WJSAM | World Journal of Sustainable Advances in Multidisciplinarity
RESEARCH | INNOVATION | INTERDISCIPLINARITY | SUSTAINABILITY
Volume 1, Issue 2 | ISSN: 3155-783X
DOI: https://doi.org/10.65339/wjsam.V1.I2.54

Systemic Hurdles and Strategic Reforms in the Implementation of Special Needs Education: Proactive Model

Maria Lyn A. Nanquil
Doctor in Development Education, Cebu Technological University, Cebu City, Philippines

Email: marialynnanquil1021961@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examined the implementation of Special Needs Education (SNED), the extent of systemic challenges, and their predictive relationship with strategic reforms in Area 5A of the Schools Division of Leyte, Philippines, during School Year 2025–2026. A quantitative descriptive-correlational research design with a predictive component was employed, involving 75 school heads, SNED coordinators, and teachers selected through total enumeration. Data were gathered using an adapted five-point Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using weighted mean, standard deviation, Pearson's correlation, and multiple linear regression. Results revealed that SNED implementation (M = 3.20) and strategic reforms (M = 3.10) were moderate, while systemic challenges were experienced to a great extent (M = 3.48). Human resources emerged as the most pronounced challenge, while individualized education planning and capability building received the lowest implementation ratings in their respective assessment areas. Policy and governance, human resources, and stakeholder collaboration demonstrated significant negative correlations with strategic reform implementation. The regression model explained 58.8% of the variance, identifying human resources and policy and governance as significant negative predictors and monitoring and evaluation as a significant positive conditional predictor. The study concluded that effective SNED implementation requires coordinated organizational reforms and strengthened institutional capacity. It recommends prioritizing personnel development, governance enhancement, individualized educational planning, resource optimization, and systematic monitoring. The study's localized coverage and correlational design limited generalizability and causal interpretation. The findings provide an empirical foundation for the proposed SNED Strategic Reform Implementation Model, offering a context-responsive framework for institutional decision-making, sustainable educational reforms, and equitable inclusive education.

Keywords: *Educational Governance, Human Resources, Inclusive Education, Special Needs Education, Strategic Reforms, Systemic Challenges*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Context of the Study

Inclusive education is a fundamental component of educational equity, social inclusion, and sustainable development. International educational frameworks emphasize the responsibility of educational institutions to provide accessible, equitable, and meaningful learning opportunities regardless of learners' disabilities or educational needs. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes inclusive education as a fundamental human right (United Nations, 2006). Furthermore, UNESCO (2024) emphasized the importance of effective educational leadership, institutional capacity, collaborative governance, and equitable resource allocation in improving educational opportunities. Within this context, Special Needs Education (SNED) provides learners with disabilities and other special educational needs with appropriate educational programs, specialized instructional support, reasonable accommodations, and accessible learning environments. Its effective implementation depends on the coordinated functioning of organizational components rather than instructional competence alone. Leithwood (2021) emphasized the importance of equitable school leadership in establishing organizational conditions that support diverse learners, while Scheer (2021) highlighted the interconnected roles of educational governance, leadership, organizational management, and collaboration in advancing inclusive education.

In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 11650 (2022) institutionalizes inclusive education by strengthening educational services, organizational capacity, resource provision, stakeholder participation, and institutional accountability. These provisions establish the importance of coordinated institutional strategies in addressing diverse educational needs and improving organizational preparedness. From an organizational perspective, governance, human resources, funding, infrastructure, instructional materials, professional development, stakeholder collaboration, and monitoring mechanisms collectively influence SNED implementation. These interconnected organizational conditions provided the rationale for examining systemic challenges and strategic reforms in Area 5A of the Schools Division of Leyte. Understanding these conditions was essential to establishing an empirical foundation for developing a context-responsive framework that supports effective, equitable, and sustainable SNED implementation.

