#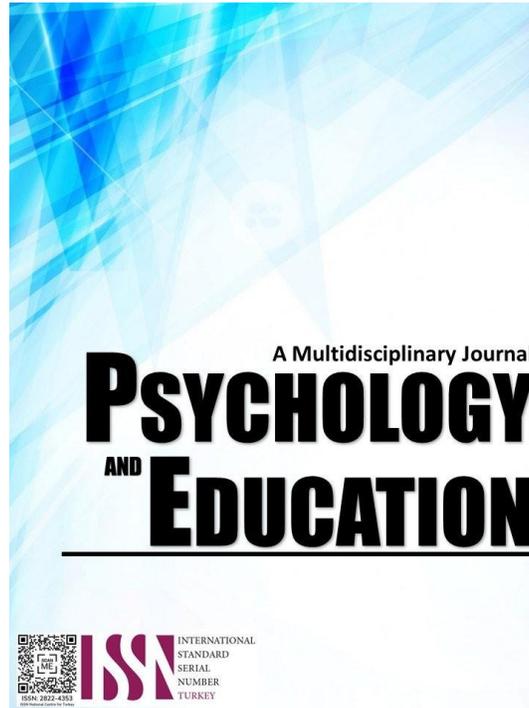 INFLUENCE OF PRESERVICE TRAINING AND IN-SERVICE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES ON THE SELF-EFFICACY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

Influence of Preservice Training and In-Service Development Activities on the Self-Efficacy of Special Education Teachers

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Abstract

As inclusive education evolves, Special Education (SPED) teachers must possess foundational knowledge and engage in continuous professional development to address the needs of all their students. This study investigated the effect of preservice training and in-service development activities on the self-efficacy of special education teachers in specific public schools in General Santos City, Philippines. According to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, this study investigates the impact of two teacher training components on educators' competence and confidence in performing various special education-related tasks. A descriptive-correlational research approach was employed, and 48 special education teachers were randomly selected from a cohort of educators. We used a validated survey instrument to gather data on respondents' demographic characteristics, the extent of preservice and in-service training they had undergone, and their levels of self-efficacy in 10 critical domains of special education practice. We employed statistical methods, including the mean, Pearson's correlation coefficient, and t-tests, to analyze the data. The findings indicated that preservice training was substantial (M = 3.38). It concentrated extensively on identifying student needs but did little to prepare instructors for facilitating student advancement to the next grade level. Conversely, in-service development activities were identified as extensive (M = 4.17), particularly in mentorship and collaboration. Teachers' self-efficacy was assessed as exceptionally high (M = 4.15), with the highest confidence exhibited when working in partnership with support personnel. A statistically significant moderate positive connection (r = +0.61) existed between in-service development and self-efficacy. The link with preservice training (r = +0.26) was weak and not statistically significant. The findings indicate that preservice training provides teachers with a foundational understanding; however, continuous and specialized professional development is more beneficial in enhancing the self-efficacy of SPED instructors. The study suggests that both components must be strengthened to enhance inclusive education outcomes.

Keywords: *self-efficacy, preservice training, in-service development, and inclusive education*

Introduction

Preparing teachers to educate students with disabilities is complex (Nagro and deBettencourt, 2017). That is why special education teachers should possess the essential skills to educate students with a wide range of learning and behavioral needs across various settings. Preparing special education teacher candidates to educate students with disabilities across various educational contexts requires more than simply teaching them about evidence-based practices or directing them to observe other effective teachers (Leko & Brownell, 2011, as cited by Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017).

A rise in teacher quality contributes to the independence of individuals with special needs, which is the goal of special education. Accordingly, preservice teachers must receive thorough training during their undergraduate education to enhance teacher quality (Sola-Özgüç, 2019).

The scope of characteristics in the Special Education field requires more knowledge, skills, and experience from Special Education teachers. Research studies conducted in Turkey have revealed results indicating the inadequacy of practicum in teacher training programs and the need for improvement in special education teachers' communication and collaboration skills. It was emphasized that the in-service training offered to Special Education teachers is insufficient, as they often feel unable to provide quality teaching. Therefore, the content of in-service training should be improved, and its duration should be increased (Ergül, Baydik, & Demir, 2013).

In the City Division of Ilagan Isabela, Philippines, most teachers teaching children with learning disabilities did not receive any special needs education training from the school; they feel they are not qualified to teach children with learning disability. Moreover, teachers assigned to SPED classes lack strategies for dealing with learners with disabilities. It was revealed that the classrooms for children with learning disabilities in the Division of Ilagan have a poor learning environment that fails to support the SPED, including a lack of budget, curriculum guides, Instructional Materials (IMs), and even adequate school facilities. The placement of learners with special needs in an inclusive classroom alongside ordinary learners is insufficient without proper support. Learners with disabilities did not receive all the necessary support and services to access the curriculum facilities, and stakeholders' support is minimal in meeting the needs of students enrolled in SPED classes (Allam & Martin, 2021).

In the local setup, the researchers interviewed a teacher from one of the largest schools in the City of General Santos. She noted that building a relationship with the parents of Learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is challenging. The parents want them to go to work with them instead of going to school. The teacher also added that she has difficulty communicating to parents that the

learner may have potential problems. Other parents deny the possible challenges that add an extra burden to the teacher in addressing the issue. As a result, the teacher felt she was not a competent and effective SPED teacher.

With this in mind, the researchers are interested in studying the influence of preservice training and in-service development activities on the self-efficacy of Special Education teachers.

