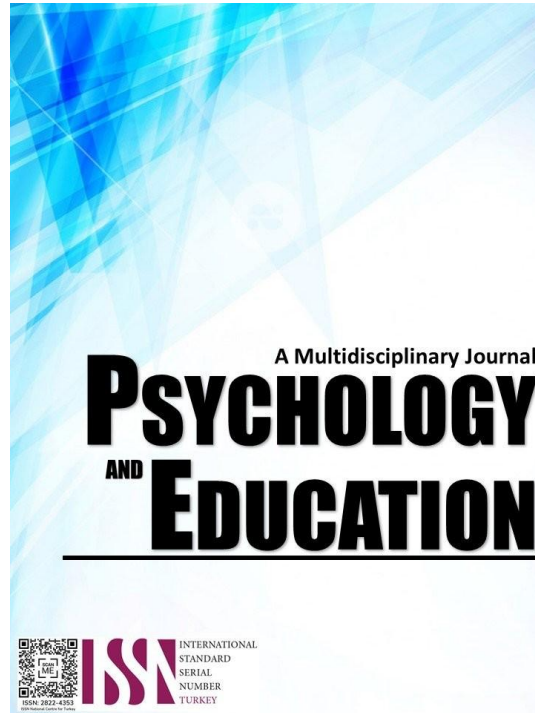


TEACHING STRATEGIES APPLIED TO LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN SELECTED ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: BASIS FOR ENHANCED MAINSTREAM CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



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Teaching Strategies Applied to Learners with Special Needs in Selected Elementary Schools: Basis for Enhanced Mainstream Classroom Activities

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Abstract

With the concept of inclusive education in the Philippines, learners with special educational needs (LSEN) are now being included in mainstream classrooms with the goal of equity and access for all. Some general education teachers, however, experience difficulties in implementing inclusive strategies due to a lack of training, large class sizes, and limited resources. With the continuing rise in classroom diversity, it becomes necessary to understand and enhance the methods deployed in teaching LSEN. This study examines the existing instruction solutions and facilities provided in some primary schools to guide the formulation of improved mainstream classroom activities that would help both LSEN and the learners during the mainstreaming program. This quantitative descriptive study examined teaching strategies applied to learners with special educational needs (LSEN) in mainstream elementary classrooms to inform enhanced classroom activities. The study was conducted in a public school district in Cebu Province, Philippines, and involved 30 general education teachers who had LSEN in their classes. Data were gathered using a 25-item researcher-developed questionnaire with a 4-point Likert scale and analyzed using frequencies, percentages, and weighted means. Respondent demographics indicated that 60% were aged 20–29 years, and most taught lower primary grades. Teachers reported predominantly positive perceptions of inclusion (overall mean = 2.65), acknowledged the need for additional training and collaboration in instruction (overall mean = 3.24), and strongly endorsed classroom practices such as differentiated tasks, peer tutoring, and cooperative learning (overall mean = 3.68). Reported areas of student need clustered around behavioral (97%), cognitive (77%), communication (73%), and sensory (57%) domains. Supports deemed most critical included expanded resources, added time for planning, smaller class sizes, and ongoing professional development (overall mean = 3.55). The findings suggest that co-teaching models, deliberate differentiation, and structured peer-supported activities can strengthen inclusive practice while benefiting all learners. Schools may prioritize capacity-building, resource allocation, and systematic collaboration among teachers, specialists, and families when designing mainstream activities for LSEN. Limitations include the small, single-district sample and the reliance on self-report data without inferential testing. Future research with larger samples, validated instruments, and hypothesis testing is recommended to evaluate the effectiveness of specific strategies over time. Future investigation on inclusion instructional strategies covering the special education teachers should be widened, and the quantitative ways and means should be introduced in the aspect of research.

Keywords: *Inclusive education, learners with special educational needs, teaching strategies, mainstream classroom, co-teaching, differentiated instruction*

Introduction

Inclusive education is a world-accepted method that allows for greater exposure of all learners, including those with special educational needs (SEN), in mainstream classes. It promotes equal access, right to quality schooling, whether able or not, and equity (CAST, 2024). Mainstreaming of LSEN in the Philippine context is not only a legal requirement but also a pragmatic way of addressing the growing diversity of learners in public school institutions. The Department of Education has provided policies that embrace inclusiveness in education, but this is sometimes hard to carry out in reality, with various people not following these policies depending on their districts in terms of resources, teacher preparation, and support systems.