1.2. Research Problem

Despite international commitments and national policies supporting inclusive education, organizational challenges continue to affect the implementation of SNED. These challenges include insufficient teacher preparation, shortages of specialized personnel, limited financial resources, inadequate instructional materials, inaccessible learning environments, and fragmented stakeholder collaboration. UNICEF (2021) highlighted persistent disparities affecting children with disabilities, emphasizing the need for responsive policies and institutional support. In the Philippines, Campado et al. (2023) identified resource limitations, technological difficulties, and insufficient teacher competencies as challenges associated with assistive technology integration. Similarly, the World Health Organization and UNICEF (2022) documented inequalities in access to assistive technologies, emphasizing the importance of coordinated resource provision. The Department of Education (DepEd, 2021), through Order No. 44, s. 2021, established guidelines for implementing, monitoring, and evaluating educational programs and services for learners with disabilities. Within the Schools Division of Leyte, differences in institutional preparedness may influence the consistency and effectiveness of SNED implementation. Although schools had undertaken initiatives to strengthen inclusive education, the extent to which strategic reforms addressed interconnected organizational challenges remained an important concern. These circumstances necessitated an examination of systemic

challenges and corresponding strategic reforms to inform institutional planning and educational improvement.

1.3. Research Gap

Existing literature recognizes organizational capacity as an important factor in advancing inclusive education. Leithwood (2021) examined equitable educational leadership, while Scheer (2021) developed an integrated framework describing the responsibilities of school principals in inclusive education. In the Philippine context, Campado et al. (2023) investigated assistive technology integration, instructional challenges, and institutional support for learners with special educational needs and disabilities. Although these studies provided valuable insights, the combined predictive relationships between multiple organizational challenges and strategic reforms in SNED remained an area requiring further investigation. Integrating governance, human resources, funding, infrastructure, instructional resources, professional development, stakeholder collaboration, and monitoring within a localized quantitative predictive framework remained an important area of investigation. The present study sought to address this contextual and methodological gap by examining the relationship between systemic challenges and strategic reforms in Area 5A of the Schools Division of Leyte. It also sought to establish an empirical foundation for developing a context-responsive organizational reform model.

1.4. Purpose and Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to determine the systemic challenges encountered in implementing SNED and their predictive relationship with strategic reforms in Area 5A of the DepEd Schools Division of Leyte during School Year 2025–2026. Specifically, it sought to assess SNED implementation concerning child find and pre-referral processes, assessment and evaluation, curriculum adaptation and modification, educational placement and program delivery, individualized education plans, and stakeholder collaboration. It also aimed to determine the extent of systemic challenges and strategic reform implementation, examine their significant relationship, and identify the challenge dimensions that significantly predicted strategic reforms. Ultimately, the study sought to establish an empirical basis for developing the SNED Strategic Implementation Proactive Reform Model.

1.5. Significance and Practical Contribution of the Study

The study contributes to inclusive education literature by examining systemic challenges and strategic reforms through an integrated organizational perspective. Its findings may assist DepEd officials, educational planners, and school administrators in identifying institutional priorities, strengthening governance, optimizing resource allocation, and improving professional development initiatives. The proposed SNED Strategic Implementation Proactive Reform Model may serve as a practical framework for coordinating organizational interventions, strengthening stakeholder partnerships, and institutionalizing continuous improvement. Teachers, learners with special educational needs, and their families may benefit from more responsive educational planning and improved support services. Furthermore, the study provides a foundation for future investigations involving organizational reform, model validation, and inclusive education implementation across different educational settings.

1.6. Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Alignment

The study directly supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4): Quality Education, which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2025). By examining organizational barriers and strategic reforms in SNED, the research supports equitable educational access, teacher capacity development, accessible learning environments, and appropriate instructional support for learners with disabilities, particularly in alignment with Targets 4.5 and 4.a. The study also aligns with Sustainable

Development Goal 10 (SDG 10): Reduced Inequalities, particularly Target 10.2, by addressing institutional conditions that may contribute to disparities in educational participation. The proposed strategic reform model promotes organizational responsiveness, equitable resource allocation, stakeholder collaboration, and sustainable educational inclusion for learners with special educational needs.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design with a predictive component to examine the implementation of Special Needs Education (SNED), organizational challenges, and strategic reforms during School Year 2025–2026. The descriptive component assessed existing institutional practices without manipulating the study variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The correlational component examined significant relationships between organizational challenges and strategic reforms (Fraenkel et al., 2023), while the predictive component utilized multiple regression analysis to identify organizational challenges that significantly predicted the implementation of strategic reforms (Field, 2024).