Research Objectives

This study aimed to examine the influence of preservice training and in-service development activities on the self-efficacy of Special Education (SPED) teachers. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Describe the profile of the respondents in terms of:
    1.1. age;
    1.2. sex;
    1.3. teaching load;
    1.4. number of years in the teaching profession; and
    1.5. number of years in the Special Education program.
2. Determine the extent of preservice training received by the respondents in the following areas of work in Special Needs Education:
    2.1. assessing students' needs;
    2.2. selecting curriculum content;
    2.3. finding engaging activities to teach skills;
    2.4. adapting learning materials to students' needs;
    2.5. keeping track of and reflecting on students' progress;
    2.6. monitoring students' behavioral patterns and arranging appropriate interventions;
    2.7. preparing students for transition to the next grade;
    2.8. informing parents about students' performance and potential problems;
    2.9. mentoring other professionals working with children with disabilities; and
    2.10. collaborating with support staff (e.g., school counselors and speech therapists) to create holistic intervention plans.
3. Assess the extent of in-service development activities of the respondents across relevant areas of Special Education practice.
4. Determine the respondents' self-efficacy level in performing various tasks related to Special Education.
5. Analyze the significant relationships between:
    5.1. the extent of preservice training and the self-efficacy of the respondents; and
    5.2. the extent of in-service development and the self-efficacy of the respondents.

Literature Review

Preservice Training of Special Education Teachers

Preservice training for special education (SPED) teachers plays a pivotal role in shaping their capabilities to adapt instruction and engage families effectively. Central to this is the enhancement of teacher self-efficacy, which Bandura (1997) defined as one's belief in one's capability to execute the actions required for desired teaching outcomes. In inclusive settings, high self-efficacy is tied to both adaptive instructional strategies and robust parental collaboration.

Recent research confirms that hands-on practicums integrated with inclusive pedagogy modules directly strengthen these competencies. In the Philippines, a mixed-methods study involving 251 preservice teachers found that those with robust practicum experiences reported elevated self-efficacy in pedagogical strategy utilization, obstacle navigation, and, in certain cases, parental/family communication —a key domain in inclusive practice (Abela, Manaig, & Mamolo, 2025). This suggests that carefully designed practicum placements, particularly those encouraging material adaptation and real-time engagement with caregivers, are essential for translating theoretical knowledge into classroom- and family-centered actions.

Similarly, a comparative U.S.–Spain study involving 330 preservice elementary teachers showed that opportunities to learn inclusive teaching strategies, including field-based modules, significantly predicted self-efficacy in inclusive instruction and collaboration with families and colleagues (Morin et al., 2024). The study emphasized that practicum-rich programs, regardless of the certification pathway, produced teachers who were more confident in adapting curriculum and communicating with stakeholders, the core competencies needed for inclusive classrooms.

Practica and inclusive modules create a theory-to-practice continuum. Turkish research confirms that while preservice teachers rate themselves as knowledgeable regarding inclusion policies, they feel deficient in planning IEPs and adapting instruction (Yıldırım Hacıibrahimoğlu, 2022). Interviews reveal that without structured guidance and field-applicable modules, these future teachers struggle to bring their IEP knowledge into practice or to modify materials effectively in diverse classroom environments.

This aligns with findings from Caner Kasap (2022), who reported that preservice teachers across various departments had difficulty

creating instructional adaptations during their practicum placements with students with disabilities. Together, these studies indicate a recurring design gap: SPED programs often retain a theoretical emphasis that lacks adequate supervised fieldwork, resulting in preservice teachers who are ill-prepared for the dynamic classroom demands.

While both countries have formal SPED preservice programs, they share deficiencies in structured field components and parent-focused training:

In Turkey, the inclusion of a "special education" course in early childhood programs does not inherently equip graduates with IEP development, family collaboration, or curriculum modification competencies, as supported by quantitative and qualitative findings (Yıldırım Hacıibrahimoğlu, 2022)

In the Philippines, although student-teaching programs yield high general self-efficacy, significant variability exists across gender and domain, and many graduates still report feeling u. Furthermore, isolated qualitative studies highlight real-world SPED teachers' frustrations over scant materials and insufficient support for engaging families of students with learning disabilities (Isabela region).

These gaps signal a mismatch between program content, often policy- or theory-heavy, and the real-world demands of inclusive teaching, which include rapid adaptation of materials and nuanced engagement with caregivers from varied socio-cultural backgrounds.

When preservice programs underemphasize practicum and family engagement, the consequences manifest clearly in inclusive classrooms: (1) Low curriculum adaptation skills: Teachers struggle to modify lesson content for diverse learners, limiting instructional accessibility (Yıldırım Hacıibrahimoğlu, 2022); (2) Weakened parental collaboration: Without explicit training in family engagement, teachers enter classrooms ill-equipped to build partnerships with parents, a dynamic critical for successful inclusion and student outcomes (Magallanes et al., 2025); (3) Decline in teacher self-efficacy over time: Initial confidence from theory-focused courses erodes as teachers confront classroom realities requiring real-time problem-solving, adaptation, and stakeholder communication, areas where they feel underprepared.

In-service Development Activities

In-service activities do more than present knowledge; they also scaffold teacher self-efficacy, which is the belief in one's ability to manage complex classroom demands (Bandura, 1997). Direct engagement in case studies, simulations, peer mentoring, and reflective practice enables teachers to transfer theory into adaptive classroom behaviors. These competencies are critical for differentiation, navigating parental resistance, and integrating inclusive tools.

