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Assessing Inclusive Education Needs and Challenges in Teaching LSEN in the Philippines

Cherry Love Montales^{1*}

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ABSTRACT

Educational institutions around the world have made efforts to give importance to diversity and inclusion among their students. This study assessed the prevalent needs and challenges of teaching Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN) in inclusive classrooms. It utilized a descriptive research design and qualitative research method. Focus Group Discussions and interviews were done with pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, and Special Education (SPED) teachers in three educational institutions in the Bicol Region, Philippines. The results of the study showed that the prevalent needs in teaching LSEN in inclusive classrooms include three themes. The first theme is the positive attitude of teachers, such as love, patience, and understanding. The second theme is the enhancement of the content and pedagogical knowledge on SPED and inclusive education, and the third is providing teaching and learning resources. Furthermore, the challenges in teaching LSEN in inclusive education include sustaining inclusive practices and values, theme two is the weak implementation of policies and programs of special and inclusive education, and a lack of general teachers' readiness. This study showed the importance of preparing pre-service teachers for their future role in an inclusive classroom. Also, the in-service teachers may be given capability-building training to guide them in teaching in inclusive settings. The findings may also inform policymakers about reforms that support inclusive education in the Philippines. It is recommended that Teacher Education Institutions design programs to support inclusive education for their pre-service teachers and the in-service teachers in their community.

INTRODUCTION

Educational Institutions have made efforts in prioritizing diversity and equity for their students. Thus, Inclusive Education was made essential across the globe. This aligns with achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #4. It encourages countries to promote "inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UNESCO, 2017). Inclusive Education means ensuring that all school children can be given quality education regardless of their ability and background.

Several international mandates were made to support Inclusive Education. One of which is the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). It encourages all students with special learning needs to be included in mainstream classes. This is one way of combating discrimination and promoting inclusive education. However, despite the good intentions of these global declarations, the practical implementation at the local level is still a challenge.

According to UNICEF (2017), there are about 93 million children with disabilities in the world, and inclusive education is thought to be a vital strategy for maximizing their potential. Apart from its educational advantages, inclusive education fosters social, psychological, and economic stability (Friend, 2011). However, past education systems often focused on "fixing" disabilities, which led to exclusionary practice, something that modern inclusive education aims to correct by offering

equal opportunities for all learners. Research indicates that both students with and without disabilities benefit socially and academically from inclusive education (Hehir *et al.*, 2016). However, a lack of resources and training makes many teachers feel unprepared to handle the diverse needs of LSEN (Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2012). Although many educators advocate for inclusion in theory, they frequently lack the skills and self-assurance needed to put it into practice (Florian & Spratt, 2013). Additionally, Avramidis and Norwich (2002) note that maintaining inclusive school environments and being prepared to accommodate a range of learning needs are significant challenges.

In the Philippines, inclusive education is supported by legal and policy frameworks. Republic Act No. 7277, or the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons, ensures that persons with disabilities are mainstreamed into society, including access to inclusive education (Philippine Congress, 1992). The Department of Education (DepEd) has issued guidelines to implement SPED programs, but challenges such as lack of facilities, limited teacher training, and resource gaps remain significant (DepEd, 2016). The responsibility of preparing future teachers for inclusive environments falls on Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs). The significance of preparing teachers to handle learner diversity is emphasized by the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), specifically Domain #3 (CHED, 2017). Courses on inclusive and

¹ Central Bicol State University of Agriculture, Philippines

*Corresponding author's e-mail: cherrylove.montales@cbsua.edu.ph

special education are now part of Philippine teacher education following the Salamanca Declaration (CMO 74, s. 2017; CMO 75, s. 2017). Pre-service teachers who adhered to the previous curriculum, however, frequently missed introductory classes on inclusive education, which left them unprepared to assist LSEN.

This gap significantly impacts the readiness of pre-service teachers to manage LSEN in inclusive classrooms. Understanding the current realities that aspiring teachers encounter when working with LSEN in mainstream settings is the primary goal of this study. It seeks to offer information that can guide the development of inclusive practices and teacher education initiatives.

