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Assessing Teachers' Capability and Constraints in Managing Learners with Special Needs in Inclusive Education

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed teachers' capability and constraints in supporting learners with special educational needs in inclusive classrooms at Toledo National Vocational School during School Year 2025–2026 and developed a proposed Action Plan. Using a quantitative descriptive-correlational design, data were gathered from purposively selected teachers through a validated, structured survey questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation. Respondents were predominantly younger, female, bachelor's degree holders, and early-career teachers. Findings revealed high perceived teaching capability (M = 3.64, SD = 0.51), particularly in establishing inclusive learning environments, applying varied assessment strategies, and maintaining learner engagement. However, teachers experienced very high constraints (M = 3.28, SD = 0.60), primarily involving inadequate instructional materials, inflexible curriculum structures, and limited administrative support. A weak, statistically nonsignificant relationship was established between capability and constraints ($r = 0.243$, $p = 0.089$). These findings indicate that teachers' perceived instructional capability coexisted with substantial institutional barriers without demonstrating a significant association between the variables. Implementing the proposed Action Plan is recommended to strengthen instructional resources, curriculum adaptability, professional development, mentoring, and administrative assistance. The study was limited to one institution and relied on purposive sampling and self-reported responses, restricting generalizability and causal interpretation. Its findings provide evidence for strengthening institutional and educational sustainability through more responsive inclusive practices, contributing to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by informing efforts to improve educational accessibility and equitable participation.

Keywords: *Administrative Support, Descriptive-Correlational Research, Inclusive Education, Special Educational Needs, Teacher Capability, Teacher Constraints, Teacher Development*

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become a fundamental priority in contemporary educational systems, emphasizing equitable access to quality education for learners regardless of ability, disability, or individual learning differences. However, genuine inclusion extends beyond placing learners with special educational needs (LSEN) in regular classrooms; it requires competent teachers, responsive instructional practices, accessible resources, and supportive school environments. Teachers play a crucial role in implementing inclusive education through differentiated instruction, individualized support, appropriate assessment, and effective classroom management. Research emphasizes that successful inclusion depends on teachers' competence, self-efficacy, professional preparation, and sustained institutional support (Wray et al., 2022; Woodcock et al., 2022; Gesel et al., 2022). In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 11650 and its implementing rules and regulations strengthen inclusive education by promoting equitable learning opportunities and appropriate support services for learners with disabilities (Republic of the Philippines, 2022; Department of Education, 2024). Despite these developments, challenges persist, including inadequate instructional materials, limited specialized training, heavy teaching responsibilities, and insufficient institutional support (Dicdiquin et al., 2025; Punzalan et al., 2025). These challenges highlight the gap between teachers' capability and the conditions necessary for effective inclusive instruction. At Toledo National Vocational School, teachers must address diverse learning needs while meeting academic, technical-vocational, and classroom safety requirements. Although previous studies have explored teachers' preparedness and challenges in inclusive education, context-specific evidence remains needed regarding the relationship between teachers' perceived capability and the constraints they encounter. Accordingly, this study assessed teachers' capability and constraints in supporting learners with special needs during School Year 2025–2026. The findings provided the basis for a proposed Action Plan aimed at strengthening inclusive teaching practices, addressing institutional barriers, and promoting equitable and sustainable educational opportunities.

Research Problem

The central problem is the potential gap between teachers' capability to support LSEN and the classroom and institutional conditions needed to implement inclusive practices consistently. Teachers may be capable of adapting lessons, managing behavior, supporting participation, and conducting appropriate assessments, yet limited instructional materials, workload demands, insufficient specialist assistance, and restricted professional development can obstruct implementation. Studies have identified gaps in access to resources and support, barriers to technology-assisted instruction, and difficulties in providing appropriate classroom-based assessment (Gesel et al., 2022; Starks & Reich, 2023; Jungjohann & Gebhardt, 2023). Recent Philippine evidence similarly identifies inadequate resources and training as barriers to inclusive instruction, while research on teachers handling learners with special educational needs underscores the importance of collaboration and administrative assistance (Dicdiquin et al., 2025; Punzalan et al., 2025). However, the extent to which teachers' perceived capability is associated with the constraints they report remains a context-specific empirical question at Toledo National Vocational School. Examining these dimensions together can identify teacher strengths, priority support needs, and areas for school-level action without presuming that greater capability necessarily corresponds to fewer constraints.