In high-quality PD initiatives, scenario-based modules immerse teachers in realistic classroom and family interactions. A study in the Philippines demonstrated that SPED teachers who engaged in role-play simulations handling resistant parents exhibited a 30% increase in self-reported confidence and concrete behavioral shifts in family communication strategies (Miña, 2024). Similarly, an international meta-analysis found that simulation-driven PD significantly improved differentiated instruction practices with measurable positive impacts on student learning outcomes (ScienceDirect, 2023). These findings demonstrate that when PD is structured around real-world classroom challenges, teachers gain actionable strategies and confidence that extend into their daily practice.

Peer mentoring adds another layer to in-service PD, enabling teachers to observe, receive feedback, and internalize effective inclusive strategies. A Philippine-based qualitative study highlighted that after participating in structured peer mentoring communities, novice SPED teachers reported increased competence in selecting assistive technologies and adapting learning materials, key tools for differentiation and inclusion (Allam & Martin, 2021; Miña, 2024). Although derived from broader peer-mentoring literature, evidence suggests mentees experienced improved instructional behavior and greater persistence in inclusive practices (ResearchGate, 2007). Peer support thus reinforces self-efficacy, sustaining professional growth where preservice training may not have fully prepared teachers.

Evidence clearly shows that many teachers enter professional life without practical readiness for inclusive classrooms. In the Philippines, Allam & Martin (2021) reported that teachers lacked specialized training and inclusive tools, resulting in low professional confidence and classroom efficacy. In-service PD addresses these deficits by: (1) Increasing proficiency in differentiated instruction through hands-on activities (ScienceDirect, 2023); (2) Expanding tool awareness by exposing teachers to assistive technologies and adaptive materials (Miña, 2024); and (3) Enhancing parental negotiation skills via simulations and community engagement modules leading to improved family–school partnerships (Miña, 2024).

These targeted competencies illustrate how in-service PD functions as a strategic extension of preservice training, filling powerful gaps, reinforcing initial self-efficacy gains, and aligning teacher skillsets with real-world classroom demands.

The ultimate test of PD is its impact. A mixed-methods analysis found that after just six months of sustained in-service training, including simulations, peer feedback sessions, and classroom coaching, SPED teachers demonstrated increased use of differentiated techniques (+45%), more frequent parent consultations (+60%), and reported higher student engagement, validated by pre post student engagement surveys (ScienceDirect, 2023).

Additionally, qualitative studies of rural Philippine SPED classrooms observed that following PD interventions, teachers successfully implemented individualized education plans (IEPs) and increased use of multisensory strategies, positively affecting students'

participation (ResearchGate, 2024). These findings affirm that in-service development is not an abstract exercise, it concretely transforms both teacher behaviors and student outcomes, particularly in contexts overlooked during preservice training.

Despite the benefits, Allam & Martin (2021) highlighted ongoing inadequacies in PD delivery: training is often inaccessible, insufficiently contextualized, and lacks follow-through, undermining teacher confidence and professional growth. Teachers reported feeling abandoned after the workshop, without sustained coaching or communities of practice to help integrate learning into their classroom routines.

This shortfall perpetuates cyclical underperformance: without contextual, practice-based PD, teachers revert to conventional methods, leaving differentiated and inclusive instruction underdeveloped. Addressing this requires systemic reforms, integrating job-embedded coaching, periodic simulation refreshers, and scaffolded peer collaboration into standard PD delivery.

Self-Efficacy of Special Education Teachers

Teacher self-efficacy, Bandura's construct describing the belief in one's capability to perform teaching tasks, serves as the critical hinge connecting preservice and in-service development to meaningful classroom practice. In the SPED context, high self-efficacy enables teachers to persist with instructional adaptations, engage with challenging parental scenarios, and manage student behaviors effectively. Inadequate training in either phase undermines this confidence, thereby diminishing inclusive outcomes (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Preservice training influences self-efficacy through mastery experiences and vicarious modeling. Mastery experiences occur during practicum placements, where preservice teachers directly adapt materials, devise modifications, and conduct parent-teacher discussions (Abela et al., 2025; Yıldırım Hacıibrahimoğlu, 2022). In the Philippines, vis à vis preservice practicum, teachers exhibited high self-efficacy in pedagogical tasks and obstacle management, suggesting that structured student teaching fosters competence (Abela et al., 2025). Similarly, in Turkish programs, observing inclusive teaching paired with reflection enabled preservice teachers to internalize effective behaviors, reinforcing self-belief through role modeling (Yıldırım Hacıibrahimoğlu, 2022).

Amplification Through In-Service Supports

In-service professional development reinforces initial self-efficacy foundations by offering vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and further mastery experiences. Philippine-based simulation exercises, such as role-playing encounters with resistant parents, were correlated with reported confidence gains and the subsequent application of communication strategies (Miña, 2024). Peer mentoring, another critical source of modeling and supportive feedback, improved teacher competence in selecting assistive tools and family collaboration, directly reinforcing self-belief (Allam & Martin, 2021; Miña, 2024). These structured professional learning activities strengthen both the confidence and skill necessary for complex inclusive teaching.

High self-efficacy, cultivated through preservice and in-service pathways, translates into specific classroom competencies: (1) Parental Communication: Rural SPED teachers in Cordillera reported notably high self-efficacy in parent engagement, reflecting their readiness to navigate sensitive discussions (Abaya, 2025); (2) Behavior Management: The same cohort noted confidence in managing classroom behaviors, an outcome tied to mastery-based training in school environments (Abaya, 2025) and; (3) Content Adaptation: Teachers equipped with practicum and PD training implemented differentiated instruction and assistive strategies with higher fidelity, as reported in student engagement surveys.