Research Objectives

This study aims to examine the current realities faced by teachers in supporting Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN) within inclusive classrooms. Specifically, it seeks to identify the prevalent needs in teaching LSEN within inclusive education and determine the challenges associated with managing LSEN in this context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers' Attitudes and Empathy Toward Inclusion

Empathy and positive attitudes are foundational in the successful inclusion of LSEN. Catapano (2018) emphasized that empathy allows teachers to understand diverse student perspectives and develop inclusive teaching strategies. Similarly, Kruschler *et al.* (2017) found that structured training modules have a positive influence on pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusion by fostering awareness of and acceptance for student diversity. Aguilar *et al.* (2015) also noted that despite limited expertise, general education teachers in the Philippines exhibit a positive outlook on inclusive education, which can be enhanced through experience and values formation.

However, studies also suggest that while many teachers support inclusion in principle, they often feel unprepared or lack confidence in implementing inclusive practices effectively (Sharma *et al.*, 2015). In particular, Damianidou and Phtiaka (2018) found that while secondary teachers in Cyprus expressed positive views toward students with disabilities, they held low expectations and failed to apply inclusive strategies, mainly due to insufficient training.

Content Knowledge and Pedagogical Gaps

Integrating Special and Inclusive Education (SIE) content into teacher education programs remains a key area of concern. Aranas and Cabahug (2017) revealed that teacher education curricula in some Philippine regions lack substantial inclusion competencies, particularly in education philosophy and classroom management. In response to such gaps, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED, 2017) mandated the inclusion of a 3-unit course on Foundations of Special and Inclusive Education in the BSEd and BEEd programs.

Despite this policy move, the sufficiency of training

remains questionable. Allday *et al.* (2013) found that only a small percentage of elementary education programs in U.S. universities offer comprehensive coursework on inclusive education, often focusing more on the characteristics of disabilities rather than practical strategies for inclusion.

Challenges in Implementation and Teacher Readiness

Multiple systemic and structural challenges hinder the effective teaching of LSEN in inclusive classrooms. Saeed (2016) outlined barriers such as attitudinal resistance, insufficient government support, lack of instructional resources, and inadequate teacher training as key problems faced by students with disabilities in Pakistan. Similarly, Mateusi and Naong (2014) reported that a lack of infrastructure, resources, and teacher preparedness are fundamental barriers to inclusive education in Lesotho.

In the Philippine context, Andaya (2015) emphasized the role of continuous in-service training and the provision of specialized materials and facilities to support inclusive education. The study also recommended that administrators and teachers have comprehensive knowledge of individualized educational plans (IEPs) and special equipment for LSEN.

Teachers' lack of readiness is not solely due to policy gaps but also to limited experiential learning. Malak (2013) found that pre-service teachers who had close contact with children with special needs during their practicum developed more positive attitudes toward inclusion. This aligns with Dapudong (2014), who highlighted the importance of providing actual training on curriculum modifications, classroom adaptation, and individualized planning to increase teacher efficacy.

Role of Policy and Institutional Support

While frameworks like the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) emphasize the need for responsive learning environments (Department of Education [DepEd], 2017), implementation remains weak. According to Juma *et al.* (2017), embedding inclusive education into teacher training curricula and action research programs is essential to building sustainable inclusive practices.

Kanno and Onyechu (2018) further asserted that instructional resources are indispensable in supporting LSEN, recommending that teachers be provided with the necessary tools to implement inclusive pedagogy effectively. De Vera *et al.* (2016) supported this by presenting evidence that teacher capability and understanding of learner disabilities improve when supported by appropriate materials and training.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study used a descriptive research design and a qualitative method. It assessed the prevalent needs and challenges in teaching LSEN in inclusive classrooms. Since this study is focused on identifying current practices and developing themes out of the evidence-based data,

descriptive research is suitable for this study (Cresswell, 2013). It used a qualitative method because it collected data from the participants who had firsthand knowledge and observations on inclusive education.

To improve the validity and reliability of the results, the study employed the Triangulation Method of Qualitative Research, which integrates several data collection methods (Denzin, 2012). This approach allowed the study to cross-check responses from different participants, giving researchers a comprehensive picture of the needs and challenges of supporting LSEN in inclusive settings.

