

Professional readiness of pioneer BSNEd graduates for special needs education practice

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Received: 20 June 2026

Available Online: 8 July 2026

Revised: 4 July 2026

DOI: 10.5861/ijrse.2026.26295

Accepted: 7 July 2026

ISSN: 2243-7703

Online ISSN: 2243-7711

OPEN ACCESS



Abstract

The transition from teacher preparation programs to professional practice is a critical phase in the development of special education professionals. This study examined the professional readiness of the pioneer graduating students of the Bachelor of Special Needs Education (BSNEd) program at Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology (NEUST). Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 39 out of 58 graduating students from the BSNEd Batch 2026. The survey assessed four dimensions of readiness: instructional readiness, disability-specific management, behavior and classroom management, and collaboration and professional identity. Results revealed that participants generally perceived themselves as highly prepared for professional practice. The highest-rated indicator was advocacy for the rights of learners with disabilities ($M = 4.64$), while readiness to address the needs of learners with sensory impairments obtained the lowest mean score ($M = 3.85$). Findings suggest that the BSNEd program effectively developed foundational competencies aligned with inclusive education and special needs instruction. However, enhanced training in sensory impairments and intellectual disabilities is recommended. The study provides baseline evidence for curriculum enhancement and continuous improvement of teacher preparation programs in special needs education.

Keywords: professional readiness, Bachelor of Special Needs Education, inclusive education, pre-service teachers

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1. Introduction

The growing emphasis on inclusive education has increased the demand for competent professionals capable of addressing the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities. Globally, educational systems are shifting toward inclusive practices that promote equitable access, participation, and achievement for all learners regardless of disability status (UNESCO, 2020). Consequently, teacher preparation institutions are expected to ensure that graduates possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to implement inclusive educational practices effectively. Professional readiness refers to the extent to which pre-service teachers perceive themselves prepared to perform the responsibilities and competencies expected in professional practice (Darling-Hammond, 2021). For special education professionals, readiness encompasses instructional planning, disability-specific interventions, classroom management, collaboration with stakeholders, and advocacy for learners with disabilities (Florian & Camedda, 2020).

In the Philippines, the enactment of Republic Act No. 11650 or the Inclusive Education Act strengthened the government's commitment to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all learners. This policy underscores the need for well-prepared educators who can effectively support diverse learners in inclusive settings. As institutions respond to this mandate, evaluating the readiness of graduating students becomes crucial for quality assurance and curriculum enhancement. The Bachelor of Special Needs Education (BSNEd) program at Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology represents one of the country's responses to the growing need for qualified special needs educators. Since Batch 2026 constitutes the program's pioneer graduating class, assessing their professional readiness provides valuable baseline information regarding the effectiveness of the program. This study sought to determine the perceived professional readiness of BSNEd graduating students as they transition into the field of practice.

Research Questions

- What is the level of instructional readiness of BSNEd graduating students?
- What is their level of readiness in disability-specific management?
- What is their level of readiness in behavior and classroom management?
- What is their level of readiness in collaboration and professional identity?
- What implications may be drawn for improving the BSNEd program?

Teacher Readiness Theory - This study is anchored on Teacher Readiness Theory, which posits that effective professional practice depends on an individual's perceived preparedness, knowledge, skills, and confidence to perform professional responsibilities. Readiness encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies developed through formal preparation, field experiences, and reflective learning (Darling-Hammond, 2021). Within teacher education, readiness is viewed as a multidimensional construct involving pedagogical competence, classroom management, collaboration skills, and professional identity. Pre-service teachers who perceive themselves as ready are more likely to transition successfully into professional practice and demonstrate greater self-efficacy in addressing diverse learner needs. For BSNEd students, readiness is particularly important because special needs educators are expected to possess specialized competencies in curriculum adaptation, individualized instruction, behavior management, assessment, and collaboration with families and multidisciplinary teams.

