysis resulted in five significant factors, each representing a key dimension of inclusive education practices. The following sections expand on why the identified indicators belong to their respective factors and their implications for inclusive education.

The first factor, Comprehensive Support and Engagement for Inclusive Education, emerged as the most significant construct. The high loading indicators within this factor, such as conducting comprehensive evaluations, developing assessment tools for learner placement, and monitoring learners' performance to adjust teaching strategies, emphasize the pivotal role of school heads in fostering an inclusive culture through systematic and data-driven approaches. Indicators like "conducting comprehensive evaluations to identify learning challenges" and "utilizing data from classroom observations and standardized tests" belong to this factor because they reflect the proactive role of leadership in addressing learners' needs. These practices are foundational for ensuring that interventions are targeted and effective. Moreover, collaboration with stakeholders such as teachers and parents reinforce the concept of engagement. These practices align with Florian and Black-Hawkins (2021), who argue that stakeholder engagement is indispensable to achieving sustainable inclusivity. They are those who have the responsibility and interest in the implementation of inclusive education at different levels that is why their involvement is very important (Balami, 2015).

The second theme appeared as Empowering Teachers through Tailored Instruction and Curriculum Design. In addition, teachers' commitment and attitudes to the implementation of inclusive education in primary schools show that there are numerous variables which influence teachers' commitment and attitudes (Engelbrecht, Eloff, & Newmark, 2017). Indicators such as "facilitating peer-led training sessions," "adapting the curriculum for SPED learners," and "providing professional development opportunities tailored to SPED needs" highlight the emphasis on teacher empowerment. The inclusion of these indicators within this factor underscores the necessity of building teacher capacity.

For instance, peer-led training sessions promote a collaborative environment where teachers can share best practices, while curriculum adaptations ensure that the instructional design is inclusive of diverse learning paces and styles. These practices align with Loreman et al. (2019), who emphasize the importance of continuous professional development in fostering effective inclusive education practices. Furthermore, this factor reflects Tomlinson's (2017) advocacy for differentiated instruction as a critical component of teacher empowerment. Sharma et al. (2021) stress that ongoing professional development in inclusive pedagogies significantly enhances teachers' ability to implement student-centered learning approaches. Instructional and methodological strategies to address the needs of students with disabilities should be mandatory for all personnel.

The third theme, Fostering an Inclusive, Safe, and Supportive Learning Environment, was evident from practices like designing universally accessible classroom environments and preventing bullying reflect a commitment to creating safe and supportive spaces for all learners. Indicators such as "designing universally accessible classroom environments," "preventing and monitoring bullying incidents," and "promoting a culture of respect and inclusion" belong here as they directly address the foundational requirements for an inclusive setting. These indicators reflect the commitment to establishing a school culture that prioritizes emotional and psychological safety, enabling all learners to thrive. For example, anti-bullying initiatives and universally designed classrooms ensure that learners feel both physically and emotionally secure, which is critical for engagement and participation. This aligns with Epstein's (2017) assertion that fostering an inclusive culture is essential for eliminating barriers to learning.

The fourth theme was utilizing and Maximizing the Allocated Budget for SPED. Indicators such as "closely monitoring budget expenditures," "seeking additional funding opportunities," and "ensuring transparency in the use of SPED funds" belong to this factor due to their focus on resource optimization. Effective budget utilization ensures that adequate resources are available to support inclusive education programs. This finding aligns with UNESCO (2015), which emphasizes the necessity of sound financial practices to enhance the quality and sustainability of inclusive education, particularly in resource-constrained contexts. Blanton et al. (2021) highlighted that schools that optimize SPED budgets through evidence-based financial planning achieve better program sustainability and service delivery, ultimately enhancing the quality of inclusive education.

The fifth theme appeared as Recognizing the Support of LGUs to the School. Indicators such as "acknowledging LGUs' contributions," "effectively utilizing LGU-provided resources," and "maintaining open communication channels with LGUs" reflect the symbiotic relationship between schools and local governments in advancing inclusive education. These indicators belong to this factor because they highlight the external support mechanisms that bolster internal school efforts. For example, recognition events for LGUs and open communication channels demonstrate how external partnerships contribute to the success and sustainability of inclusive programs. Kuyini and Desai (2020) corroborate this, noting that partnerships with local governments enhance the implementation of inclusive education policies through resource allocation and advocacy.

Integration of Findings

This study adopted an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design to systematically investigate school heads' implementation practices of inclusive education. The integration of qualitative and quantitative phases was essential to construct a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. The qualitative phase, which involved focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, yielded several emergent themes such as inclusive and fair learning environment, identification of learners for placement, assessing special education programs and learners, collaboration with stakeholders, provision of SPED training courses and provision of intervention

programs. These themes provided the conceptual foundation for the construction of a 107-item survey instrument utilized in the quantitative phase.

Subsequent exploratory factor analysis (EFA) yielded five statistically robust components of inclusive education practices these includes Comprehensive Support and Engagement for Inclusive Education, Empowering Teachers through Tailored Instruction and Curriculum Design, Fostering an Inclusive, Safe, and Supportive Learning Environment, Utilizing and Maximizing Allocated Budgets for SPED, and Recognizing Local Government Support. These factors not only confirmed but also extended the qualitative findings. For instance, the component Fostering an Inclusive, Safe, and Supportive Learning Environment reflected the qualitative theme of creating an inclusive and fair learning atmosphere. Likewise, the theme regarding the provision of SPED training and intervention programs was quantitatively supported by the factor Empowering Teachers through Tailored Instruction and Curriculum Design. The convergence between qualitative and quantitative data underscores the methodological rigor of the study and reinforces the validity and reliability of the developed instrument as a contextually grounded and empirically supported measure of inclusive education implementation.

Conclusions

The primary objective of this study is to identify emerging trends, insights, and unexplored dimensions of inclusive education that extend beyond existing theoretical frameworks. Themes generated during the qualitative phase served as the foundation for developing a new survey instrument in the quantitative phase, ensuring that the tool was empirically grounded and contextually relevant to school heads' implementation practices. The validated instrument offers a comprehensive framework for assessing and strengthening inclusive education, highlighting key areas such as teacher training, resource allocation, and stakeholder collaboration. Its development not only provides actionable insights for improving inclusive practices but also contributes a valuable resource for future researchers. By supporting evidence-based strategies and a deeper understanding of inclusive education, the tool stands to inform both policy and practice in diverse educational settings.

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