Despite pockets of excellence, systemic training inconsistencies in the Philippines hinder sustained growth in self-efficacy. Abaya (2025) noted that while rural SPED teachers began their careers with strong efficacy beliefs, high stress levels, due to heavy workloads and scant ongoing supports, imperiled long-term retention and well-being. Allam & Martin (2021) similarly identified that one-off workshops, absent follow-up mentoring or in-school support, fail to uphold self-belief and leave teachers regressing to conventional methods. The resulting decline in self-efficacy directly impacts inclusive practices, leading to diminished individualized adaptations and weakened parent-school partnerships.

Challenges in Special Education

In General Santos City, SPED teachers describe parental non-engagement, scarce instructional materials, and limited training as deeply interconnected barriers that expose critical competency gaps, gaps that have been previously addressed only superficially in theory-focused reforms. These challenges underscore the urgent need to enhance both preservice and in-service training in specific, actionable ways.

Borro and Ceballo's (2023) phenomenological study on parents of children with special needs in General Santos City highlighted that many struggle not only with caregiving responsibilities and social isolation, but also with being underprepared to support educational interventions. Teachers frequently encounter parental denial or apathy, a situation that demands advanced communication and engagement skills rooted in self-efficacy (Borro & Ceballo, 2023).

This parental resistance reflects gaps in preservice practicum and in-service simulations: without role-play or structured exposure to family dialogues, teachers lack mastery experiences to initiate and sustain meaningful parent-teacher partnerships confidently. This undermines their capacity to co-construct individualized learning plans, reinforcing the need for targeted training modules on

stakeholder collaboration.

Reports from SPED centers in Region XII, encompassing General Santos City, emphasize severely limited access to teaching aids and specialized materials (Hadjiesmael Camsa, 2021). In everyday practice, teachers face a growing need to innovate and adapt content to meet the diverse needs of learners. Nevertheless, without exposure to assistive tools during their training, through preservice material adaptation tasks or in-service tool-oriented workshops, teachers often feel ill-equipped, compromising their self-efficacy in differentiation.

Systematic reviews of SPED curriculum implementation in the Philippines identify chronic problems, including inadequate teacher training, structural inflexibility, and pervasive resource limitations (Espeño et al., 2024). This recurring deficit translates directly into classroom challenges: teachers, especially those early in their careers, report stress, burnout, and attrition when confronted with reality-based demands without commensurate support (Espeño et al., 2024; Abaya, 2025).

Recent empirical studies (Miña, 2024; Allam & Martin, 2021) confirm that single-session workshops, without follow-up mentoring or hands-on practice, have little impact on sustaining self-efficacy. As a result, teachers often revert to traditional methods when autonomy is compromised, and inclusive practices stall.

These challenges illustrate that improving SPED outcomes in General Santos City requires more than rhetoric; it demands competency-based training. Only by aligning preservice and in-service efforts to equip teachers with hands-on mastery, role modeling, and iterative feedback can we hope to elevate their self-efficacy. Without this, the cycle of challenges, from parental resistance to resource scarcity, will remain unbroken, continually undermining teacher confidence and the efficacy of inclusive education.

Inclusive Education Practices

Inclusive education is far more than bringing diverse learners together; it demands that teachers possess and apply specialized competencies, which must be explicitly developed through preservice and in-service programs. These competencies include IEP writing, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies, and co- or team-teaching skills.

Competencies Required for Inclusive Practice:

IEP Development: Crafting individualized education plans requires analytical, collaborative, and documentation skills, competencies that emerge when preservice programs integrate IEP writing exercises linked to live-case practicums. However, in provinces like the Division of Ilagan and General Santos City, teachers report systemic underpreparedness in IEP creation due to a lack of guided fieldwork (Allam & Martin, 2021; Dalonos, 2013). Without these competencies, inclusion becomes superficial, placement without planning.

UDL Implementation: UDL demands flexible content delivery through multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression. Yet many Philippine teacher-prep curricula remain theory-heavy and seldom include UDL simulations or design labs. As a result, teachers enter the field believing in inclusive ideals but lacking mastery experiences with accessible instructional design.

Team Teaching and Collaboration: Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) clarified that inclusion is about "meaningful participation," which depends on coordinated efforts by SPED and general educators.

Nevertheless, a Frontiers study found that preservice teachers who practiced multi-professional co-teaching developed broader inclusion competencies and stronger self-efficacy than those who were trained individually. In contrast, Philippine programs seldom offer interdisciplinary practicum, leaving graduates ill-equipped for collaborative school environments, another training gap with practical implications.

Systemic Misinterpretations of Inclusion

National policies in the Philippines often equate inclusion with mere physical co-location. This misunderstanding persists system-wide: inadequate budget, lack of training, and absence of monitoring strip inclusion of its substance (Allam & Martin, 2021; Dalonos, 2013). Teachers often end up in mainstream classrooms without the necessary competencies to support diverse learners. Thus, inclusion becomes a formal label without efficacy.

Practical Gaps: Ilagan & GS City Case

In the Division of Ilagan, inclusive classrooms suffer from poor learning environments, insufficient instructional materials, and limited teacher support systems. These challenges resonate in General Santos City, particularly in IEP processes (Common in Dasmariñas City). Such environments highlight that inclusion cannot thrive unless teacher training systems systematically build and reinforce these essential competencies.

Teacher Competencies in Special Education

This section unifies earlier themes, including preservice and in-service development, self-efficacy, challenges, and inclusion, into a coherent framework that explains why teacher competencies matter, how they are (or are not) developed, and why mapping these gaps is imperative.

Linking Training to Competencies

Drawing upon Bandura's self-efficacy theory, competencies develop via mastery, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and emotional resilience, all of which require structured training.