2.2. Research Locale, Population, and Participants or Respondents

The study was conducted in Area 5A of the Schools Division of Leyte, Philippines, comprising 11 school districts across five municipalities: Abuyog, Javier, McArthur, Mahaplag, and Mayorga. These included four districts in Abuyog, two in Javier, two in McArthur, two in Mahaplag, and one in Mayorga. The respondents consisted of 75 SNED implementers, comprising 32 school heads, 11 SNED coordinators, and 32 SNED teachers. Their involvement in program planning, management, coordination, and implementation provided administrative, organizational, and instructional perspectives on SNED practices.

2.3. Sampling Technique and Sample Determination

The study employed total enumeration, involving all 75 identified SNED implementers across the 11 school districts of Area 5A. Respondents were included based on their direct involvement in implementing SNED programs within their respective schools. Since the entire target population was included, no sample-size computation or random selection procedure was necessary. This approach provided complete coverage of the identified target population and represented the perspectives of all participating SNED implementers.

2.4. Research Instrument

The study utilized an adapted three-part questionnaire grounded in General Systems Theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968), the Burke–Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change (Burke & Litwin, 1992), and Educational Change Theory (Fullan, 2007), whose contemporary developments further emphasize systemic educational transformation (Fullan, 2025). Instrument development was guided by Republic Act No. 11650 (2022) and DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021 (Department of Education, 2021). Part I assessed SNED implementation across six dimensions with 48 indicators. Part II measured organizational challenges across eight dimensions with 56 indicators, while Part III assessed strategic reforms across six dimensions with 48 indicators. The questionnaire comprised 152 indicators rated using a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater implementation or more extensively experienced challenges.

2.5. Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher secured approval from the dissertation adviser and Dissertation Committee and obtained permission from the Schools Division Superintendent of Leyte. Coordination with district supervisors and concerned school personnel facilitated questionnaire administration.

After explaining the study objectives and securing informed consent, the researcher personally administered the questionnaires, provided sufficient completion time, and clarified procedural concerns without influencing responses. The completed questionnaires were reviewed for completeness, coded, encoded, and checked for accuracy before statistical analysis.

2.6. Data Analysis and Statistical Treatment

Weighted mean and standard deviation assessed SNED implementation, organizational challenges, and strategic reforms. Mean scores were interpreted using five intervals: 1.00–1.80, 1.81–2.60, 2.61–3.40, 3.41–4.20, and 4.21–5.00. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient determined the strength and direction of relationships between organizational challenges and strategic reforms. Multiple linear regression examined the predictive contributions of the eight organizational challenge dimensions using standardized regression coefficients, the coefficient of determination (R^2), the F-test, and significance values (Field, 2024). Inferential analyses employed a 0.05 significance level. The findings provided the basis for developing the proposed SNED Strategic Implementation Proactive Reform Model.

2.7. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Institutional permission and written informed consent were obtained before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and respondents retained the right to withdraw without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through secure data storage, restricted access, and aggregate reporting. The researcher protected respondents from coercion and ensured that participation did not interfere with their professional responsibilities.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Status of Implementation of Special Needs Education