Research Setting and Respondents

The study was conducted in three different institutions: (1) a state university in Camarines Sur, Philippines, (2) a private Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Naga City, Philippines, and (3) a public High School in Naga City, Philippines. These institutions were selected due to their diversity in teacher education programs and implementation of inclusive education.

The participants included:

- Thirty-five (35) selected pre-service teachers from the state university, taking Bachelor of Secondary Education majoring in English, Filipino, and Mathematics.
- Ten (10) in-service teachers from a Laboratory High School.
- Six (6) More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs), composed of SPED professors, SPED teachers, and administrators.

The respondents were purposively selected to ensure a diverse yet relevant range of perspectives on inclusive education. Pre-service teachers provided firsthand insight into their training and preparedness. In contrast, in-service teachers and MKOs contributed professional and institutional viewpoints on implementing inclusive practices and teaching LSEN.

Data Collection Procedures

All necessary approvals were obtained before data collection. Letters of request and informed consent forms were distributed and signed by participants. The standards of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) in the Philippines were followed, including the confidentiality of responses and the right to withdraw at any stage.

This study utilized both Focus Group Discussion, in-depth individual interview and group interview to identify the prevalent needs and challenges in teaching LSEN in an inclusive education. Responses during these processes were transcribed. Through thematic clustering, patterns were observed and described to identify the needs and challenges in teaching LSEN in inclusive education.

Data Analysis

The data gathered were analyzed using a qualitative thematic analysis approach, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The steps included familiarization with the data through transcription and repeated reading, coding

significant responses, identifying initial themes, reviewing and refining these themes, and writing the final analysis. Themes were developed to categorize the needs and challenges in inclusive education as experienced by the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Prevalent Needs in Teaching LSEN in Inclusive Education

Theme 1: Positive Attitudes of Teachers

One of the most prevalent needs identified in teaching LSEN in inclusive education is the necessity for teachers to possess positive attitudes. This theme emerged prominently from the responses, reflecting teachers' perspectives on the critical role in fostering an inclusive classroom environment. This theme was supported by 30 out of 35 pre-service teachers, 9 out of 10 in-service teachers, and all 6 MKOs. The sub-themes under this category include acceptance, love, patience, understanding, respect, and attention.

Acceptance

Acceptance is crucial for creating an inclusive atmosphere. Respondents highlighted the importance of teachers accepting the challenge of teaching LSEN and promoting a welcoming environment. One MKO-teacher shared, "Making the students feel that they are not left behind is essential," emphasizing the need to refrain from distinguishing between 'special' and 'regular' students and to start thinking inclusively. This response illustrates how acceptance can shape classroom dynamics, ensuring every student feels valued and included.

Love

Love for teaching and the students was another significant sub-theme. Respondents spoke about the need for teachers to teach wholeheartedly and to demonstrate a deep love for their students. A teacher with a "big heart" and an "understanding" is seen as "invaluable in managing an inclusive classroom. This aligns with research by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), which indicates that a teacher's gentleness and commitment can significantly impact the success of inclusive practices.

Patience

Patience was repeatedly mentioned as a vital quality. Teachers need to exhibit long patience, especially when dealing with the diverse needs of LSEN. One respondent noted the "unending patience" of the teacher with the LSEN, underscoring the endurance required to support students effectively. Patience is crucial for allowing LSEN the time they need to understand and engage with the lesson, as highlighted in studies by Sharma *et al.* (2012).

Understanding

It involves knowing each student's unique differences. Teachers must strive to understand their students to cater to their learning needs. Respondents noted that

understanding students' difficulties and showing empathy can foster a supportive learning environment. This is aligned in the work of Avramidis and Norwich (2002), who emphasize that understanding students' challenges is key to effective inclusion.

Respect

Respect for students is fundamental. Proper treatment and unbiased judgment by teachers were noted as essential components of respect. One respondent mentioned the importance of the teacher giving equal attention to the LSEN, which is crucial for fostering a sense of fairness and equality in the classroom. Respect ensures that all students feel recognized and valued, which is critical for their engagement and motivation.

Attention to LSEN

Teachers must give equal attention to all students, ensuring that LSEN does not feel neglected. This involves being attentive to their learning progress and providing the necessary support. The attention given by teachers can make a significant difference in the academic and social outcomes for LSEN, as supported by research from Florian and Pratt (2013).