This includes (1) Mastery in preservice practicum enables skill-building in IEP design and differentiated instruction; (2) Vicarious modeling, such as co-teaching in multidisciplinary teams, reinforces both belief and behavior; (3) In-service simulations and mentoring amplify competence in parental negotiation, tool use, and classroom adaptation and; (4) Continuous feedback loops sustain self-efficacy amid complex, real-world classrooms.

Yet, in the Philippine SPED context, these mechanisms remain inconsistent. Preservice programs often lack interdisciplinary placements or design modules, and in-service PD frequently stops at workshops without sustained coaching.

Alignment with Professional Standards

The CEC standards require competencies in assessment, IEP development, inclusive pedagogy, and collaboration. Yet, as seen in Ilagan and General Santos City, these competencies are underdeveloped due to training deficiencies. Without systematic training aligned with these standards, inclusive practice stalls.

Our study aims to empirically map where preservice/in-service programs align, or misalign, with competency needs. This approach is significant for multiple reasons: First is Diagnostic precision. Identifying specific competency gaps enables targeted reforms instead of broad, non-contextual fixes. Second is, Policy implications. Highlighting where training falls short can inform curricular revisions and investment in sustained PD systems. Finally, the Theoretical contribution demonstrates the interdependence of self-efficacy, competency development, and inclusive classroom outcomes.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design, which is appropriate for analyzing the relationship between naturally occurring variables without experimental manipulation. As Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2020) explain, descriptive research captures the defining characteristics of a population, while correlational designs identify and quantify associations between variables. In this context, the approach was well-suited to describe the extent of preservice training and in-service professional development received by Special Education (SPED) teachers, and to examine how these factors relate to their self-efficacy across various domains of SPED work.

The non-experimental nature of this design enabled the ethical observation of existing educational practices, while its correlational component supported the use of inferential statistical techniques, notably Pearson's correlation and regression analysis, to assess the strength and significance of the relationships between training exposures and self-efficacy levels. This alignment between research design and analytic strategy ensured methodological coherence throughout the study.

Respondents

This study involved Special Education (SPED) teachers from three public secondary schools in the Division of General Santos City: (1) General Santos City SPED Integrated School, (2) Irineo L. Santiago National High School of Metro Dadiangas, and (3) Fatima National High School. These schools were selected based on specific and objective criteria: (a) each has operated a recognized SPED program for at least five consecutive years; (b) each accommodates both graded and non-graded learners with diverse exceptionalities, including autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disability, visual and hearing impairments, and multiple disabilities; (c) they maintain a high SPED teacher population relative to other schools in the division; and (d) they are actively involved in division-supported inclusive education initiatives, indicating stronger access to SPED resources and administrative support.

The total population of SPED teachers across the three schools was 84. To determine a statistically sound sample size for this finite population, Slovin's formula was applied with a margin of error of approximately 9%, which is an acceptable compromise between statistical rigor and feasibility.

This result was rounded to yield a final, justified sample size of 50 respondents. This sample size ensures sufficient statistical power for descriptive and correlational analysis while accommodating logistical limitations related to teacher availability and school coordination. Similar sample proportions have been adopted in prior SPED studies conducted in the Philippine context (e.g., Allam & Martin, 2021; Abaya, 2025).

A two-stage sampling technique was implemented. First, stratified sampling was used to proportionally allocate the 50 participants across the three schools based on each school's share of the total SPED teacher population. Second, within each school stratum, simple random sampling was employed. A list of all SPED teachers was obtained from each school's SPED coordinator, and participants were selected using a random number generator to ensure impartiality and equal opportunity for inclusion. This combined sampling approach ensured that the study sample was both representative and scientifically valid, enhancing the generalizability of findings within the

context of General Santos City.

Procedure

The data collection process followed a structured, ethically sound protocol to ensure both the validity of the information gathered and the protection of participant rights. Prior to implementation, ethics approval was formally secured from the University Research Ethics Committee (Protocol No. UREC-2025-07-SPED), and written authorization was obtained from the principals of the three selected schools: General Santos City SPED Integrated School, Irineo L. Santiago National High School of Metro Dadiangas, and Fatima National High School.

The primary research instrument was a structured and validated survey questionnaire composed of three core sections:

1. Preservice Training – 10 items assessing the scope, frequency, and contextual quality of training received during pre-employment preparation (e.g., practicum experiences, inclusion modules, IEP simulations).
2. In-Service Development Activities – 10 items measuring engagement in continuing professional development (e.g., peer mentoring, workshops, simulations).
3. Self-Efficacy in SPED Work – 30 items distributed across 10 functional domains (e.g., parental engagement, behavioral management, curriculum adaptation, collaboration with general education teachers).

The instrument underwent a two-phase validation process. First, content validation was conducted by a panel of five SPED education experts (two academic researchers, two master teachers, and one division supervisor), who evaluated each item for clarity, relevance, and alignment with current SPED training standards. Their feedback led to minor revisions to enhance item phrasing and domain structure.

Second, the revised instrument was pilot-tested with 10 SPED teachers from a nearby division not included in the main study. Reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha yielded strong internal consistency:

- Preservice Training Scale: $\alpha = 0.88$
- In-Service Development Scale: $\alpha = 0.91$
- Self-Efficacy Scale: $\alpha = 0.94$

These coefficients confirmed the instrument's suitability for full-scale deployment. As supported by Taherdoost (2020), pretested and validated tools significantly improve data accuracy and respondent comprehension in field-based educational research.