The overall status of SNED implementation obtained a grand mean of 3.20 (SD = 0.73), interpreted as Moderately Implemented. Child find and pre-referral processes obtained the highest mean (M = 3.49, SD = 0.74), interpreted as Highly Implemented. This was followed by educational placement and program delivery (M = 3.38, SD = 0.69), curriculum adaptation and modification (M = 3.35, SD = 0.79), assessment and evaluation (M = 3.19, SD = 0.83), and stakeholder collaboration (M = 3.18, SD = 0.96). Individualized Education Plan (IEP) implementation obtained the lowest mean (M = 2.63, SD = 1.20). Except for child find and pre-referral processes, all dimensions were moderately implemented. In child find and pre-referral processes, activities identifying learners with disabilities obtained the highest rating (M = 3.84, SD = 0.97), whereas established referral procedures received the lowest (M = 3.13, SD = 0.98). Assessment and evaluation showed stronger implementation of collaborative information gathering (M = 3.47, SD = 0.81) than specialist involvement (M = 2.81, SD = 1.14). These findings indicate that early identification was comparatively more established than formal referral and specialized assessment. Sagun et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of early detection and intervention, while Jocson and Buenrostro (2024) highlighted the relevance of developmental assessment in individualized educational planning. Regarding curriculum adaptation, modification of learning activities obtained the highest rating (M = 3.61, SD = 0.84), whereas assistive technology utilization received the lowest (M = 2.95, SD = 0.90). Educational placement demonstrated stronger provision of inclusive learning opportunities (M = 3.57, SD = 0.90) than instructional guidance and technical assistance (M = 3.08, SD = 0.85). These findings suggest that teachers' instructional efforts require stronger professional and material support. Fernández-Batanero et al. (2022) emphasized the contribution of assistive technologies to

educational accessibility, while Campado et al. (2023) identified resource and technical challenges affecting their integration into Philippine special education classrooms.

IEP implementation identified parental participation and periodic IEP review as priority areas for improvement, both obtaining the lowest mean of 2.47 (SD = 1.22), interpreted as Slightly Implemented. Formulating measurable learning goals obtained the highest rating within this dimension (M = 2.77, SD = 1.38). Meanwhile, stakeholder collaboration demonstrated stronger school–parent communication (M = 3.36, SD = 1.05) than coordination with healthcare professionals and specialists (M = 3.01, SD = 0.89). Sanderson and Goldman (2023) emphasized factors associated with parental satisfaction in the IEP process, while Garcia-Melgar et al. (2022) highlighted coordinated teamwork among educators, families, and allied health professionals. Collectively, the findings indicate that early identification must be complemented by stronger referral mechanisms, specialized assessment, individualized educational planning, instructional assistance, and multidisciplinary collaboration to ensure continuity of SNED services.

3.2. Extent of Systemic Challenges Encountered in SNED Implementation

Systemic challenges obtained a grand mean of 3.48 (SD = 0.83), interpreted as Great Extent. Human resources emerged as the most pronounced challenge (M = 3.57, SD = 1.06), followed by instructional materials and assistive technology (M = 3.55, SD = 1.22), stakeholder collaboration (M = 3.55, SD = 0.95), infrastructure and learning environment (M = 3.53, SD = 1.22), policy and governance (M = 3.48, SD = 0.87), funding and resource allocation (M = 3.46, SD = 1.15), and professional development (M = 3.43, SD = 1.14). Monitoring and evaluation obtained the lowest mean (M = 3.28, SD = 0.91) and was the only dimension interpreted as Moderate Extent. The most prominent governance concern involved insufficient institutional mechanisms (M = 3.63, SD = 0.93), while the shortage of specialists represented the principal human resource challenge (M = 3.77, SD = 1.16). Inadequate SNED funding (M = 3.57, SD = 1.23), insufficient specialized instructional spaces, and the need for facility improvements (M = 3.61, SD = 1.26 for both infrastructure indicators) further demonstrated institutional and operational constraints. Insufficient specialized instructional materials obtained the highest rating within the instructional materials and assistive technology dimension (M = 3.77, SD = 1.36). Limited mentoring opportunities (M = 3.51, SD = 1.20) and irregular professional development activities (M = 3.51, SD = 1.26) were the principal professional development concerns. Limited community support (M = 3.64, SD = 1.13) and irregular monitoring of SNED implementation (M = 3.35, SD = 1.06) likewise emerged as the highest-rated concerns within their respective dimensions.