It can be inferred that teachers perceived that accepting the challenge of having LSEN in their classroom and teaching them wholeheartedly is the highest priority in inclusive education. Acceptance is the fundamental and initial step in inclusion, primarily because general teachers often lack a solid foundation in special and inclusive education during their Teacher Education. Moreover, it was mentioned that patience should be unending and long. Knowing the unique needs of LSEN students and the learning needs of all other students in a class requires patience and understanding in teaching them in an inclusive environment. Despite the intervention programs of the DepEd aimed at reducing class size and the teacher-student ratio in public schools, as reported in *The Philippine Star* (Mateo, 2018), teacher-respondents mentioned that in some schools, the class size still exceeds 70 students per class, and an additional LSEN entails more patience and understanding from teachers. Teachers need to have a proper attitude towards inclusion when teaching LSEN. Having a 'big heart' is what the research respondents referred to as greatly needed. As previously reported in the study by Sharma, Simi, and Forlin (2015), preparing pre-service teachers for inclusion creates a balance of cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains across the curriculum. Kaplan and Lewis (2013), as cited by Juma *et al.* (2017), further agreed that when Inclusive Education is integrated into pre-service teacher education, it saves time and resources needed to address negative attitudes later.

Northern (2017) reported the results of Blazer's (2013) study, which found that teachers' attitudes substantially affect students' outcomes. Likewise, Costello and Boyle (2013) agreed that pre-service teachers' attitudes could

affect their willingness and ability to LSEN. On the other hand, Dapudong (2014) and Dapudong (2013) state that in international schools, teachers with a positive attitude towards inclusive education are knowledgeable and have training or background in teaching LSEN. On the other hand, Aguilar *et al.* (2015) revealed in their study that in the Philippines, general education teachers have a positive outlook on inclusive education despite their lack of expertise in the field.

Theme 2: Content and Pedagogical Knowledge on Special and Inclusive Education

Another critical need in teaching LSEN in inclusive education is the requirement for comprehensive knowledge of SIE among pre-service teachers. This theme was emphasized by 29 out of 35 pre-service teachers, 8 in-service teachers, and all 6 MKOs. This theme encompasses two significant sub-themes: content and pedagogy.

Content

Content expertise is essential for effectively supporting LSEN. Respondents emphasized the need for teachers to thoroughly understand how to teach LSEN, including orientation sessions for receiving teachers and ongoing professional development. One participant noted the importance of having "teachers with" knowledge who can teach LSEN, highlighting the necessity for expertise in this area. Additionally, conducting seminars on SIE was mentioned as a critical strategy to equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge. There is also a strong consensus that pre-service teachers should have at least a course focused on Special Education embedded in their curriculum or additional trainings about this. This aligns with findings by Florian and Rouse (2009), who argue that teacher education programs must include comprehensive training on inclusive education to prepare teachers effectively.

Pedagogy

Pedagogy refers to the instructional strategies and methods used to facilitate learning among LSEN. Respondents emphasized the importance of employing appropriate techniques and strategies tailored to the needs of LSEN students. One respondent mentioned the need for "capacity in doing fair activities for LSEN to excel", highlighting the importance of equitable learning opportunities. Interactive games and other engaging activities were identified as practical tools to enhance learning experiences for LSEN students. Such pedagogical approaches are supported by research from Sharma *et al.* (2012), who emphasize the importance of employing varied and interactive teaching strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners. This also reflects global efforts to implement inclusive pedagogical practices even in resource-limited contexts. For example, Asante (2025) highlighted how multi-grade teaching in

rural Ghana fostered cognitive and social development by leveraging learner diversity, despite the challenges posed by limited infrastructure and training.

Theme 3: Teaching-Learning Resources

A third theme identified in teaching LSEN in inclusive education is the need for adequate teaching and learning resources. A total of 26 out of 35 pre-service teachers, 9 out of 10 in-service teachers, and 5 out of 6 MKOs pointed out the lack of learning materials and teaching aids as a barrier to effective instruction. This theme is divided into two sub-themes: learning materials and teaching resources.