It has been found that inclusive teaching strategies, such as co-teaching, differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, and peer tutoring, have great potential to improve the social and academic achievements of LSEN students (Iacono et al., 2021; Moeyaert et al., 2021; Pozas & Letzel-Alt, 2023). Several general teachers complain about inadequate training, large classes, and instructional resources that are not sufficient to fulfill the purpose and intention of inclusive education (Jortveit & Kovač, 2022). In the participating district, teachers regularly encounter LSEN with varied behavioral, cognitive, communication, and sensory needs. Without consistent guidance and structured support, instructional adaptations often rely on individual teacher initiative, which may not be sustainable or effective in the long term. A localized understanding of current teaching strategies and perceived support is essential to inform school-based planning and professional development.

This study aimed to determine the teaching strategies applied to LSEN in selected elementary schools and to derive a basis for enhanced mainstream classroom activities. Specifically, it sought to describe teachers' (a) perceptions about inclusion; (b) planning for instruction; (c) teaching strategies used; (d) supports and challenges experienced; and (e) priority areas for enhanced activities.

Findings from this research provide practical guidance for school leaders and educators seeking to enhance inclusive instruction through collaboration, targeted professional development, and strategic classroom design. They also provide a baseline for future evaluations

of inclusive teaching models in similar educational contexts.

Research Questions

This study aimed to identify the teaching strategies employed with learners who have special needs in selected elementary schools. This was intended to answer the following queries:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, years of experience as a public-school teacher, grade levels taught, and highest level of education achieved?
2. What are the perceptions of the teachers having special education learners in their classroom?
3. How do teachers plan instructions for learners with special needs?
4. What specific teaching strategies do teachers use to address the needs of learners with special needs in their classrooms?
5. What support and challenges have teachers encountered in their plan of instruction for learners with special needs?
6. Based on the findings, what Enhanced Mainstream Classroom Activities can be designed?

Methodology

Research Design

A quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional survey was used in this study to describe the current inclusive instructional practices and perceptions of elementary-level teachers. This design is popular in educational research since it can successfully represent the attitudes, behaviors, and practices of a specific population at a particular time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Descriptive survey designs are especially helpful in summarizing data without the ability to intervene in variables so that researchers can identify patterns and trends (Pallant, 2020). The quantitative nature of this approach enables the undertaking of statistical analysis, which facilitates the discovery of relationships and differences between variables.

Descriptive research plays a crucial role in detecting trends, establishing baseline data, and making decisions (Hassan, Martella, & Robinson, 2024). It is non-invasive and answers questions such as what, where, when, and how, which makes it suitable for studies that try to help describe conditions rather than establish what caused what.

A cross-sectional design was selected because it is cost and time-effective, since researchers can gather data from a large sample within a given time frame (Kinyua & Denis, 2023).

Non-experimental design used in this study is suitable when there are no interventions. Such designs are especially helpful in the educational setting where ethical and logistical constraints make experimental designs infeasible (Salmons, 2023). Moreover, in the inclusive learning field, the research design must be context-sensitive and systematic for learners to effectively apply various instructional practices (Asriadi, Hadi, Istiyono, & Retnawati, 2023).

All these sources confirm that it is appropriate to use a quantitative descriptive and cross-sectional survey design in the presented study. It can help to capture findings on the current instructional practice and perceptions of elementary teachers in a way that has substantial value in instilling future work in professional development and policy on promoting inclusive education.

Respondents

Participants were 30 general education teachers from a public school district in Cebu Province, Philippines, who had at least one learner with special educational needs in their class during the study period.

A non-probability, criterion-based sampling approach was used, specifically convenience sampling, where teachers who had learners with special needs in their classes were invited to participate. To protect confidentiality, the specific names of schools and the district are not disclosed.

Instrument

Data were collected using a researcher-developed, 25-item questionnaire organized into five sections: (1) perceptions about LSEN; (2) planning for instruction; (3) teaching strategies/practices; (4) supports and challenges; and (5) enhanced mainstream classroom activities. Items used a four-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree).

The instrument captured demographic variables (age group, years of teaching, grade level handled, and highest educational attainment). As the available dataset preserved only aggregated scores, internal consistency reliability and construct validity could not be estimated in this report; this is noted as a limitation and a priority for future studies.

