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Teachers' Level of Awareness and Preparedness on Inclusive Education (IE): Basis for Capacity-Building Program

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ABSTRACT

This study examined teachers' awareness and preparedness in implementing inclusive education in public elementary schools in the Districts of Calbayog II and III, Schools Division of Calbayog City, during School Year 2025–2026, as a basis for developing a capacity-building program. A quantitative descriptive-correlational and comparative research design was employed, involving 141 teachers and 9 school administrators through complete enumeration. Data were collected using adapted, expert-validated questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results revealed that teachers were highly aware and highly prepared across all assessed dimensions, with no significant differences between teacher and administrator assessments. Attitude toward inclusive education was the only profile variable significantly associated with awareness ($\rho = 0.285$, $p = .028$) and preparedness ($\rho = 0.343$, $p = .004$). Awareness demonstrated strong positive correlations with all preparedness dimensions ($\rho = 0.617$–0.632, $p < .001$). The study concluded that greater awareness and favorable attitudes were associated with higher preparedness for inclusive education. It recommends sustained professional development, practical training, mentoring, adequate instructional resources, stakeholder collaboration, and systematic monitoring through the proposed Inclusive Education Capacity Building and Learner Support Program. The study was limited to selected public elementary schools within two districts and relied on questionnaire-based assessments, restricting broader generalization. The findings provide an empirical foundation for strengthening teachers' competencies and institutional support systems, contributing to equitable, accessible, and sustainable educational practices for diverse learners.

Keywords: *Capacity Building, Differentiated Instruction, Inclusive Education, Teacher Awareness, Teacher Preparedness, Teacher Attitudes*

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive Education (IE) is a fundamental approach to ensuring equitable access to quality education, regardless of learners' abilities, backgrounds, and individual circumstances. It emphasizes meaningful participation, accessibility, respect for diversity, and the removal of barriers that hinder academic and social development. Rather than simply integrating learners into regular classrooms, inclusive education requires responsive instructional practices, flexible assessment methods, and supportive learning environments that accommodate diverse educational needs (Tiernan, 2022). Recent research emphasizes that inclusion also depends on teachers' beliefs, confidence, and practical capacity to respond to learner differences (Dignath et al., 2022).

1.1. Background and Context of the Study

Globally, inclusive education has evolved into a fundamental human right and an essential component of sustainable educational development. UNESCO (2020) emphasized that teachers must possess appropriate knowledge, adaptive teaching strategies, and collaborative competencies to address learner diversity effectively. Teachers serve as primary agents in translating inclusive education policies into meaningful classroom practices, making their awareness, confidence, and professional preparedness essential to successful implementation (Sharma et al., 2022). In the Philippines, the constitutional commitment to accessible and quality education is reinforced by Republic Act No. 11650, which promotes equitable educational opportunities for learners with disabilities and emphasizes continuous professional development among educators (Pineda, 2025). Despite these policy advancements, challenges persist in translating inclusive education principles into effective classroom practices, particularly in schools with limited specialized training, instructional resources, and institutional support. In Eastern Visayas, inclusive education implementation demonstrates progress alongside continuing challenges related to teacher preparation and institutional assistance. Although educators actively promote learner participation and parental involvement, insufficient comprehensive support programs constrain sustainable implementation (Lebeco & Verano, 2023). These circumstances highlight the importance of assessing teachers' awareness and preparedness within the specific educational context of the Districts of Calbayog II and III, Schools Division of Calbayog City. A cross-national policy review identifies teacher capacity building, resource allocation, school-level action, and monitoring as interconnected requirements for equitable inclusion (OECD, 2023).

1.2. Research Problem

Despite established policies promoting inclusive education, discrepancies remain between teachers' understanding of inclusive principles and their preparedness to implement them effectively. Teachers may recognize the importance of equity and learner diversity but encounter difficulties in adapting instructional materials, managing heterogeneous classrooms, conducting appropriate assessments, and providing individualized learning support. Limited specialized training and inadequate institutional resources further complicate these responsibilities. DepEd Region VIII (2025) highlighted that inclusive education implementation across public elementary schools remained inconsistent, with learners frequently placed in mainstream classrooms without adequate instructional adaptations, support mechanisms, or appropriately prepared teachers. Similarly, inclusive education practices in Northern Samar demonstrate the continuing need for appropriate interventions and institutional assistance to address the educational requirements of learners with disabilities (Biado, 2025). Within the Districts of Calbayog II and III, differences in professional experience, training opportunities, attitudes, and available resources may be associated with teachers' awareness and preparedness. Understanding these factors is necessary to determine whether existing professional development initiatives adequately address teachers' needs. However, context-

specific evidence examining both dimensions and incorporating school administrators' assessments remains insufficient, limiting the development of targeted and responsive capacity-building interventions. A systematic review of primary school teachers' attitudes found that acceptance of inclusion varies with the learners' support needs, underscoring the importance of targeted professional learning (Lindner et al., 2023).