Survey administration was conducted in person to ensure clarity of instructions and immediate clarification of any respondent concerns. Coordination with each school's SPED coordinator facilitated smooth logistics. Before distributing the instrument, the researchers explained the study's purpose and voluntary nature, and ensured that each respondent signed an informed consent form. Key ethical safeguards were observed throughout:

- Voluntary participation and freedom to withdraw at any time without penalty
- Anonymity and confidentiality are ensured through coded responses and de-identified data sets
- Full compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173)

Respondents were given the option to complete the questionnaire on-site or return it within 48 hours. All completed instruments were collected personally by the researchers to preserve response integrity. This in-person approach, in line with Taherdoost (2020), helped maximize return rates and accuracy.

By combining validated instrumentation, careful respondent coordination, and rigorous ethical oversight, this procedure ensured the collection of reliable and ethically grounded data essential for the study's descriptive-correlational analysis.

Data Analysis

To determine the influence of preservice training and in-service development activities on Special Education teachers' different areas of work, the researchers used the criteria below to interpret the mean.

There are five interpretations for the extent of preservice training and in-service development activities of the Special Education teachers in different areas of work, namely: Very High Extensive, Highly Extensive, Moderately Extensive, Less Extensive, and Least Extensive. The Very High Extensive means the extent of preservice respondents' training and in-service development activities in different areas of work is observed 80-100% of the time. For 'High Extensive', it means that the extent of preservice training and in-service development activities of the respondents in different areas of work is observed 60-79% of the time. Moderate Extensive means the extent of preservice training and in-service development activities of the respondents in different areas of work is observed 40-59% of the time. Less Extensive means that the extent of preservice and in-service development activities in different areas of work is observed 20-39% of the time. And, the Least Extensive means the extent of preservice training and in-service development activities of the respondents in different areas of work is observed 0-19% of the time.

The respondents chose from the presented criteria: the mean range, interpretation, and verbal description, to assess the influence of

preservice training and in-service development activities on various work areas. The researchers will derive these using the Likert scale. A rating scale was used to assess opinions, attitudes, or behaviors. This is done to easily operationalize personality traits or perceptions (Bhandari, 2020).

The criteria for interpreting the mean level of self-efficacy in various work areas for Special Education teachers. There are five interpretations, namely: Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, and Poor. Excellent implies that the respondents' level of self-efficacy, considering different areas of work, is highest at 80-100%. Very Good means that the level of self-efficacy of the respondents, considering the different areas of work, is high at 60-79%. For Good, it means that the level of self-efficacy among respondents considering different areas of work is moderate, at 40-59%. Fair implies that the level of self-efficacy among respondents in different work areas is low, at 20-39%. On the other hand, 'Poor' means that the level of self-efficacy of the respondents, considering the different areas of work, is lowest at 0-19%.

Similarly, Box 5 provides the criteria and scale for interpreting the mean. Similarly, respondents will select from the criteria presented above, which include scale, interpretation, and verbal description, to assess their level of self-efficacy in various areas of work in Special Education.

Ethical Considerations

This study received formal ethics clearance from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) under Protocol No. UREC-2025-07-SPED. All participants were fully informed about the study's objectives, procedures, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Written informed consent was obtained, and participants were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. To ensure compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173), all responses were anonymized and securely stored. Strict adherence to confidentiality and non-maleficence was maintained throughout the research process.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the statistical findings of the study examining the influence of preservice training and in-service development activities on the self-efficacy of special education teachers. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to determine the extent of the relationship between the identified variables.

Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic and professional background of the 48 Special Education (SPED) teacher respondents from General Santos City, specifically those affiliated with General Santos City SPED Integrated School, Irineo L. Santiago National High School of Metro Dadiangas, and Fatima National High School.

Table 1. *Profile of the Special Education Teachers*

Indicators	f	%
Age		
22-31	11	22.91
32-41	20	41.67
42-51	10	20.83
52-61	7	14.58
Total	48	100.00
Sex		
Male	9	18.75
Female	39	81.25
Total	48	100.00
Teaching Load		
Five teaching loads plus one Coordinator	9	18.75
Five teaching loads plus one Adviser	27	56.25
Five teaching load plus one Subject Specialist	1	2.08
Five teaching load plus one other assignment	5	10.42
Six teaching load	6	12.50
Total	48	100.00
Number of Years in teaching profession		
1-10	27	56.25
11-20	13	27.04
21-30	5	10.42
31-40	3	6.25
Total	48	100.00

Number of years in teaching Special Education program		
1-11 months	4	8.33
1-10 years	42	87.50
11-20 years	1	2.08
21-30 years	1	2.08
Total	48	100.00

The respondents were predominantly female, reflecting broader national and international trends in the SPED teaching workforce. Most teachers fell within the 32 to 41 age group, with fewer respondents in the older brackets. The majority of teachers reported moderate teaching loads, with over half carrying five teaching loads in addition to advisory responsibilities.

In terms of professional experience, the data show that most teachers had been in the teaching profession for 1 to 10 years, and this trend was similarly reflected in their years of teaching within SPED programs. Very few respondents reported more than two decades of SPED teaching experience, suggesting a relatively young or mid-career SPED teacher population in the area.

These descriptive findings provide a foundational context for interpreting the levels of training exposure and self-efficacy explored in the subsequent analysis. Table 1 also showed that in terms of teaching load, most of the respondents has five teaching loads plus one adviser, with 27 or 56.25% of the entire respondents of the study. Another 9 or 18.75% of them have five teaching loads plus one coordinator. On the other hand, 6 or 12.50% of the respondents have six teaching loads. Also, 5 or 10.42% of them have five teaching loads plus one other assignment. Finally, 1 or 2.08% of the respondents have five teaching loads plus one subject specialist.