The findings demonstrate that SNED implementation was confronted by interconnected challenges involving personnel capacity, institutional resources, governance, and stakeholder support. Mendoza and Heymann (2024) identified funding, educational resources, professional training, and collaborative support as important considerations in implementing inclusive education. Chow et al. (2024) similarly highlighted teachers' need for adequate professional assistance and instructional resources, while Aldridge and McLure (2024) emphasized organizational preparedness and institutional capacity in educational reform. Accordingly, addressing systemic challenges requires strategic workforce planning, equitable resource allocation, accessible learning facilities, sustained professional development, strengthened governance, and coordinated institutional partnerships. These measures should be supported by systematic monitoring to promote sustainable improvements in SNED implementation.

3.3. Extent of Implementation of Strategic Reforms in SNED

Strategic reform implementation obtained a grand mean of 3.10 (SD = 0.86), interpreted as Moderate Extent. Policy enhancement obtained the highest mean (M = 3.25, SD = 0.94), followed by stakeholder engagement and partnership (M = 3.21, SD = 0.84), inclusive teaching and learning support (M = 3.20, SD = 0.93), monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement (M = 3.17, SD = 0.90), and resource enhancement and optimization (M = 2.91, SD = 0.90). Capability building obtained the lowest mean (M = 2.89, SD = 0.98). All six dimensions were implemented to a moderate extent.

Policy enhancement demonstrated stronger policy review and updating practices (M = 3.31, SD = 1.04) than compliance mechanisms (M = 3.16, SD = 0.96). Capability building revealed that encouraging evidence-based inclusive teaching strategies (M = 3.08, SD = 1.12) was more established than mentoring and coaching programs (M = 2.68, SD = 1.00). These findings highlight the need to align policy commitments and instructional expectations with strengthened professional support mechanisms.

Resource enhancement demonstrated stronger utilization of available financial resources (M = 3.08, SD = 1.01) than assistive technology acquisition (M = 2.84, SD = 1.05) and external resource mobilization (M = 2.84, SD = 0.95). Inclusive teaching and learning support showed stronger implementation of differentiated instruction (M = 3.33, SD = 1.03) than assessment modification (M = 3.09, SD = 1.02).

Stakeholder engagement demonstrated stronger community collaboration (M = 3.33, SD = 0.95) than partnerships with local government agencies (M = 3.09, SD = 0.87). Monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement showed stronger development of improvement plans based on evaluation findings (M = 3.28, SD = 1.06) than regular assessment of reform implementation progress (M = 3.01, SD = 0.86).

These findings suggest that institutional reform initiatives require stronger operational support, particularly in capability building and resource enhancement. Donath et al. (2023) demonstrated the contribution of professional development to inclusive teaching competencies, while Fernández-Batanero et al. (2022) emphasized assistive technology accessibility. Garcia-Melgar et al. (2022) highlighted collaborative support mechanisms, and Aldridge and McLure (2024) underscored comprehensive planning and organizational preparedness. The results support a coordinated reform strategy prioritizing continuous professional development, resource accessibility, instructional improvement, institutional partnerships, policy accountability, and systematic evaluation.

3.4. Relationship Between Systemic Challenges and Strategic Reform Implementation

Pearson product–moment correlation analysis revealed statistically significant negative relationships between strategic reform implementation and three dimensions of systemic challenges at the .05 significance level. Policy and governance exhibited the strongest inverse relationship ($r = -0.453$, $p < .001$), followed by stakeholder collaboration ($r = -0.298$, $p = .009$) and human resources ($r = -0.292$, $p = .011$). These findings indicate that greater perceived difficulties in governance, stakeholder coordination, and personnel support were associated with lower levels of strategic reform implementation.