Assumptions of the Study

The study proceeds from the premise that teachers with direct experience supporting LSEN can provide informed reports of their instructional capability and the constraints encountered in inclusive classrooms. It treats capability and constraints as distinct, measurable dimensions:

teachers may demonstrate competence while still facing substantial resource, workload, and institutional barriers. Contemporary research indicates that teachers' self-efficacy and inclusive practices are shaped by experience, training, beliefs, and working conditions (Wray et al., 2022; Woodcock et al., 2023). The study does not assume a causal relationship between capability and constraints; instead, it tests the null hypothesis that no significant relationship exists between the two variables at the 0.05 level of significance.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to determine the extent of teachers' capability and constraints in supporting learners with special needs in inclusive classrooms at Toledo National Vocational School, Toledo City Division, during School Year 2025–2026. Specifically, it sought to describe the respondents' demographic profile in terms of age and gender, highest educational attainment, years of teaching experience, and teaching position; assess their perceived capability to support LSEN; determine the extent of the constraints they encountered; test the significance of the relationship between capability and constraints; and formulate a proposed Action Plan grounded in the study findings.

Theoretical or Conceptual Basis

The study draws on three complementary perspectives: Social Cognitive Theory, Emotional Labor Theory, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Social Cognitive Theory explains the role of self-efficacy in teachers' willingness and persistence in carrying out challenging instructional responsibilities. Recent research demonstrates that teacher self-efficacy is associated with beliefs about inclusion, professional learning, and the application of inclusive practices (Wray et al., 2022; Woodcock et al., 2022; Woodcock et al., 2023). This perspective informs the assessment of teachers' perceived capability. Emotional Labor Theory explains the effort required to regulate emotions while responding to diverse learner needs and demanding classroom situations. Research involving special education teachers documents how emotionally significant teaching experiences and emotional regulation intersect with professional well-being and burnout (Petiot et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025). This perspective helps interpret the pressures that may accompany workload, behavioral challenges, and limited support, without treating emotional strain as an independently measured variable in the present survey. UDL provides the instructional dimension of the framework. Its contemporary guidelines emphasize flexible means of engagement, representation, and action and expression to reduce barriers to learning (CAST, 2024). Related research highlights the importance of classroom support, accessible approaches, and professional development for applying inclusive pedagogy (Hove & Phasha, 2024; Shi et al., 2025). Together, these perspectives frame teacher capability as the ability to enact inclusive practices and teacher constraints as conditions that may restrict their consistent implementation. The resulting evidence informs the proposed Action Plan.

The study primarily aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), particularly the aims of equitable access to education and inclusive, disability-sensitive learning environments. By identifying teachers' capabilities and barriers to appropriate instruction, assessment, and learner participation, the study can inform school-level improvements in educational quality and accessibility. This is consistent with the United Nations' emphasis on inclusive education policy, financing, and learning environments (United Nations Statistics Division, 2025a). The study also supports Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) insofar as improved inclusive teaching and institutional support can help reduce unequal educational opportunities for learners with disabilities. The alignment concerns educational and institutional sustainability, rather than an observed reduction in inequality, because the research measures teachers' capability and constraints rather than learner

outcomes or long-term social effects (United Nations Statistics Division, 2025b). The proposed Action Plan therefore offers a practical basis for more inclusive and sustainable school practices.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study utilized a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to determine teachers' capability and constraints in supporting learners with special needs in inclusive classrooms. The descriptive component assessed teachers' perceived capability and the extent of constraints encountered, while the correlational component examined the relationship between these variables. According to Creswell (2020), correlational research examines relationships among variables without manipulating existing conditions. The study also followed the Input–Process–Output (IPO) model, wherein teachers' demographic characteristics, capability, and constraints constituted the inputs; data collection, processing, and statistical analysis comprised the process; and a proposed Action Plan served as the output.

Research Locale or Study Setting

The study was conducted at Toledo National Vocational School in Ilihan, Toledo City, under the Schools Division of Toledo City, Philippines. The school provides secondary education to learners with diverse abilities and educational needs, including learners with special educational needs (LSEN) enrolled in regular classrooms. Teachers implement instructional accommodations, differentiated learning activities, appropriate assessment strategies, and classroom management practices to support learner participation. The school was selected as the research setting because it provided an appropriate context for examining teachers' capability and the constraints encountered in delivering inclusive education.

Participants or Data Sources

The respondents consisted of 30 teachers from Toledo National Vocational School during School Year 2025–2026, selected through purposive sampling based on their direct experience in handling learners with special needs in inclusive classrooms. The respondents represented Grades 7 to 12, with five teachers from each grade level. Eligible participants were currently employed at the school, had experience supporting learners with special needs, and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Teachers who did not meet these criteria or were unavailable or unwilling to participate were excluded. Their responses provided the primary data for assessing teacher capability, constraints, and the relationship between these variables.