2. Methodology

Research Design - This study employed a descriptive-survey research design to examine the perceived professional readiness of the pioneer graduating students of the Bachelor of Special Needs Education (BSNEd) program at Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology (NEUST). A descriptive-survey design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to describe the current level of readiness of the participants based on their self-assessed competencies in relation to special needs education practice. Rather than testing causal relationships, the study focused on documenting patterns of perceived preparedness across key professional domains that are relevant to the transition from teacher preparation to actual professional practice. The descriptive approach allowed the researchers to obtain a systematic overview of how graduating BSNEd students evaluated their own readiness in areas such as instructional planning, disability-specific management, behavior and classroom management, collaboration, and professional identity. This design is consistent with the purpose of readiness studies, particularly those that seek to generate baseline information for curriculum improvement, program review, and institutional quality assurance. Since Batch 2026 represents the pioneer graduating cohort of the BSNEd program, the use of a descriptive-survey design provided an appropriate basis for understanding the initial outcomes of the program from the perspective of its first group of graduates.

Participants of the Study - The participants of the study were graduating BSNEd students enrolled at NEUST during Academic Year 2025–2026. These students were selected because they were nearing the completion of their teacher preparation program and were therefore in a suitable position to assess their perceived readiness for professional practice in special needs education. Out of the total population of 58 graduating students, 39 voluntarily participated in the survey, resulting in a response rate of 67.24%. The participation of more than two-thirds of the graduating cohort provided a meaningful representation of the pioneer batch. Since the study focused specifically on this first graduating group, the findings may be viewed as baseline evidence of how students perceived the effectiveness of their preparation before entering the teaching profession. Participation was voluntary, and the responses reflected the students' self-assessment of their competencies at the point of transition from pre-service preparation to possible professional employment.

Research Instrument - The study utilized a researcher-developed Professional Readiness Survey designed to measure the perceived preparedness of BSNEd graduating students for special needs education practice. The survey was constructed based on the core competencies expected of special needs educators, particularly in relation to inclusive instruction, disability-specific support, classroom management, collaboration with stakeholders, and professional advocacy. The instrument was organized into four major dimensions: instructional readiness, disability-specific management, behavior and classroom management, and collaboration and professional identity.

The first dimension, instructional readiness, focused on the participants' perceived ability to design lesson plans using Universal Design for Learning principles, apply varied assessment strategies, modify curriculum according to individual learner needs, and use assistive technology in instruction. The second dimension, disability-specific management, measured readiness to support learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and behavioral challenges, global developmental delay or intellectual disabilities, and sensory impairments. The third dimension, behavior and classroom management, assessed students' perceived ability to manage disruptive behavior, create safe learning environments, and implement positive behavioral interventions and supports. The fourth dimension, collaboration and professional identity, examined readiness to collaborate with parents in Individualized Education Program implementation, participate in co-teaching models, and advocate for learners with disabilities. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale. A rating of 5 indicated "Strongly Agree," 4 indicated "Agree," 3 indicated "Slightly Agree," 2 indicated "Disagree," and 1 indicated "Strongly Disagree." Higher scores indicated stronger perceived readiness for professional practice. The use of a Likert-type scale allowed the researchers to quantify the participants' perceptions and compare readiness levels across different domains of special needs education practice.

Data Gathering Procedure - Data were gathered through a survey administered to the graduating BSNEd

students. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study and were invited to answer the questionnaire voluntarily. The survey sought to capture their honest perceptions of their professional readiness as they approached graduation. Since the participants were members of the pioneer graduating cohort, their responses were especially important in identifying the perceived strengths of the program as well as areas that may require further enhancement. The completed responses were collected, organized, and encoded for analysis. Each item was examined according to its corresponding readiness dimension. The researchers ensured that the responses were treated with care and used only for the purpose of academic analysis and program improvement. The data gathering process emphasized voluntary participation and the use of aggregated results, so that individual responses would not be singled out in the interpretation of findings.