1.3. Research Gap

Existing literature recognizes teachers' knowledge, attitudes, competencies, and professional development as essential components of inclusive education implementation. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of responsive teaching practices, differentiated instruction, and institutional support in addressing learner diversity (Sharma et al., 2022). Research has also highlighted the need to strengthen teachers' awareness and practical competencies to sustain inclusive educational practices (Tiernan, 2022). However, broader international and national findings may not adequately represent the contextual realities of public elementary schools in Calbayog City. Specifically, limited localized evidence simultaneously examines teachers' awareness and preparedness across multiple instructional and institutional dimensions while considering their demographic and professional characteristics. Furthermore, relying exclusively on teachers' self-assessments may provide an incomplete understanding of their preparedness. This study addresses these gaps by integrating teacher and school administrator assessments, examining relationships between teacher characteristics, awareness, and preparedness, and generating context-specific evidence to guide the development of an inclusive education capacity-building program. Meta-analytic evidence also links teachers' attitudes with their self-efficacy for inclusive teaching, providing a relevant basis for examining attitudes alongside awareness and preparedness (Yada et al., 2022).

1.4. Purpose and Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to determine teachers' awareness and preparedness in implementing inclusive education in public elementary schools in the Districts of Calbayog II and III, Schools Division of Calbayog City, during School Year 2025–2026. Specifically, it examined teachers' demographic and professional profiles, awareness of inclusive instructional practices, and preparedness in terms of knowledge, skills, resources, support, and confidence. It also compared teacher and school administrator assessments, investigated relationships between teacher characteristics and the principal variables, and determined the relationship between awareness and preparedness. Based on the findings, the study proposed a capacity-building program to strengthen teachers' competencies and support effective inclusive education implementation.

1.5. Significance and Practical Contribution of the Study

The study provides empirical evidence to guide teachers, school administrators, educational supervisors, and policymakers in strengthening inclusive education implementation. Its findings may inform professional development initiatives, instructional planning, resource allocation, and institutional support mechanisms responsive to teachers' identified needs. Learners, particularly those with diverse educational requirements, may benefit from improved instructional practices and more supportive classroom environments. The study also encourages stronger collaboration among teachers, parents, administrators, and support personnel. Its principal practical contribution is the proposed Inclusive Education Capacity Building and Learner Support Program (INCLUDE), which provides a structured approach to developing teacher competencies, strengthening collaborative support, improving instructional resources, and sustaining inclusive educational practices. Evidence from beginning teachers highlights the combined importance of professional knowledge, practical skills, and beliefs in readiness for inclusive teaching (Rosenberg et al., 2024).

1.6. Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Alignment

This study directly supports SDG 4 – Quality Education by promoting inclusive and equitable educational opportunities through enhanced teacher awareness, preparedness, and professional competencies. Its proposed capacity-building program addresses instructional accessibility, differentiated learning, and institutional support, contributing to more responsive educational environments for diverse learners. The study also aligns with SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities by emphasizing the removal of educational barriers, non-discrimination, and equitable participation among learners with diverse abilities and circumstances. Through continuous professional development, collaborative partnerships, and appropriate resource utilization, the research supports the sustainability of inclusive educational practices and contributes to institutional efforts toward reducing educational disparities and promoting equal learning opportunities. Inclusive Education (IE) is a fundamental approach to ensuring equitable access to quality education, regardless of learners' abilities, backgrounds, and individual circumstances. It emphasizes meaningful participation, accessibility, respect for diversity, and the removal of barriers that hinder academic and social development. Rather than simply integrating learners into regular classrooms, inclusive education requires responsive instructional practices, flexible assessment methods, and supportive learning environments that accommodate diverse educational needs (Tiernan, 2022).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational and comparative research design to assess teachers' awareness and preparedness in implementing Inclusive Education (IE). The descriptive approach determined teachers' demographic and professional characteristics and their levels of awareness and preparedness. The correlational approach examined relationships between teacher profile variables, awareness, and preparedness, while the comparative approach determined whether significant differences existed between teacher and school administrator assessments. These complementary approaches provided empirical evidence for developing a context-responsive capacity-building program without manipulating the variables under investigation.