Conversely, funding and resource allocation (r = 0.162, p = .165), infrastructure and learning environment (r = 0.180, p = .122), instructional materials and assistive technology (r = 0.178, p = .126), professional development (r = 0.172, p = .141), and monitoring and evaluation (r = 0.036, p = .760) demonstrated statistically non-significant relationships with strategic reform implementation. Consequently, the null hypotheses were rejected for the three significant dimensions but were not rejected for the remaining five.

The findings are consistent with Aldridge and McLure (2024), who emphasized organizational preparedness and institutional capacity in educational reform. Garcia-Melgar et al. (2022) similarly highlighted effective stakeholder communication and coordinated teamwork, while Chow et al. (2024) emphasized adequate professional assistance in implementing inclusive education. These results identify governance, human resources, and stakeholder collaboration as important considerations in reform planning. However, the observed relationships establish statistical associations rather than causality. The non-significant dimensions should remain institutional priorities because of their practical relevance to SNED implementation.

3.5. Significant Predictors of Strategic Reform Implementation

Multiple linear regression analysis revealed that the overall regression model was statistically significant ($F = 11.790$, $p < .001$), with a coefficient of determination of $R^2 = 0.588$ and an adjusted $R^2 = 0.538$. The eight systemic challenge dimensions collectively accounted for 58.8% of the observed variance in strategic reform implementation.

Human resources emerged as the strongest significant negative predictor ($B = -0.744$, $SE = 0.149$, $\beta = -0.916$, $t = -4.997$, $p < .001$), followed by policy and governance ($B = -0.280$, $SE = 0.125$, $\beta = -0.284$, $t = -2.246$, $p = .028$). Holding the remaining predictors constant, a one-unit increase in human resource and governance challenge scores was associated with estimated decreases of 0.744 and 0.280 units, respectively, in strategic reform implementation scores. These findings reinforce the importance of qualified personnel, specialized professional support, administrative coordination, and functional governance mechanisms.

Monitoring and evaluation emerged as a significant positive predictor ($B = 0.524$, $SE = 0.102$, $\beta = 0.551$, $t = 5.129$, $p < .001$), despite demonstrating a non-significant bivariate correlation ($r = 0.036$, $p = .760$). This difference reflects the distinction between bivariate and adjusted statistical relationships and may involve shared variance or suppression effects among predictors. This adjusted relationship warrants further examination through regression diagnostics and should be interpreted as a conditional statistical association rather than a causal effect.

Meanwhile, funding and resource allocation ($B = 0.071$, $SE = 0.164$, $\beta = 0.094$, $t = 0.430$, $p = .669$), infrastructure and learning environment ($B = 0.312$, $SE = 0.324$, $\beta = 0.441$, $t = 0.962$, $p = .339$), instructional materials and assistive technology ($B = 0.028$, $SE = 0.312$, $\beta = 0.040$, $t = 0.091$, $p = .928$), professional development ($B = 0.230$, $SE = 0.145$, $\beta = 0.314$, $t = 1.588$, $p = .117$), and stakeholder collaboration ($B = -0.056$, $SE = 0.172$, $\beta = -0.061$, $t = -0.325$, $p = .747$) did not demonstrate statistically significant unique predictive contributions.

Notably, stakeholder collaboration exhibited a significant negative bivariate relationship but became statistically non-significant in the regression model. This suggests possible overlap with other systemic challenge dimensions, although its practical importance remains evident in the

descriptive findings. The results align with Donath et al. (2023), who emphasized professional competency development, and Aldridge and McLure (2024), who highlighted institutional preparedness and coordinated educational reform. Collectively, the findings support prioritizing human resources, policy and governance, and systematic monitoring while maintaining comprehensive institutional support across the remaining dimensions.