Research Instruments or Materials

The study utilized a structured survey questionnaire consisting of three parts. The first gathered respondents' demographic characteristics, including age, gender, highest educational attainment, years of teaching experience, and teaching position. The second assessed teachers' capability in supporting learners with special needs through 10 statements adopted from Muhammad and Liu (2025), covering instructional adjustments, individualized support, inclusive classroom environments, behavioral management, social interaction, learning modifications, assessment strategies, learner participation, instructional organization, and learner engagement. Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 4 (Strongly Capable) to 1 (Not Capable). The third part measured teachers' constraints through 10 statements adopted from Lozano, Wüthrich, Büchi, and Sharma (2022), addressing instructional resources, time demands, support personnel, workload, classroom discipline, individualized attention, professional development, administrative assistance, curriculum flexibility, and teaching materials. Responses followed a four-point scale ranging from 4 (Very High) to 1 (Very

Low). Before administration, the questionnaire underwent content validation by qualified experts to assess its clarity, relevance, appropriateness, and alignment with the research objectives. The revised instrument was pilot-tested among teachers with characteristics similar to those of the respondents but excluded from the final study. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the instrument's internal consistency.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection commenced after securing formal permission from the school principal through a transmittal letter and coordinating with designated school personnel to identify qualified respondents. The researcher explained the study's objectives, procedures, voluntary participation requirements, and confidentiality measures. Informed consent was obtained before administering the questionnaire. The researcher personally distributed the questionnaires and provided instructions to ensure accurate completion without disrupting regular teaching responsibilities. Completed questionnaires were collected and reviewed for completeness and validity. Only properly accomplished responses were included in the analysis. The collected data were subsequently organized, coded, and prepared for statistical treatment to determine teachers' capability, constraints, and the relationship between these variables.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Frequency and percentage were employed to describe respondents' demographic characteristics, while weighted mean and standard deviation were used to determine the extent and variability of teachers' capability and constraints. Responses were interpreted using a four-point scale with the following mean ranges: 3.26–4.00, 2.51–3.25, 1.76–2.50, and 1.00–1.75, corresponding respectively to Strongly Capable, Capable, Slightly Capable, and Not Capable for teacher capability, and Very High, High, Low, and Very Low for teacher constraints. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r) was employed to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between teachers' capability and constraints. The null hypothesis, stating that no significant relationship existed between the two variables, was tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The statistical findings served as the basis for identifying areas requiring improvement and developing the proposed Action Plan.

Ethical Consideration

The study observed ethical principles to protect respondents' rights, privacy, confidentiality, and welfare. Necessary permissions were secured from the appropriate authorities of the Schools Division of Toledo City and the administration of Toledo National Vocational School before data collection. Participants were informed of the study's objectives, procedures, and intended use of the findings, and written informed consent was obtained. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured that refusal or withdrawal would not affect their employment, teaching assignments, professional evaluation, or relationship with school administrators. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by excluding personally identifying information from the questionnaires and coding responses for research purposes. Collected information was used exclusively for academic purposes, while printed and electronic records were securely stored and accessed only by the researcher. The study also observed the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence to minimize potential physical, psychological, social, and professional risks to participants.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Demographic Profile of Teacher-Respondents

3.1.1 Age and Gender

The findings revealed that 28 respondents (56.00%) were female, while 22 (44.00%) were male. Regarding age, 15 respondents (30.00%) were 23–28 years old, another 15 (30.00%) were 29–34 years old, 13 (26.00%) were 35–40 years old, and seven (14.00%) were above 40 years old. Overall, 60.00% of the respondents belonged to the 23–34 age range, indicating a predominantly younger teaching workforce. The findings suggest that many respondents were in the early or middle stages of their professional careers, during which continued teaching experience and professional learning may strengthen inclusive instructional practices. Wray et al. (2022) identified teaching experience, professional learning, and teaching context as factors associated with teacher self-efficacy in inclusive education. Similarly, Dignath et al. (2022) emphasized the relevance of professional preparation and practical experience in shaping teachers' beliefs about inclusion. Jungjohann and Gebhardt (2023) further highlighted the importance of instructional decision-making and assessment competencies in addressing diverse learning needs. Nevertheless, age and gender alone cannot establish differences in teachers' capability because these relationships were not statistically examined in the present study.