2.2. Research Locale, Population, and Participants or Respondents

The study was conducted in public elementary schools in the Districts of Calbayog II and III, Schools Division of Calbayog City, Samar, Eastern Visayas, Philippines, during School Year 2025–2026. The respondents consisted of 141 public elementary school teachers and 9 school administrators, comprising 150 respondents. Teachers were characterized according to age, sex, civil status, educational attainment, teaching experience, performance rating based on the latest Individual Performance Commitment and Review Form (IPCRF), relevant in-service training, and attitude toward inclusive education. School administrators provided complementary assessments of teachers' awareness and preparedness.

2.3. Sampling Technique and Sample Determination

Complete enumeration was employed to include all identified teachers and school administrators within the participating public elementary schools. The study covered 141 teachers and 9 school administrators, yielding a total of 150 respondents and a 100% response rate. This approach ensured comprehensive representation of the identified population and facilitated the comparison of teacher and administrator perspectives regarding inclusive education implementation. The study utilized adapted questionnaires based on DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009, the UNESCO IBE–Philippines Inclusive Education Profile (2025), Joyno (2025), and UNICEF Philippines (2025). The teachers' questionnaire comprised three parts: respondent profile, including 25 training indicators and 15 attitude indicators measured using a four-point

Likert scale; awareness, comprising 25 indicators across five dimensions; and preparedness, comprising 20 indicators across four dimensions. Awareness and preparedness were measured using five-point Likert scales. The administrators' questionnaire contained corresponding awareness and preparedness indicators. Expert validation covered face, content, construct, pragmatic, and convergent-discriminant validity. Recommendations from the research panel were incorporated into the instrument before administration.

2.4. Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher submitted a formal request to the Planning and Research Section of the Schools Division of Calbayog City on July 3, 2026, and received approval from the Schools Division Superintendent on July 6, 2026. Permission was subsequently secured from district supervisors and school administrators. The validated questionnaires were personally distributed to respondents with appropriate instructions and sufficient completion time. Completed questionnaires were retrieved, checked for completeness and consistency, organized, and prepared for statistical analysis.

2.5. Data Analysis and Statistical Treatment

Data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, mean, median, mean absolute deviation, standard deviation, and weighted mean. The Shapiro–Wilk test assessed data normality and guided the selection of appropriate statistical procedures. The Mann–Whitney U-test determined differences between teacher and administrator assessments. Spearman's rank correlation, Pearson product-moment correlation, eta correlation, and point-biserial correlation examined relationships among the study variables. All hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 significance level using two-tailed tests. Statistical software facilitated accurate data processing and analysis.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

The researcher observed ethical research practices by securing institutional permission from the Schools Division Superintendent, district supervisors, and school administrators before data collection. Respondents received clear instructions and sufficient time to complete the questionnaires without undue pressure. Confidentiality of collected information was maintained, and responses were used exclusively for academic purposes. Professional integrity, respectful communication, and responsible data handling were observed throughout the research process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Demographic and Professional Profile of Teacher-Respondents

The 141 teacher-respondents had a mean age of 42.55 years, a median of 42.00 years, and a mean absolute deviation of 8.4535 years. The largest age group was 32–36 years (20.57%), followed by 47–51 years (19.86%). Female respondents predominated, comprising 114 teachers, compared with 27 male teachers. Regarding civil status, 63.83% were married, 31.21% were single, 2.84% were separated, and 2.13% were widowed. Participation in relevant in-service training was highest at the school level (WM = 3.38), interpreted as Always, followed by the district level (WM = 2.12), interpreted as Sometimes. Participation at the division (WM = 1.45), regional (WM = 1.11), and national (WM = 1.04) levels was interpreted as Never. These findings indicate limited exposure to professional development opportunities beyond the school level. Teachers demonstrated consistently positive attitudes toward inclusive education, obtaining a grand weighted mean of 3.76, interpreted as Always. Willingness to collaborate with teachers, parents, and school leaders received the highest rating (WM = 3.87), while monitoring and technical assistance from educational authorities received the lowest rating (WM = 3.62). These findings reflect teachers' commitment to equity, collaboration, and non-discrimination while emphasizing the need for sustained institutional support and broader professional development

opportunities. Regarding educational attainment, 60.99% held bachelor's degrees, while 39.01% held master's degrees. The largest teaching experience group had served for 25 years or more (22.70%), followed by those with 10–12 years of experience (21.28%). Based on the latest IPCRF, 91.49% obtained Outstanding ratings, while 8.51% received Very Satisfactory ratings. These findings demonstrate substantial professional experience and favorable performance among respondents, although specialized inclusive education competencies require continued development.

