

Examining teachers' cognitive attitudes and barriers toward inclusive education implementation in the Philippine setting

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of cognitive attitudes and the concurrent challenges encountered by teachers in handling inclusive education classrooms at Tabunan National High School, Tabunan, Borbon, Cebu Province during the school year 2025–2026. A descriptive correlational research design was utilized, employing an adapted questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument, with forty (40) teachers participating as respondents. Statistical tools, including weighted mean, simple percentage, and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, were applied. The overall mean indicated that respondents held positive cognitive attitudes toward handling inclusive education classrooms. The overall weighted means for barriers related to students' self-efficacy, self-help skills, social skills, and academic skills were all interpreted as moderate, resulting in a grand mean also classified as moderate. The findings indicated that there was no significant relationship between teachers' cognitive attitudes and the concurrent challenges they faced, as the null hypothesis could not be rejected. Based on these results, the development and implementation of a training workshop program is recommended.

Keywords: special education, inclusive classroom, cognitive attitude, concurrent struggles, descriptive method, Borbon, Cebu

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1. Introduction

Inclusive classrooms are essential for educational equity, providing all students regardless of ability or background with meaningful learning opportunities. However, while teachers' positive attitudes toward inclusion are important, research shows that practical barriers such as limited training, scarce resources, and insufficient institutional support often persist and impede effective inclusive practices (Singh, 2023). The success of inclusive education depends not only on teachers' attitudes but also on their readiness to address specific student needs. Key areas such as self-efficacy, self-help skills, social skills, and academic skills demand advanced teaching strategies and adaptability, yet many teachers feel unprepared due to inadequate training and support (Vantieghem et al., 2023; Palei, 2024). Teachers also cite difficulties in promoting peer acceptance, minimizing bullying, developing individualized learning plans, and managing large class sizes, often without adequate administrative support (Dewi, 2024; Jardinez & Natividad, 2024). While collaborative teaching and professional development are proposed solutions, their implementation is inconsistent (Monteiro & Ikegami, 2023; Poly & Harishma, 2023).

Despite extensive literature on inclusive education, little research examines the specific challenges Filipino teachers face, especially in local contexts such as the Borbon District. There is limited evidence on how teachers in these settings develop self-efficacy and address barriers to inclusion. The interaction between these challenges and limitations in professional development and technical support remains underexplored, and few studies translate findings into practical solutions for local needs. This study aims to provide actionable insights into the barriers and needs of teachers in Borbon, Cebu, to inform effective and evidence-based intervention programs. The results have important implications for teachers, policymakers, and stakeholders in inclusive education. Thus, the study examined the influence of cognitive attitudes and the concurrent challenges in terms of students' self-efficacy, self-help skills, students' social skills, and academic skills faced by teachers in handling inclusive education classrooms at Tabunan National High School, Tabunan, Borbon, Cebu Province during the school year 2025–2026. The findings will guide the development of a targeted intervention and training program, directly addressing the practical barriers faced by teachers in this context.

Overall, the study addresses a literature gap concerning the relationship between teachers' cognitive attitudes toward inclusive education and the actual classroom barriers they experience. Previous studies have commonly examined teachers' attitudes, readiness, competencies, or challenges as separate concerns. However, fewer studies have investigated whether teachers' positive or negative cognitive attitudes are significantly associated with the practical difficulties they encounter in supporting students' self-efficacy, self-help skills, social skills, and academic skills. The novelty of the present study lies in examining these two dimensions concurrently. Rather than assuming that positive attitudes automatically lead to fewer classroom difficulties, the study empirically tested the relationship between teachers' cognitive attitudes and the barriers they experienced. The findings showed that teachers generally held positive attitudes toward inclusive education, but these attitudes were not significantly related to the level of practical barriers they encountered. This finding is important, because it demonstrates that teachers' philosophical support for inclusion does not necessarily reduce the operational challenges of inclusive teaching. Even teachers who believe strongly in the rights and benefits of inclusive education may continue to experience difficulties when adequate training, resources, specialist support, and appropriate classroom structures are unavailable.

The study also contributes context-specific evidence from Tabunan National High School in Borbon, Cebu. Research on inclusive education in the Philippines has often focused on broader regional or national conditions, while evidence from smaller public-school settings remains limited. The study therefore provides locally grounded information that may be used to develop a targeted teacher-training and intervention program responsive to the

actual needs of the participating school.