3.6. Empirical Basis for the Proposed SNED Strategic Reform Implementation Model

The findings provide an empirical foundation for developing a SNED Strategic Reform Implementation Model responsive to the institutional and operational conditions of schools in Area 5A of the DepEd Schools Division of Leyte. The moderate implementation of SNED services (M = 3.20), substantial systemic challenges (M = 3.48), and moderate implementation of strategic reforms (M = 3.10) demonstrate the need for coordinated institutional improvement. The proposed model should prioritize human resource development, policy and governance enhancement, and systematic monitoring and evaluation based on their significant predictive relationships. Individualized educational planning and capability building should receive particular operational attention because they obtained the lowest implementation ratings in their respective assessment areas. Resource enhancement, accessible infrastructure, inclusive instructional support, and stakeholder partnerships should complement these priorities. This integrated approach is consistent with Aldridge and McLure (2024), Donath et al. (2023), and Mendoza and Heymann (2024), who emphasized organizational preparedness, professional competency development, and institutional resource provision in educational reform and inclusive education. Overall, the proposed model provides a context-responsive framework for addressing systemic barriers, strengthening institutional capacity, and promoting sustainable SNED implementation. Future implementation and evaluation are recommended to assess the model's practical effectiveness and institutional applicability.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that the implementation of Special Needs Education (SNED) in Area 5A of the Schools Division of Leyte remained moderate despite existing institutional efforts to promote inclusive education. Although child find and pre-referral practices were comparatively well implemented, individualized education planning, specialized assessment, parental participation, and professional capability building required further improvement. Human resource constraints emerged as the most prominent systemic challenge, while strategic reforms remained moderately implemented across all dimensions. Significant negative relationships were identified between strategic reform implementation and challenges involving policy and governance, human resources, and stakeholder collaboration. Regression analysis further identified human resources and policy and governance as significant negative predictors, whereas monitoring and evaluation demonstrated a significant positive conditional predictive relationship. The regression model explained 58.8% of the variance in strategic reform implementation. Collectively, these findings provided an empirical foundation for the proposed SNED Strategic Reform Implementation Model, emphasizing coordinated governance, workforce development, instructional support, stakeholder engagement, and institutional accountability.

The Schools Division Office should prioritize strengthening SNED governance through clear implementation guidelines, defined institutional responsibilities, coordinated planning, and systematic policy compliance monitoring. Shortages of qualified SNED teachers and specialists should be addressed through needs-based personnel deployment, professional support arrangements, and appropriate staffing proposals. School heads and SNED coordinators should standardize learner referral, multidisciplinary assessment, individualized education planning,

parental participation, and periodic review of educational interventions. Sustained capability-building initiatives should be strengthened through specialized training, mentoring, instructional coaching, learning action cells, and technical assistance. Educational administrators should ensure the provision and effective utilization of instructional materials, assistive technologies, and accessible learning facilities. Partnerships with parents, local government units, health professionals, social service agencies, and community organizations should also be strengthened. Regular monitoring and evaluation using measurable indicators should support continuous program improvement. Furthermore, the proposed SNED Strategic Reform Implementation Model should undergo expert validation, pilot implementation, and systematic effectiveness evaluation before wider adoption.

The study focused on school heads, SNED coordinators, and SNED teachers in Area 5A of the Schools Division of Leyte during School Year 2025–2026; consequently, the findings should be interpreted within this specific educational context. The quantitative descriptive-correlational design with predictive analysis identified significant statistical relationships but did not establish causality. Moreover, the positive conditional predictive relationship involving monitoring and evaluation warrants further examination of possible suppression and multicollinearity effects. The proposed strategic reform model also requires empirical validation and implementation evaluation. Future studies may involve broader respondent populations across different educational settings, examine the underlying predictive relationships, and assess the model's practical effectiveness.

5. REFERENCES

Aldridge, J. M., & McLure, F. I. (2024). Preparing schools for educational change: Barriers and supports – A systematic literature review. Leadership and Policy in Schools, 23(3), 486–511. https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2023.2171439

Burke, W. W., & Litwin, G. H. (1992). A causal model of organizational performance and change. Journal of Management, 18(3), 523–545. https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639201800306

Campado, R. J., Toquero, C. M. D., & Ulanday, D. M. (2023). Integration of assistive technology in teaching learners with special educational needs and disabilities in the Philippines. International Journal of Professional Development, Learners and Learning, 5(1), Article ep2308. https://doi.org/10.30935/ijpdll/13062