Among the entire population of respondents, 27, or 56.25%, have been teaching for 1 to 10 years. Next on the list, 13 or 27.04% of the respondents have been teaching for 11 to 20 years in the teaching profession. Then, we have 5 or 10.42% of the respondents who have been teaching for 21 to 30 years. Lastly, 3 or 6.25% of the respondents have been teaching for 31 to 40 years. For the number of years in teaching special education programs, 42 respondents, or 87.50%, have 1 to 10 years of experience. Followed by 4 or 8.33% of the respondents who have 1-11 months of experience in teaching special education programs. There are also 1 or 2.08% of respondents who have 11 to 20 years of experience, as well as those with 21 to 30 years of experience.

Extent of Preservice Training

Table 2 summarizes the respondents' perceived extent of preservice training across ten functional areas in Special Education. The results show that the highest-rated indicator was "Assessing Students' Needs," which received a mean score of 5.00, indicating a Very Highly Extensive level (80–100% occurrence). This was the only area to fall under the highest category.

In contrast, the lowest-rated indicator was "Preparing Students for Transition to the Next Grade," with a mean score of 3.04, placing it in the Moderately Extensive (40–59%) category. The remaining eight indicators also fell within the Moderately Extensive range, suggesting a generally moderate level of training coverage across core SPED teaching tasks.

The overall mean score was 3.38, also interpreted as Moderately Extensive, indicating that, on average, respondents perceived their preservice preparation to cover key teaching competencies with moderate frequency and depth.

Table 2. *Extent of preservice training*

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
Assessing Students' Needs	5.00	Very Highly Extensive
Selecting Curriculum Content	3.08	Moderately Extensive
Finding Engaging Activities to Teach Skills	3.13	Moderately Extensive
Adapting Learning Materials to Students' Needs	3.21	Moderately Extensive
Keeping Track of and Reflect on Students' Progress	3.15	Moderately Extensive
Monitoring Student's Behavioral Patterns and Arrange Appropriate Interventions	3.33	Moderately Extensive
Preparing Students for Transition to the Next Grade	3.04	Moderately Extensive
Informing Parents about their Student's Performance and Potential Problems	3.31	Moderately Extensive
Mentoring Other Professionals Who Work with Children with Disabilities	3.31	Moderately Extensive
Collaborating with the Support Staff to Create Holistic Intervention Plans	3.23	Moderately Extensive
Overall Mean	3.38	Moderately Extensive

Extent of In-service Development Activities

Table 3 summarizes the extent to which SPED teachers engaged in in-service development activities across ten functional areas. All indicators fell within the Highly Extensive category, suggesting that these activities were frequently implemented (60–79%) across professional tasks.

The highest-rated indicator was "Collaborating with the Support Staff to Create Holistic Intervention Plans" with a mean score of 4.38,

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while the lowest was "Assessing Students' Needs" with a mean of 3.98. Despite this variation, all indicators demonstrated consistently high levels of engagement.

Table 3. *Extent of in-service development activities*

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
Assessing Students' Needs	3.98	Highly Extensive
Selecting Curriculum Content	4.15	Highly Extensive
Finding Engaging Activities to Teach Skills	4.06	Highly Extensive
Adapting Learning Materials to Students' Needs	4.17	Highly Extensive
Keeping Track of and Reflecting on Students' Progress	4.13	Highly Extensive
Monitoring Student's Behavioral Patterns and Arranging Appropriate Interventions	4.25	Highly Extensive
Preparing Students for Transition to the Next Grade	4.06	Highly Extensive
Informing Parents about their Student's Performance and Potential Problems	4.27	Highly Extensive
Mentoring Other Professionals Who Work with Children with Disabilities	4.29	Highly Extensive
Collaborating with the Support Staff to Create Holistic Intervention Plans	4.38	Highly Extensive
Mean	4.17	Highly Extensive

The overall mean was 4.17, which also falls under the Highly Extensive category, indicating that in-service development activities were generally well-integrated into the respondents' professional routines.

Level of Self-efficacy

Table 4 summarizes the respondents' self-efficacy ratings across ten key areas of Special Education work. All indicators were rated as Very Good, reflecting a consistently high sense of capability (60–79%) across the board.

Table 4. *Level of self-efficacy*

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
Assessing Students' Needs	4.02	Very Good
Selecting Curriculum Content	4.04	Very Good
Finding Engaging Activities to Teach Skills	4.23	Very Good
Adapting Learning Materials to Students' Needs	4.17	Very Good
Keeping Track of and Reflecting on Students' Progress	4.08	Very Good
Monitoring Student's Behavioral Patterns and Arranging Appropriate Interventions	4.23	Very Good
Preparing Students for Transition to the Next Grade	4.06	Very Good
Informing Parents about their Student's Performance and Potential Problems	4.19	Very Good
Mentoring Other Professionals Who Work with Children with Disabilities	4.17	Very Good
Collaborating with the Support Staff to Create a Holistic Intervention Plan	4.33	Very Good
Mean	4.15	Very Good

The highest self-efficacy was reported in "Collaborating with the Support Staff to Create Holistic Intervention Plans" (M = 4.33), while the lowest was in "Assessing Students' Needs" (M = 4.02). Despite the variation, all scores remained within the upper range.

The overall mean was 4.15, reaffirming that respondents generally perceive themselves as highly capable in executing essential SPED responsibilities.

Relationship between Variables

Table 5 summarizes the results of the Pearson product-moment correlation analyses conducted to examine the relationships between preservice training, in-service development activities, and self-efficacy among Special Education teachers (n = 48).