Data Analysis - The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, particularly weighted means, to determine the level of perceived professional readiness of the participants. The mean score for each indicator was computed and interpreted according to a predetermined scale. Mean scores from 4.21 to 5.00 were interpreted as very high readiness, indicating that the participants strongly perceived themselves as prepared in that area. Mean scores from 3.41 to 4.20 were interpreted as high readiness, suggesting that the participants generally perceived themselves as prepared, although some areas may still benefit from further strengthening. Mean scores from 2.61 to 3.40 were interpreted as moderate readiness, while scores from 1.81 to 2.60 indicated low readiness. Scores from 1.00 to 1.80 were interpreted as very low readiness. The interpretation of the results focused not only on the numerical values but also on the practical meaning of the scores for teacher preparation in special needs education. Particular attention was given to the highest- and lowest-rated indicators because these provided useful insights into the perceived strengths and possible gaps of the BSNEd program. The findings were interpreted in relation to Teacher Readiness Theory and the broader literature on inclusive education, special needs education, and professional preparation.

3. Results and discussion

The survey results showed generally positive perceptions regarding professional readiness among BSNEd graduating students. The reported means were: Instructional Readiness (4.15–4.33), Disability-Specific Management (3.85–4.26), Behavior and Classroom Management (4.03–4.54), and Collaboration and Professional Identity (4.23–4.64).

Table 1
Instructional Readiness

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Design lesson plans incorporating UDL principles	4.15	High
Use varied assessment strategies	4.33	Very High
Modify curriculum to meet individual needs	4.31	Very High
Utilize assistive technology	4.23	Very High

The findings indicate that participants possess strong confidence in implementing inclusive instructional practices. The highest score was obtained for using diverse assessment strategies ($M = 4.33$), suggesting that the BSNEd curriculum effectively prepared students to assess diverse learners. These findings align with the principles of Universal Design for Learning, which emphasize flexible teaching and assessment approaches to address learner variability (CAST, 2024).

Table 2
Disability-Specific Management

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Autism Spectrum Disorder	4.26	Very High
ADHD and behavioral challenges	4.05	High
GDD/Intellectual Disabilities	3.97	High
Sensory Impairments	3.85	High

Among the disability categories, readiness to support learners with ASD received the highest rating. However, sensory impairments obtained the lowest score ($M = 3.85$). This finding suggests a need for more intensive

exposure to visual and hearing impairment interventions. Previous research has emphasized the importance of specialized preparation in low-incidence disabilities to ensure effective educational support (Florian & Camedda, 2020).

Table 3
Behavior and Classroom Management

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Manage disruptive behavior	4.03	High
Create safe classroom environment	4.54	Very High
Implement PBIS	4.31	Very High

Participants expressed strong confidence in maintaining safe and supportive learning environments. The highest rating in this domain was creating physically and emotionally safe classrooms ($M = 4.54$). This finding reflects the increasing emphasis on positive behavior support systems in teacher preparation programs.

Table 4
Collaboration and Professional Identity

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Collaborate with parents in IEP implementation	4.23	Very High
Work in co-teaching models	4.44	Very High
Advocate for learners with disabilities	4.64	Very High

Advocacy emerged as the strongest area of readiness ($M = 4.64$). This finding suggests that graduates recognize their role as champions of inclusion and disability rights. Contemporary special education literature identifies advocacy as a critical professional competency among special educators (Friend et al., 2024).

4. Overall Discussion

The results indicate that the pioneer BSNEd graduates perceive themselves as professionally ready to enter the workforce. The strongest competencies were observed in advocacy, collaboration, classroom safety, curriculum adaptation, and assessment. Nevertheless, lower scores in sensory impairment management and intellectual disability interventions suggest areas where additional practicum experiences and specialized coursework may be beneficial. These findings support the assertion that structured teacher preparation programs contribute significantly to developing inclusive teaching competencies (Darling-Hammond, 2021). Furthermore, the results reflect the goals of inclusive education policies that emphasize teacher preparedness as a key factor in successful implementation (UNESCO, 2020).