Procedure

After securing school-level permission, questionnaires were distributed to eligible teachers along with study information and consent language. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Completed questionnaires were collected by the researcher, screened for completeness, and encoded in a spreadsheet for analysis.

Data Analysis

A concise resolution of the responses obtained in this research was achieved by adopting descriptive statistical means. These were the applications of frequencies, percentages, and weighted means, which offered an overview of the participants' responses and made their interpretation meaningful.

Ethical Considerations

The study observed voluntary participation, anonymity of respondents, and confidentiality of school identifiers. No student-level data were collected. Data were reported in aggregate to minimize risks of identification. Permissions were obtained from school leadership, and the study adhered to ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and justice.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. *Respondents' Profile*

<i>Age</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
20-29	18	60%
30-39	9	30%
40-49	3	10%
Total	30	100%
No. of Years as Public Teacher		
1-5 years	6	20%
6-10 years	9	30%
11-15 years	9	30%
16-20 years	3	10%
20 years above	3	10%
Total	30	100%
Grade Level Handle		
Kindergarten	3	10%
Grade 1	11	36%
Grade 2	9	30%
Grade 3	3	10%
Grade 4	1	3.33
Grade 5	2	6.66%
Grade 6	1	3.33%
Total	30	100%
Highest Educational Attainment		
BEEd/DPE 2nd Courser	3	10%
With M.A Units	25	83.33%
M.A Graduates	1	6.66%
With Ed.D/Ph.D. Units	1	6.66%
Ed.D/Ph.D. Graduates	0	0
Total	30	100%

Most respondents were aged 20–29 years (60%), followed by 30–39 years (30%) and 40–49 years (10%). Teaching experience spanned 1–5 years (20%), 6–10 years (30%), 11–15 years (30%), and 16–20 years or more (20%).

Teachers primarily handled Grades 1 (36%), 2 (30%), and 3 (10%), with smaller proportions in Kindergarten (10%), Grade 5 (6.7%), and Grades 4 and 6 (3.3% each). The majority reported having graduate study units (83.3%).

Perceptions about Learners with Special Needs

Table 2. *Perceptions about Learners with Special Needs*

<i>Perceptions</i>	<i>Weighted Mean</i>	<i>Verbal Description</i>
1. Having a pupil with a disability or special needs will usually limit the learning from others.	2.36	D
2. Calling out a child with a behavioral disability in front of the class usually backfired and made the situation worse.	2.70	A
3. Teachers waste too much time helping those learners with disability.	1.83	D
4. All teachers need to understand how to provide for learners with special needs.	3.73	SA
Over-all Mean	2.65	A

Legend: 3.25–4.00 = Strongly Agree (SA); 2.50–3.24 = Agree (A); 1.75–2.49 = Disagree (D); 1.00–1.74 = Strongly Disagree (SD)

Teachers expressed generally positive perceptions about inclusion (overall mean = 2.65, interpreted as Agree). They strongly agreed that all teachers need to understand how to support LSEN students (mean = 3.73) and disagreed that having a pupil with a disability limits the progress of other learners (mean = 2.36).

Planning for Instruction

Table 3. *Planning Instruction*

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Weighted Mean</i>	<i>Verbal Description</i>
1. Classes need to be better understood by teachers through training them appropriately for teaching in inclusion environments.	3.56	SA
2. The need of additional training or support to plan instruction for students with special needs.	3.60	SA
3. It feels frustrating to plan instruction that fits to students with special needs.	2.03	D
4. Teacher's collaboration to plan instruction through co-teaching.	3.46	SA
5. There is a need to increase general education teachers' awareness and understanding of the benefits of collaborating to plan instruction for students with learning disabilities.	3.53	SA
Over-all Mean	3.24	A

Legend: 3.25–4.00 = Strongly Agree (SA); 2.50–3.24 = Agree (A); 1.75–2.49 = Disagree (D); 1.00–1.74 = Strongly Disagree (SD)

Respondents emphasized the need for additional training and support to plan instruction for LSEN (mean = 3.60) and endorsed teacher collaboration through co-teaching (mean = 3.46). The overall mean for planning indicators was 3.24 (Agree), with teachers disagreeing that planning for LSEN is inherently frustrating (mean = 2.03).