3.2. Teachers' Level of Awareness in Implementing Inclusive Education

Teachers and school administrators consistently assessed teachers as Highly Aware across the five dimensions of inclusive education: instructional strategies for diverse learners, classroom management in inclusive settings, assessment and evaluation practices, differentiated instruction, and collaboration with parents and support personnel. School administrators rated awareness of instructional strategies at 4.00 and classroom management at 4.33. Adapting lesson content and instructional materials received a favorable rating (WM = 4.22), while positive reinforcement and facilitating peer support obtained weighted means of 4.44. Awareness of assistive devices and supplementary learning resources received a relatively lower rating (WM = 3.78), although it remained within the Highly Aware category. The findings indicate that teachers possessed substantial awareness of inclusive educational principles and practices, particularly those associated with positive classroom environments and responsive instruction. Nevertheless, specialized instructional resources, assistive technologies, and practical strategies for addressing diverse learning requirements warrant further attention. These findings reinforce the importance of continuous professional development and institutional assistance in translating awareness into effective classroom practices.

3.3. Teachers' Level of Preparedness in Implementing Inclusive Education

Both respondent groups assessed teachers as Highly Prepared across knowledge of inclusive education principles, skills in handling diverse learners, availability of instructional resources and support, and confidence in managing inclusive classrooms. School administrators assessed teachers' skills in handling diverse learners at 4.11, availability of instructional resources and support at 3.89, and confidence in managing inclusive classrooms at 3.87. Upholding learner-centered educational principles received a favorable rating (WM = 4.33), while curriculum adaptation, individualized learning support, and positive behavior management obtained weighted means of 4.22. Relatively lower ratings were recorded for identifying and classifying diverse educational needs (WM = 3.89), implementing differentiated instruction (WM = 3.89), accessing external support networks (WM = 3.67), and confidently managing mixed-ability classrooms (WM = 3.67). Although teachers demonstrated favorable preparedness, these findings identify opportunities to strengthen specialized competencies, resource utilization, and confidence in addressing complex learner needs. Practical training, mentoring, collaborative lesson planning, and accessible support services remain essential to sustaining inclusive educational practices. The importance of positive attitudes is consistent with evidence from a meta-analysis reporting a relationship between teachers' inclusive attitudes and self-efficacy, although the present study measured preparedness rather than self-efficacy (Long et al., 2025).

3.4. Differences Between Teacher and School Administrator Assessments

The Mann–Whitney U-test revealed no statistically significant differences between teacher and school administrator assessments across all dimensions of awareness and preparedness, with all computed p-values exceeding the 0.05 significance level. Consequently, the corresponding null hypotheses were not rejected. The findings indicate that both respondent groups generally shared comparable perceptions regarding teachers' understanding of inclusive education and preparedness to address diverse learning needs. This consistency provides complementary

evidence of teachers' perceived competencies. However, comparable questionnaire assessments do not necessarily establish actual classroom effectiveness, emphasizing the importance of continuous monitoring, classroom observations, and constructive feedback. Recent evidence also identifies differentiated teaching, classroom management, and professional knowledge as central competencies for inclusive education (Rapisa et al., 2026).

3.5. Relationship Between Teachers' Profile and Their Awareness and Preparedness

Attitude toward inclusive education was the only profile variable significantly associated with both awareness and preparedness. It demonstrated weak positive correlations with awareness ($\rho = 0.285$, $p = .028$) and preparedness ($\rho = 0.343$, $p = .004$). Age, sex, civil status, highest educational attainment, teaching experience, IPCRF performance rating, and relevant in-service training showed no statistically significant relationships with either outcome. For awareness, the corresponding p-values were .138, .396, .694, .058, .123, .159, and .502, respectively. For preparedness, the corresponding p-values were .490, .340, .488, .157, .301, .811, and .063, respectively. These findings suggest that favorable attitudes toward inclusion were associated with greater awareness and preparedness, whereas demographic and professional characteristics were not significantly associated with these outcomes. Nevertheless, the weak correlations indicate that attitude should not be considered the sole factor associated with teachers' competencies. Professional development should therefore incorporate reflective activities, advocacy, collaborative learning, and practical experiences that cultivate positive dispositions toward learner diversity.