5. Conclusion

The pioneer BSNEd graduates of NEUST demonstrated high to very high levels of perceived professional readiness across instructional, behavioral, collaborative, and advocacy domains. The strongest area of preparedness was advocacy for learners with disabilities, while disability-specific competencies related to sensory impairments emerged as areas requiring further development. Overall, the findings suggest that the BSNEd program has effectively prepared its first cohort of graduates for professional practice. The study provides valuable baseline evidence regarding program effectiveness and offers insights for continuous curriculum improvement.

Recommendations

- Increase practicum experiences involving learners with visual and hearing impairments.
- Strengthen coursework focused on low-incidence disabilities and specialized interventions.
- Expand training on assistive technologies and accessibility tools.
- Develop partnerships with SPED centers to provide authentic field experiences.

- Conduct longitudinal studies examining graduates' readiness and actual workplace performance.
- Replicate the study with future BSNEd batches to monitor program outcomes and trends.

Practical Implications - The findings of the study offer several practical implications for learners, teachers, and schools. Since the pioneer BSNEd graduates reported generally high to very high levels of professional readiness, the results suggest that future learners with disabilities may benefit from teachers who are prepared to provide inclusive, responsive, and learner-centered instruction. Graduates who feel confident in curriculum modification, varied assessment, assistive technology, and classroom safety are more likely to create learning environments where students with disabilities can participate meaningfully. For learners, this means greater access to instruction that considers their individual strengths, limitations, learning pace, and support needs.

For teachers, particularly pre-service and beginning special needs educators, the findings highlight the importance of continuous professional growth beyond graduation. Although the participants perceived themselves as ready in many areas, the relatively lower ratings in sensory impairments and intellectual disabilities suggest that teachers should continue strengthening their specialized competencies through training, mentoring, and direct classroom experience. Beginning teachers may benefit from additional workshops on visual and hearing impairments, individualized instructional strategies, assistive technologies, behavior intervention planning, and collaboration with families and specialists. Teacher readiness should therefore be viewed not as a final outcome of graduation alone, but as a continuing professional process.

For schools, the findings imply the need to provide supportive environments where new special needs educators can successfully apply their preparation in practice. Schools should not assume that beginning teachers can work effectively without guidance, especially when handling learners with complex or low-incidence disabilities. Administrators may consider assigning mentors, encouraging co-teaching arrangements, providing access to assistive technologies, and strengthening partnerships with parents, therapists, and special education centers. Schools can also use the results as a basis for identifying professional development priorities, particularly in disability-specific management and inclusive classroom practices.

Overall, the study suggests that effective special needs education requires shared responsibility. Learners benefit when teachers are well-prepared; teachers become more effective when schools provide mentoring and resources; and schools become more inclusive when they create systems that support both educators and learners. The findings therefore point to the need for stronger alignment among teacher preparation programs, classroom practice, and school-level support systems.

AI Use Disclosure - The authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-5.5, June–July 2026 version) as a generative artificial intelligence (AI) tool to assist in the preparation of this manuscript. Specifically, the tool was used to support language editing, improve grammar and academic writing style, organize the manuscript in accordance with the IMRaD format, generate initial drafts of selected sections, refine the conceptual and theoretical framework, suggest appropriate scholarly structure, and assist with formatting in accordance with the American Psychological Association (APA) 7th edition guidelines. All AI-generated outputs were critically reviewed, verified, revised, and edited by the authors. The authors independently validated the interpretation of the survey findings, confirmed the accuracy of statistical computations, verified the appropriateness of scholarly citations and references, and ensured that all conclusions were supported by the study data. No fabricated information, analyses, or references generated by AI were included without verification. No confidential, personally identifiable, or sensitive participant information was entered into any AI system. The authors retain full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and final content of this manuscript.

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