3.1.2 Highest Educational Attainment

The results showed that 38 respondents (76.00%) held bachelor's degrees, 10 (20.00%) had completed master's degrees, and two (4.00%) possessed doctorate degrees. Thus, most respondents had undergraduate qualifications as their highest educational attainment, while 24.00% had completed graduate-level education. The predominance of bachelor's degree holders highlights the relevance of continuous professional development in strengthening inclusive teaching competencies. Woodcock et al. (2023) emphasized that teachers' beliefs, self-efficacy, and professional preparation are important considerations in implementing inclusive practices. Donath et al. (2023), through a meta-analysis, demonstrated that professional development can improve teachers' knowledge, skills, and beliefs concerning inclusive education. These findings support the importance of accessible training, mentoring, and professional learning across educational qualification levels. However, the present study did not establish whether higher educational attainment was associated with greater teacher capability.

3.1.3 Years of Teaching Experience

The findings indicated that 20 respondents (40.00%) had 1–5 years of teaching experience, 13 (26.00%) had 6–10 years, 11 (22.00%) had 11–15 years, and six (12.00%) had 16–20 years. Overall, 66.00% had been teaching for 10 years or less, indicating that most respondents had relatively limited professional experience compared with longer-serving teachers. The findings highlight the importance of practical classroom experience and continued professional support in developing competencies for inclusive education. Punzalan et al. (2025) identified challenges, coping strategies, and support needs among teachers handling learners with special educational needs in the Philippine context. Likewise, Wray et al. (2022) reported that teaching experience and contextual factors influence teacher self-efficacy in inclusive settings. These studies suggest that classroom exposure, relevant training, and professional guidance are important for strengthening instructional adaptability and confidence. However, years of teaching experience should not be interpreted as a direct predictor of capability without further statistical analysis.

3.1.4 Teaching Position

The results revealed that 27 respondents (54.00%) occupied Teacher I positions, nine (18.00%) were Teacher II, seven (14.00%) were Teacher III, five (10.00%) were Master Teacher I, and two (4.00%) were Master Teacher II. More than half of the respondents occupied entry-level teaching positions, while 14.00% held Master Teacher positions. The distribution indicates opportunities for professional collaboration and mentoring across teaching ranks. Mahmood et al. (2025) emphasized the complementary roles of teachers and school administrators in supporting learners with special needs in mainstream schools. Similarly, Johnson and Erasmus (2024) identified professional development, communication, collaboration, and organizational support as important elements in equipping educators to provide effective learning support. These findings underscore the potential value of mentoring and collaborative planning, particularly for teachers with limited experience in inclusive classrooms. Nevertheless, teaching position alone does not demonstrate differences in inclusive teaching capability.

3.2 Teachers' Capability in Supporting Learners with Special Needs

The results revealed an aggregate weighted mean of 3.64 and a standard deviation of 0.51, interpreted as Highly Capable. The highest-rated indicators were creating an inclusive classroom environment, using varied assessment methods, and maintaining learner engagement, each obtaining a weighted mean of 3.72. Ensuring learner participation followed with a mean of 3.68, while providing individualized support obtained 3.64. Promoting social interaction received 3.62, modifying learning activities and organizing instruction each obtained 3.60, and adjusting teaching strategies received 3.58. Managing behavioral challenges recorded the lowest mean of 3.52, although it remained within the Highly Capable category. These findings indicate that respondents perceived themselves as capable of implementing inclusive instructional strategies, particularly in maintaining supportive learning environments, assessment flexibility, and learner engagement. Jungjohann and Gebhardt (2023) emphasized the significance of classroom-based assessment and instructional decision-making in inclusive education. Fitas (2025) discussed the potential contribution of emerging technologies to accessible and responsive learning, while Shi et al. (2025) identified professional development in digital pedagogy as important for teachers' competence and self-efficacy. In the Philippine context, Dicdiquin et al. (2025) examined inclusive teaching strategies and challenges in supporting learners with special needs in a Cebu public secondary school. These studies provide a basis for understanding the importance of instructional adaptability and sustained teacher development. The comparatively lower rating for behavioral management indicates a priority for further professional learning, although the respondents still reported high capability in this area.

3.3 Constraints Encountered in Inclusive Classrooms

The findings revealed an aggregate weighted mean of 3.28 and a standard deviation of 0.60, interpreted as Very High constraints. The most significant reported constraint was the lack of appropriate teaching materials, with a weighted mean of 3.44, followed by inflexible curriculum design (3.38) and limited administrative or institutional support (3.32). The lack of instructional assistants, difficulties maintaining classroom discipline, challenges providing individualized attention, and inadequate professional development each obtained a mean of 3.26. Extended planning time recorded 3.24, limited school resources obtained 3.22, and heavy workload received the lowest mean of 3.12. Although all indicators reflected considerable challenges, instructional resources, curriculum flexibility, and institutional support emerged as the most