3.6. Relationship Between Teachers' Awareness and Preparedness in Implementing Inclusive Education

Teachers' awareness demonstrated strong positive and statistically significant correlations with all four preparedness dimensions. Specifically, awareness was associated with knowledge of inclusive education principles ($\rho = 0.617$, $p < .001$), skills in handling diverse learners ($\rho = 0.631$, $p < .001$), availability of instructional resources and support ($\rho = 0.632$, $p < .001$), and confidence in managing inclusive classrooms ($\rho = 0.628$, $p < .001$). The null hypothesis stating that no significant relationship existed between awareness and preparedness was rejected. Availability of instructional resources and support demonstrated the strongest association, followed by skills in handling diverse learners, classroom management confidence, and knowledge of inclusive education principles. These findings indicate that teachers with higher awareness tended to report greater preparedness across instructional, professional, and institutional dimensions. Although the correlational design does not establish causality, the results provide empirical support for strengthening awareness alongside practical competencies, confidence, and access to appropriate resources through sustained capacity-building initiatives.

3.7. Proposed Inclusive Education Capacity-Building Program

Based on the findings, the study proposed INCLUDE: Inclusive Education Capacity Building and Learner Support Program, designed to strengthen teachers' awareness, attitudes, competencies, and preparedness while improving coordinated support for diverse learners. The program encompasses seven interconnected components: identifying learner needs and teacher capability gaps; nurturing teachers' knowledge and confidence; creating an inclusive education competency framework; linking teachers, parents, administrators, and support personnel; utilizing an inclusive education resource center and hub; developing appropriate learning resources; and evaluating implementation. Proposed activities include Learning Action Cell sessions, practical workshops, coaching, mentoring, collaborative planning, learner identification and referral, instructional material development, and periodic monitoring. These initiatives address the identified need for sustained professional development, positive attitudes, accessible resources, and institutional collaboration. The program provides a context-

responsive framework for strengthening inclusive educational practices and advancing equitable learning opportunities. Its implementation and subsequent evaluation may contribute to sustainable teacher development and improved institutional support for learners with diverse educational needs.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that public elementary school teachers in the Districts of Calbayog II and III demonstrated high levels of awareness and preparedness in implementing Inclusive Education (IE), reflecting their understanding of inclusive principles, instructional practices, and commitment to addressing diverse learner needs. Teacher and school administrator assessments showed no statistically significant differences, indicating comparable perceptions of teachers' competencies. Attitude toward inclusive education was the only profile variable significantly associated with both awareness and preparedness, while demographic and other professional characteristics demonstrated no significant relationships. Furthermore, teachers' awareness was strongly and positively associated with all preparedness dimensions, emphasizing the importance of strengthening knowledge, practical competencies, confidence, and institutional support. Despite favorable assessments, opportunities remain to improve differentiated instruction, resource utilization, specialized learner support, and inclusive classroom management. These findings provide an empirical foundation for the proposed Inclusive Education Capacity Building and Learner Support Program (INCLUDE) to strengthen teachers' competencies and sustain inclusive educational practices.

School administrators and educational authorities should strengthen continuous professional development through regular Learning Action Cell sessions, practical workshops, coaching, mentoring, demonstration teaching, and collaborative planning. Training should emphasize differentiated instruction, curriculum adaptation, assessment practices, individualized learning support, and mixed-ability classroom management. Schools should cultivate positive attitudes toward inclusive education through reflective activities, advocacy programs, and peer-sharing initiatives. Establishing an inclusive education competency framework and resource center is recommended to improve access to instructional materials, assistive technologies, assessment tools, and specialized support services. Collaboration among teachers, parents, administrators, and support personnel should be strengthened through regular consultations, case conferences, and systematic learner identification and referral mechanisms. Furthermore, school administrators should establish continuous monitoring and evaluation procedures through classroom observations, feedback, and targeted technical assistance. The proposed INCLUDE program should be considered for implementation and periodic evaluation to support sustained professional development and responsive educational practices. Research on pre-service teachers indicates that preparation and training experiences can influence attitudes toward inclusive education, reinforcing the rationale for sustained professional learning opportunities (Boyle et al., 2023).

The study was limited to 141 public elementary school teachers and nine school administrators in the Districts of Calbayog II and III, Schools Division of Calbayog City, during School Year 2025–2026, restricting the generalizability of its findings to other educational settings. Questionnaire-based assessments primarily reflected respondents' perceptions rather than direct observations of classroom practices. Moreover, the descriptive-correlational and comparative research design established associations but did not determine causal relationships among variables. Future researchers may address these limitations through broader samples, additional variables, qualitative interviews, classroom observations, case studies, and longitudinal approaches to provide deeper evidence regarding the effective and sustainable implementation of inclusive education.

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