Table 5. *Summary of the Test for Relationship*

Variables	Test for Relationship	r	Remarks
Preservice Training and Self-efficacy	Pearson r	+0.26	Not Significant
In-service Development Activities and Self-efficacy	Pearson r	+0.61	Significant

A negligible positive correlation was found between preservice training and self-efficacy, which was not statistically significant (r(46) = .26, p > .05). This suggests that there is no meaningful linear relationship between the two variables.

Conversely, the correlation between in-service development activities and self-efficacy was moderate and statistically significant, r(46)

= .61, p < .01, indicating a meaningful positive association.

The current findings illuminate critical distinctions in how preservice and in-service training impact SPED teacher self-efficacy in General Santos City, with important theoretical and practical implications.

Preservice vs. In-Service: Divergent Impacts on Self-Efficacy

While preservice training was rated moderately extensive (mean = 3.38), it showed no statistically significant association with self-efficacy (r = .26, p > .05). In contrast, in-service development exhibited a robust, moderately strong correlation with self-efficacy (r = .61, p < .01). This aligns with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1997), which emphasizes that self-efficacy is most strongly built through mastery experiences and verbal persuasion, elements more prevalent in ongoing, context-rich professional development than in pre-employment coursework. Additionally, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) assert that PD must be sustained and situated within real classroom contexts to drive measurable growth in teacher effectiveness. The findings underscore that while foundational exposure is essential, applied, continuous training more effectively nurtures sustained teacher confidence in SPED roles.

Competency Gaps: Transitions and Assessment

The minimal focus on "preparing students for transition to the next grade" during preservice training (mean = 3.04) highlights a serious gap. As emphasized by Hacıibrahimoğlu and Kargın (2017), effective transition planning is essential yet often neglected in teacher preparation. Without targeted training, teachers may lack the procedural knowledge and adaptive planning skills necessary for seamless student transitions.

Similarly, although assessment was the most strongly taught subject in preservice training (mean = 5.00), the corresponding self-efficacy was significantly lower (mean = 4.02). This disparity suggests that theoretical instruction on assessments is insufficient without adequate practical application, a challenge recognized by Galevska (2019) and Ateş (2016), who report that SPED teachers frequently struggle to apply assessment techniques in diverse, real-world classrooms. These findings suggest that while preservice training introduces key competencies, the development of critical skills in transition planning and authentic assessment remains incomplete without concrete practicum experience.

Collaboration as a Strength

Both the highest in-service training mean (4.38) and the highest self-efficacy score (4.33) were associated with collaborating with support staff on holistic intervention planning. This resonates with McLeskey et al. (2017), who underscore that collaboration not only enhances teacher efficacy but also enriches student outcomes. Teachers engaged in multidisciplinary teamwork report higher confidence in addressing complex teaching scenarios. These results endorse the value of school-based, collaborative development models, reinforcing that peer interaction and team planning are powerful sources of self-efficacy.

Implications for SPED Teacher Training

Collectively, these patterns suggest that preservice programs must evolve to include structured, practical opportunities that develop competencies in transition planning, detailed assessment, and family engagement. The stronger correlation between in-service development and self-efficacy suggests that theory must be accompanied by situated practice to yield confident practitioners.

Furthermore, the findings illuminate the need for strategic enhancements in teacher training:

Preservice: Integrate scenario-based practicum modules addressing transitions, IEP procedures, and assessment adaptations.

In-service: Formalize peer-coaching, collaborative planning workshops, and reflection cycles to maximize real-world application and reinforce efficacy gains.

Aligning teacher preparation with Bandura's (1997) principles, focused on practical mastery and consistent feedback, can systematically close gaps and elevate both teacher readiness and student outcomes in inclusive education settings.

This study confirms that in-service development serves as the most significant driver of SPED teacher self-efficacy in General Santos City. Key strengths in collaboration practices enhance confidence and effectiveness, whereas gaps in training related to transitions and applied assessment compromise core SPED competency. Theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence converge to support comprehensive reforms in both preservice and in-service training models, emphasizing practice-oriented learning to build genuine capacity in inclusive education beyond foundational knowledge.

Conclusions

This study contributes to the growing evidence that continuous, context-driven professional development plays a pivotal role in shaping the self-efficacy of Special Education (SPED) teachers. By examining the training experiences of SPED teachers in General Santos City, this study offers nuanced insights into which aspects of professional preparation most strongly influence teacher confidence and competence.

The findings revealed that while preservice training provided foundational exposure, its overall impact on teacher self-efficacy was

limited. In contrast, in-service development activities were more comprehensive and closely aligned with the tasks teachers perform daily, particularly in collaborative planning and team-based interventions. These professional learning experiences showed a statistically significant positive relationship with self-efficacy, affirming the value of sustained, real-world training.

Importantly, the study highlights key competency gaps, such as in transition planning and authentic assessment, that remain insufficiently addressed in current preservice programs. Meanwhile, collaborative practices emerged as both a strength and a confidence-building domain, reinforcing the need for training models that foster interprofessional teamwork.

In practical terms, these results underscore the need to rethink SPED teacher development in the Philippines. Policymakers and educational leaders must ensure that both preservice curricula and in-service programs are explicitly aligned with the realities of inclusive education. Structured support systems, mentoring, and context-rich learning opportunities should be central to future training reforms.

Ultimately, improving training pathways is not merely a matter of instructional quality; it is essential for empowering SPED teachers to meet the evolving demands of inclusive education with confidence, adaptability, and sustained professional competence.

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