2. Methods

A descriptive-correlational research design was utilized to determine the influence of cognitive attitudes and the concurrent difficulties experienced by teachers in handling inclusive education classrooms at Tabunan National High School, Tabunan, Borbon, Cebu, during the 2025–2026 academic year. Tabunan National High School has been progressively implementing inclusive education in response to national mandates and the increasing recognition of the need to support all learners, including those with disabilities and diverse learning needs. The study population comprised 40 High School teachers at Tabunan National High School, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a research-based questionnaire adapted from Mabanag et al. (2024) and Legrain et al. (2024). The instrument assessed the respondents' cognitive attitudes toward managing inclusive education settings, utilizing a five-point Likert scale comprising ten statements. It also measured the concurrent difficulties encountered by respondents in handling inclusive education settings, using a five-point Likert scale with ten statements for each sub-variable. Statistical analysis incorporated both descriptive and quantitative methods. The study utilized statistical tools including weighted mean, simple percentage, and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient r in examining significant relationships and analyzing the data.

The teacher participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, the procedures involved, and the intended use of the collected data. Participation was voluntary. The participants were informed that they could decline to participate or withdraw from the study without penalty or negative consequences. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before the questionnaire was administered. The participants were also assured that their responses would be treated confidentially. No personally identifying information was included in the analysis or presentation of the findings. The collected data were used solely for research purposes and were reported only in aggregate form.

Also prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the school administration and relevant educational authorities. The participants were informed about the purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, possible benefits, and confidentiality provisions of the study. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before the administration of the questionnaire. Participants were informed that they could decline participation or withdraw at any time without penalty. No personally identifying information was collected or reported, and all responses were analyzed and presented in aggregate form.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the gathered data on the respondents' level of cognitive attitudes and the level of concurrent barriers faced by the respondents in handling inclusive education classrooms.

Table 1 presents the teacher respondents' level of cognitive attitudes in handling inclusive education classrooms. The data indicates an overall positive cognitive attitude among respondents toward managing inclusive education classrooms, as demonstrated by an aggregate weighted mean of 3.41. High ratings were consistently recorded for fundamental human rights and social-developmental benefits, including the belief that students with special educational needs (SEN) have a right to learn in regular classrooms and that inclusion promotes independence and acceptance of diversity among peers, with a weighted mean of 3.53. Nevertheless, this philosophical support is counterbalanced by pragmatic skepticism. Respondents strongly agreed that inclusion necessitates extensive organizational and pedagogical changes and expressed doubts regarding its practical implementation, while remaining neutral on whether SEN students' complicate classroom management (weighted mean of 3.13) or increase teacher workload (weighted mean of 3.23).

These findings have significant operational implications for educational practice and policy. The results reveal a clear dynamic: teachers broadly support the ethical principles and social benefits of inclusion, yet they express genuine reservations regarding structural strain, instructional focus, and workload management. While teachers

generally endorse the rights of students with special educational needs (SEN) to be educated alongside their peers and acknowledge the social benefits of inclusion, they also identify practical challenges in effective implementation, particularly concerning classroom organization and instructional adaptations (Mejoy et al., 2024). The evidence suggests that moral support alone is insufficient to sustain successful inclusive education without tangible systemic support. Including SEN students often requires additional planning, differentiated instruction, individualized plan paperwork, and more intensive classroom management, expanding duties and time demands beyond typical teaching responsibilities (Chen, 2024). To translate these positive beliefs into effective practice, institutions must bridge the gap between theory and implementation by providing teachers with targeted professional training, adaptive resources, reduced pupil-to-teacher ratios, and dedicated classroom support staff to alleviate pedagogical pressures.

Table 1*Respondents' level of cognitive attitudes in handling inclusive education classroom*

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	I believe that educating students at SEN requires too many changes in the organization of the classroom and teaching approaches.	3.53	0.96	Positive
2	I do not support the enrollment of SEN students in regular classes, as it overloads teachers with an already heavy workload.	3.23	1.17	Neutral
3	I believe that putting SEN students in regular classes is a good idea in theory, but in practice it is not possible to implement it.	3.53	1.11	Positive
4	I believe that the presence of SEN students in the regular classroom takes the attention of the teachers away from the other students.	3.50	0.96	Positive
5	I believe that the presence of SEN students in schools facilitates the acceptance of difference by other students.	3.53	0.96	Positive
6	I believe that the presence of SEN students in schools improves the social behavior of all students.	3.13	0.99	Neutral
7	I believe that SEN students should have the right to learn in a regular classroom.	3.53	1.11	Positive
8	I believe that the enrolment of SEN students in regular classes has beneficial effects on the social-emotional development of SEN students.	3.50	1.13	Positive
9	I believe that enrolling SEN students in regular classrooms improves their independence.	3.53	0.96	Positive
10	I believe that having SEN students in the regular classroom does not make classroom management more difficult.	3.13	0.99	Neutral
	Aggregate Mean	3.41		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		1.05	Positive