Areas of Students' Special Needs

Table 4. *Areas of Special Needs (N=30)*

<i>Level of Difficulty</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Communication	22	73%
Behavioral	29	97%
Cognition	23	77%
Sensory Development	17	57%

Teachers reported that LSEN frequently presented needs in behavioral (97%), cognitive (77%), communication (73%), and sensory (57%) domains.

Teaching Strategies and Practices

Table 5. *Teaching Strategies/Teaching Practice*

<i>Teaching Strategies/Teaching Practice</i>	<i>Weighted Mean</i>	<i>Verbal Description</i>
1. Involves the cooperation of the teacher with colleagues, like the class teacher, the school principal, inclusion specialist, health therapist, and with parents all belong to a team responsible for the child's development.	3.63	SA
2. There is a teaching assistant who helps children with LSEN and supports teachers in the classroom.	3.40	SA
3. All children benefit from cooperative learning, teamwork, and peer tutoring.	3.73	SA
4. Teachers should give differentiated tasks suited to one's abilities.	3.80	SA
5. Pedagogical and developmental plans are drawn up for each child with LSEN.	3.46	SA
6. Parents play a vital role in supporting the child's development in many ways.	3.70	SA
7. Many resources are available to help teachers plan lessons, manage classroom environments, and develop high-quality instruction for students with special needs.	3.53	SA
8. The role of the learning support is to provide assessment and development of classrooms and home-based interventions.	3.46	SA
Over-all Mean	3.68	SA

Legend: 3.25–4.00 = Strongly Agree (SA); 2.50–3.24 = Agree (A); 1.75–2.49 = Disagree (D); 1.00–1.74 = Strongly Disagree (SD)

Strong endorsements were observed for differentiated tasks suited to learners' abilities (mean = 3.80), cooperative learning, teamwork, and peer tutoring (mean = 3.73), and the vital role of parents (mean = 3.70). The overall mean across strategies was 3.68 (Strongly Agree).

Supports and Challenges

Table 6. *Supports and Challenges*

<i>Teaching Strategies/Teaching Practice</i>	<i>Weighted Mean</i>	<i>Verbal Description</i>
1. Additional staff members and volunteers in the classroom as providing the most support for the inclusion of students with learning disabilities.	3.56	SA
2. Small group instruction allows for more teacher-student interactions, individualized instruction, student on-task behavior, and teacher monitoring and feedback.	3.46	SA
3. A need for expanded sources of support, more time to plan for students with disabilities, reduced class size, and ongoing training in serving students with special needs.	3.63	SA
Over-all Mean	3.55	A

Legend: 3.25–4.00 = Strongly Agree (SA); 2.50–3.24 = Agree (A); 1.75–2.49 = Disagree (D); 1.00–1.74 = Strongly Disagree (SD)

Teachers strongly agreed on the need for expanded supports, more time for planning, smaller class sizes, and ongoing training (mean

= 3.63). Additional staff and volunteers were also viewed as beneficial (mean = 3.56). The overall mean was 3.55 (Agree to Strongly Agree).

Findings indicate broad teacher openness to inclusion, alongside a clear call for capacity building. The high endorsement of differentiation, cooperative learning, and peer support aligns with an inclusive pedagogy that leverages flexible grouping, scaffolded tasks, and structured collaboration to address the heterogeneous needs of students in mainstream classrooms. Behavioral needs were most frequently reported, underscoring the importance of proactive classroom management, social-emotional learning routines, and access to specialist support where available. Communication and cognitive needs further point to the utility of multi-modal instruction and formative assessment to tailor supports. Perceptions and planning indicators suggest that professional learning communities and co-teaching partnerships may provide a practical vehicle for teachers to co-design lessons, share strategies, and problem-solve around LSEN. System-level supports—time, staffing, and resources—remain pivotal for sustained implementation.

Overall, the data support a pragmatic approach: strengthen teacher collaboration; institutionalize differentiated planning; expand peer-assisted learning; and engage families as partners to reinforce goals and strategies across contexts.

Conclusions

Teachers in this sample were supportive of inclusion and endorsed concrete practices—differentiation, cooperative learning, and parent engagement—that can enhance participation of LSEN in mainstream classes. To translate these orientations into daily practice, schools should provide structured collaboration time, targeted professional development, and adequate staffing. Limitations include the small, single-district sample, reliance on self-report, and the absence of validated instrument metrics or inferential analyses. Future studies should employ larger, multi-site samples, establish instrument reliability and validity, and test the impact of specific inclusive strategies on student outcomes.

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