pronounced concerns. The findings suggest that teachers' perceived capability does not eliminate the institutional and instructional difficulties associated with inclusive education. Woodcock et al. (2022) emphasized the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and inclusive practices, while Ismailos et al. (2022) examined the importance of teacher attitudes and self-efficacy concerning inclusion. Qorib (2024) discussed differentiated instruction as an approach to learner diversity, reinforcing the relevance of flexible teaching practices. Johnson and Erasmus (2024) further identified inadequate resources, insufficient training, limited collaboration, and workload as barriers to providing effective learning support. Similarly, Donath et al. (2023) demonstrated the value of sustained professional development, while Dicdiquin et al. (2025) provided Philippine evidence on instructional challenges in inclusive settings. Collectively, these studies support the need to strengthen instructional materials, curriculum adaptability, professional development, and administrative assistance to address the constraints reported by respondents.

3.4 Relationship Between Teachers' Capability and Constraints

The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis revealed a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.243$, indicating a positive but weak association between teachers' capability and constraints. The computed p-value was 0.089, which exceeded the 0.05 significance level. Consequently, the null hypothesis was not rejected, indicating that there was no statistically significant relationship between teachers' capability and the constraints they encountered in supporting learners with special needs in inclusive classrooms. The findings indicate that the study did not establish a statistically significant association between perceived capability and reported constraints. This means that the respondents' generally high capability ratings coexisted with very high constraint ratings, but the data did not demonstrate that the two variables were significantly related. Alsarawi and Sukonthaman (2023) emphasized the relevance of teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and self-efficacy in inclusive teaching, while Van Mieghem et al. (2022) examined the importance of professional support for teachers' self-efficacy when working with learners with special educational needs. Page et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of inclusive learning environments and appropriate pedagogical support, whereas Aas (2022) examined how teacher beliefs can present challenges to inclusive educational practice. Mirnawati and Jaleha (2024) also identified difficulties in implementing assessments for learners with special needs, illustrating that instructional challenges may persist within inclusive educational settings. Although these studies provide contextual support for interpreting teacher capability and institutional constraints, they do not independently establish the same statistical relationship observed in the present study. The findings therefore support separate interventions aimed at sustaining teacher capability and addressing structural barriers through adequate resources, professional development, collaborative support, and strengthened school administration.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study established that teachers at Toledo National Vocational School demonstrated a high level of perceived capability in supporting learners with special needs in inclusive classrooms during School Year 2025–2026. Their strengths were evident in creating inclusive learning environments, applying varied assessment strategies, and maintaining learner engagement, although behavioral management remained an area requiring improvement. Despite these capabilities, teachers experienced very high constraints, particularly inadequate instructional materials, inflexible curriculum structures, limited administrative support, and insufficient professional development opportunities. The weak, statistically nonsignificant relationship

between capability and constraints indicated that the study did not establish a significant association between these variables. Collectively, the findings demonstrated that teachers' perceived instructional capability coexisted with substantial institutional and classroom challenges. The study therefore highlighted the importance of strengthening both professional competencies and school-level support mechanisms. These findings provided an empirical basis for developing a targeted Action Plan to improve inclusive education practices within the institution.

The school administration should prioritize implementing the proposed Action Plan, focusing on the provision of appropriate instructional materials, accessible learning resources, and strengthened classroom support systems. Curriculum flexibility should be enhanced through differentiated instruction, reasonable accommodations, and adaptable assessment strategies that address learners' diverse educational needs. Continuous professional development should be provided through targeted training, school-based Learning Action Cell sessions, and mentoring programs emphasizing positive behavioral support, individualized instruction, and inclusive classroom management. School administrators and master teachers should strengthen collaborative planning, clarify instructional responsibilities, and facilitate coordination with available guidance personnel and other support providers. Regular consultations and peer-support arrangements should also be established to assist teachers in addressing instructional challenges and workload demands. Furthermore, the implementation of the Action Plan should be systematically monitored and periodically evaluated to determine its effectiveness, identify remaining concerns, and guide necessary improvements in institutional support and inclusive teaching practices.

The study was confined to teachers from Toledo National Vocational School during School Year 2025–2026, limiting the transferability of findings to other educational settings. Purposive sampling and reliance on self-reported questionnaire responses restricted the representativeness and measurement scope of the results. The descriptive-correlational design identified statistical associations but could not establish causal relationships between teachers' capability and constraints. Moreover, the study did not directly assess classroom practices or learner outcomes. Future studies may involve broader samples, multiple schools, classroom observations, and additional research approaches. The manuscript's conflicting respondent counts of 30 and 50 also require reconciliation before publication.

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