Legend: 4.21-5.00- Very Positive; 3.41-4.20- Positive; 2.61-3.40-Neutral; 1.81-2.60-Negative; 1.00-1.80-Very Negative

Table 2*Level of concurrent barriers faced by the respondents in handling inclusive education classrooms*

Components	WM	SD	Verbal Description
Students' self-efficacy	3.36	0.98	Moderate
Self-help skills	3.28	0.88	Moderate
Students' social skills	3.25	0.93	Moderate
Academic skills	3.09	0.97	Moderate
Grand Mean	3.25		Moderate
Grand Standard Deviation		0.94	

Legend: 4.21-5.00- Very High; 3.41-4.20- High; 2.61-3.40-Moderate; 1.81-2.60-Low; 1.00-1.80-Very Low

Table 2 collectively presents the level of concurrent barriers faced by the respondents in handling inclusive education classrooms. The data showed a consistent, moderate level of concurrent barriers faced by respondents in inclusive classrooms, revealing a grand weighted mean of 3.25. The greatest challenges relate to students' self-efficacy, followed by self-help and social skills, with academic skills being less pronounced but still moderate barriers. Low standard deviations indicate that respondents largely agree that non-academic skill gaps present ongoing challenges in these settings (Mabanag et al., 2024; Gabutan et al., 2025).

These findings indicate that the main obstacles in inclusive classrooms go beyond curriculum delivery, centering on socio-emotional and adaptive skills (Mabanag et al., 2024). Teachers report that inadequate resources, limited support, and complex classroom dynamics hinder the development of self-efficacy and independence among students with special needs, requiring additional time for behavioral support and reducing instructional

opportunities. Effective inclusive education thus requires holistic support frameworks, including targeted social skills training and specialized personnel, while collaboration between teachers and support staff is undermined by time constraints and lack of structured teamwork (Alverson et al., 2025; Niadas et al., 2025).

Table 3

Test of relationship between the respondents' cognitive attitudes and concurrent barriers faced in handling inclusive education

Variables	r-value	Strength of Correlation	p - value	Decision	Remarks
Cognitive Attitudes and Concurrent Barriers	0.244	Negligible Positive	0.130	Do not reject H_0	Not significant

**significant at $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

Table 3 presents the test of relationship between the respondents' cognitive attitudes and concurrent barriers faced in handling inclusive education tested at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance. The results showed a negligible and statistically insignificant relationship, revealing an r-value of 0.244 and a p-value of 0.130 between teachers' cognitive attitudes and the barriers they faced in handling inclusive classrooms. Hence, teachers' beliefs about inclusion do not meaningfully influence the frequency or intensity of student-centered challenges, such as self-efficacy or social skills gaps.

These results imply that positive attitudes alone do not reduce practical barriers in inclusive education. Structural and behavioral challenges persist, regardless of teacher mindset. Therefore, concrete strategies such as training, behavioral support, and classroom assistants are necessary for effective and sustainable inclusive education. This underscores the need for investment in training, support staff, and adaptive materials to better meet the needs of both teachers and students. Research in the Philippines confirms that teachers can hold positive views on inclusion but still experience exhaustion and difficulty managing classrooms, highlighting the need for tangible support systems (Macapaz et al., 2024; Vasquez et al., 2025).

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the study's findings reveal a critical balance between ethical conviction, operational challenges, and the practical realities of classroom management. Teachers consistently exhibit a principled commitment to inclusive education, viewing it as a fundamental right that fosters personal autonomy, social development, and mutual acceptance among students. Nevertheless, this philosophical commitment coexists with ongoing functional challenges, particularly regarding students' self-efficacy, self-help routines, and social interaction skills. Statistical analysis demonstrates that a positive mindset alone does not mitigate the impact of these daily classroom barriers. A teacher's belief in the value of inclusion does not alleviate the practical difficulties associated with managing a diverse classroom in the absence of dedicated support.