Chow, W. S. E., de Bruin, K., & Sharma, U. (2024). A scoping review of perceived support needs of teachers for implementing inclusive education. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 28(13), 3321–3340. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2023.2244956

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (6th ed.). SAGE Publications. https://us2.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/research-design/book270550

Department of Education. (2021). Policy guidelines on the provision of educational programs and services for learners with disabilities in the K to 12 Basic Education Program (DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021). https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/DO_s2021_044.pdf

Donath, J. L., Lüke, T., Graf, E., Tran, U. S., & Götz, T. (2023). Does professional development effectively support the implementation of inclusive education? A meta-analysis. Educational Psychology Review, 35, Article 30. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-023-09752-2

Fernández-Batanero, J. M., Montenegro-Rueda, M., Fernández-Cerero, J., & García-Martínez, I. (2022). Assistive technology for the inclusion of students with disabilities: A systematic review. Educational Technology Research and Development, 70(5), 1911–1930. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-022-10127-7

Field, A. (2024). Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics (6th ed.). SAGE Publications. https://us2.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/discovering-statistics-using-ibm-spss-statistics/book285130

Fraenkel, J. R., Wallen, N. E., & Hyun, H. H. (2023). How to design and evaluate research in education (11th ed.). McGraw Hill. https://www.mheducation.com/highered/product/how-to-design-and-evaluate-research-in-education-fraenkel.html

Fullan, M. (2007). The new meaning of educational change (4th ed.). Teachers College Press. https://books.google.com/books/about/The_New_Meaning_of_Educational_Change.html?id=dvc84eFzKkkC

Fullan, M. (2025). The new meaning of educational change (6th ed.). Teachers College Press. https://doi.org/10.65528/9780807782897

Garcia-Melgar, A., Hyett, N., Bagley, K., McKinstry, C., Spong, J., & Iacono, T. (2022). Collaborative team approaches to supporting inclusion of children with disability in mainstream schools: A co-design study. Research in Developmental Disabilities, 126, Article 104233. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2022.104233

Jocson, E., & Buenrostro, J. (2024). A study on the translatability of the developmental assessment report into the individualized education plan in the Philippines. International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 71(3), 420–436. https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2022.2095557

Leithwood, K. (2021). A review of evidence about equitable school leadership. Education Sciences, 11(8), Article 377. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11080377

Mendoza, M., & Heymann, J. (2024). Implementation of inclusive education: A systematic review of studies of inclusive education interventions in low- and lower-middle-income countries. International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 71(3), 299–316. https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2022.2095359

Republic Act No. 11650, Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education Act (2022) (Phil.). https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2022/ra_11650_2022.html

Sagun, K., Albarillo, A., Amancio, J. K., Bulanadi, J., De Guzman, I., Jugueta, V. P., & Santos, K. E. (2022). Outcomes of early detection and intervention of children with disability: Perspectives from Philippine public school teachers and administrators. International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 69(4), 1151–1167. https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2020.1761539

Sanderson, K. A., & Goldman, S. E. (2023). Factors associated with parent IEP satisfaction. Remedial and Special Education, 44(3), 184–196. https://doi.org/10.1177/07419325221111571

Scheer, D. (2021). Integrated framework model for the leadership role of principals in inclusive education. European Journal of Education, 56(4), 660–680. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12480

UNESCO. (2024). Global education monitoring report 2024/5: Leadership in education—Lead for learning. https://www.unesco.org/reports/gem-report/en/2024-leadership-education

UNICEF. (2021). Seen, counted, included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities. https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-with-disabilities-report-2021/

United Nations. (2006). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (A/RES/61/106). https://mandates.un.org/mandate/A/RES/61/106

United Nations. (2025). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2025. https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2025/

von Bertalanffy, L. (1968). General system theory: Foundations, development, applications. George Braziller. https://openlibrary.org/books/OL19227353M/General_system_theory

World Health Organization, & UNICEF. (2022). Global report on assistive technology. https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240049451