This result has significant implications throughout the educational system. For policymakers and school administrators, it highlights the need to pair the promotion of inclusive values with concrete structural support, such as reduced class sizes, specialized training in adaptive instruction, and access to classroom assistants. For teachers, it requires targeted resources and collaborative support, rather than relying solely on individual resilience to address instructional and behavioral demands. For students with special needs, be given an intervention that prioritizes the development of personal autonomy, confidence, and foundational social skills in addition to academic objectives. Furthermore, parents, health professionals, and community stakeholders shall share responsibility by reinforcing life skills and therapeutic interventions outside the classroom, ensuring that inclusion is a sustainable, community-wide commitment rather than an unsupported burden on teachers. Thus, teachers' positive or negative cognitive attitude toward inclusive education does not necessarily correspond to the degree of practical challenges they encounter in the classroom. Therefore, a training workshop program for teachers in handling inclusive education is recommended.

Implications for teachers and educational practitioners - The results indicate that positive attitudes toward inclusion are important but insufficient by themselves. Teachers need practical knowledge, resources, and

continuing professional development to translate inclusive beliefs into effective classroom practices. Training programs should therefore include differentiated instruction, adaptive assessment, classroom management in diverse learning environments, preparation of individualized learning plans, and strategies for developing students' self-efficacy, self-help abilities, social interaction, and academic skills. Teachers may also use structured classroom routines, peer-assisted learning, scaffolded tasks, visual instructions, positive reinforcement, and gradual release of responsibility to help students with special educational needs participate more independently. Regular collaboration among general education teachers, special education personnel, guidance counselors, parents, and other professionals may help teachers identify student needs and design appropriate interventions. The finding that attitudes were not significantly related to barriers further suggests that teachers should not be blamed for classroom difficulties simply because they appear insufficiently positive or committed. The challenges identified in the study may result from structural limitations rather than from teachers' personal beliefs.

Implications for students - For students with special educational needs, the findings emphasize that inclusive education should address more than academic performance. Interventions should also develop confidence, independence, self-regulation, communication, social participation, and daily living skills. Because students' self-efficacy emerged as the most prominent barrier, teachers and schools should provide achievable learning tasks, regular constructive feedback, opportunities for successful participation, and recognition of individual progress. These practices may help students develop greater confidence in their ability to learn and participate in classroom activities. Support for self-help and social skills may include explicit instruction in classroom routines, communication, cooperation, problem-solving, emotional regulation, and help-seeking. Such interventions may improve not only the participation of students with special educational needs but also the classroom climate and social awareness of students without identified special needs.

Implications for schools and administrators - Schools should complement the promotion of inclusive values with concrete institutional support. This may include reducing excessive class sizes where possible, providing appropriate instructional and assistive materials, assigning classroom aides or support personnel, and ensuring access to special education specialists, guidance counselors, and health professionals. School leaders should also establish regular professional-development activities based on teachers' identified needs. Instead of offering general seminars on the importance of inclusion, training should focus on practical classroom concerns, including differentiated lesson planning, behavior support, adaptive assessment, social-skills instruction, and collaboration with families. Administrators should provide teachers with sufficient preparation time and opportunities for collaborative planning. They should also establish referral and monitoring systems through which teachers can identify students who require additional support, document interventions, review student progress, and coordinate with parents and specialists.

The findings may guide the development of a school-based intervention and training program composed of the following areas: understanding inclusive education and learner diversity; differentiated and adaptive instruction; strategies for strengthening students' self-efficacy; development of self-help and independent-living skills; social-skills and positive-behavior support; individualized educational planning and assessment; collaboration among teachers, parents, and specialists; and teacher well-being, workload management, and access to support services. The effectiveness of the proposed program may be evaluated through pre- and post-training assessments, classroom observations, teacher reflections, and monitoring of student participation and progress.

Significance of the findings - The main significance of the study is its demonstration that positive attitudes toward inclusive education do not automatically eliminate the practical challenges experienced by teachers. The respondents generally supported the principles and benefits of inclusion, yet they still reported moderate difficulties, particularly in relation to students' self-efficacy, self-help abilities, and social skills. For practitioners, this means that commitment to inclusion must be accompanied by practical competencies and continuing support. For students, it means that inclusive education should address social, emotional, adaptive, and academic development. For schools, it means that successful inclusion is an institutional responsibility and should not depend solely on the effort or resilience of individual teachers. Because the study involved 40 purposively selected

teachers from one public secondary school, the findings are not intended to be statistically generalized to all Philippine schools. Instead, they provide context-specific evidence that may be useful for schools with similar conditions. Future studies may include larger samples, multiple schools, qualitative interviews, classroom observations, and perspectives from students and parents to further examine the relationship between teacher attitudes, institutional support, and inclusive classroom practices.

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