Learning Materials

Respondents highlighted the importance of materials that LSEN can manipulate to facilitate learning. Specific examples include books designed exclusively for LSEN and exposure to various assistive devices. Learning materials must be tailored to meet the particular needs of LSEN, such as using Braille for visually impaired students or hearing aids for those with hearing impairments. This need for specialized materials aligns with findings from Jackson and Burke (2013), who emphasize that tailored learning resources are critical for effectively including students with special needs in mainstream classrooms.

Teaching Resources

Respondents noted the necessity for appropriate teaching materials, such as video clips and instructional aids, which can be used to enhance the learning experience for LSEN. Training rooms designed for pre-service teachers to learn about LSEN were also highlighted. Providing adequate teaching resources ensures that educators are well-equipped to deliver inclusive education, as Florian and Rouse (2009) pointed out, who argue that access to appropriate teaching materials is essential for successful implementation of inclusive practices.

Muraina (2015) supports the view that instructional materials influence students' learning. However, Muraina (2015) also emphasizes the need for adequate funding to procure these materials. Respondents in this study has the same sentiment, suggesting that educational authorities should allocate budgets specifically for acquiring instructional materials for pre-service teacher training. One MKO of SPED noted, "Pre-service teachers should be exposed to the different devices...so the school should also procure those materials,".

Challenges in Teaching LSEN in Inclusive Education

Theme 1: Sustaining Positive School Culture

One significant challenge in teaching LSEN in inclusive education is sustaining a positive school culture. This theme encompasses two critical sub-themes: inclusive practices and inclusive values.

Sustaining Inclusive Practices

Respondents highlighted the need to develop positive

norms in the classroom to ensure adequate education and inclusion of LSEN. For example, respondents emphasized the importance of better communication between LSEN, teachers, and classmates, which helps bridge the gap between special and regular students and promotes equality and success among all students. This aligns with Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), who emphasize the significance of creating classroom norms that support the diverse needs of all learners.

The pre-service teacher respondents of this study also noted that inclusive practices involve ensuring that all learners, regardless of age, culture, religion, or disabilities, are admitted to both private and public schools. Additionally, participants stressed that schools must follow programs and activities that support inclusive education, conducting information campaigns to raise awareness and understanding of the needs of LSEN. Moreover, inclusive practices enable teachers to develop more appropriate instructional materials (IMs) suited to the LSEN. Research participants encouraged creating and using better-suited IMs, promoting positive reinforcement, and helping LSEN achieve academic and social success. One participant noted, "Students are learning beyond boundaries," indicating that inclusive practices help break down barriers and facilitate holistic learning experiences.

Sustaining Inclusive Values

Participants emphasized the importance of sustaining inclusive values such as love for LSEN, accepting diversity, and ensuring fair treatment for all students. As one participant noted, teachers need to make LSEN feel that they are not different from others. This aligns with the findings of Sharma *et al.* (2012), who highlight the importance of empathy and respect in inclusive education settings. Creating a sense of belonging and commitment is vital for the success of inclusive education programs. When LSEN feel accepted and valued, they are more likely to engage actively in their education and achieve better outcomes. The commitment of teachers, administrators, and peers to inclusive values helps sustain a positive school culture that benefits all students.

According to a study, implementing inclusive education requires the dedication and willingness of educators and stakeholders (Begum, 2017). It is then essential that, for inclusive education to be successful, teachers commit to creating an inclusive environment for LSEN students and all other students. Lagata (2017) stated the importance of positive school culture in inclusive education. Teachers can greatly influence school culture through their attitudes. Therefore, having the right attitude towards inclusion can result in a positive culture for all the learners, including the LSEN.

Thus, pre-service teachers must be trained in creating an inclusive culture to sustain the practices being implemented in the current educational system. This action will entail changes in teacher education. Some authors have acknowledged the need for the integration of

Inclusive Education in the Teacher Education Curriculum (Aranas, 2017; Juma *et al.*, 2017; Mateusi & Naong, 2014; Allday *et al.*, 2013; Malak, 2013). Furthermore, an international mandate on this area was emphasized, as stated “Pre-service training programs should be provided to all student teachers, primary and secondary alike” (UNESCO, 19 “4, C.41). In the Philippines, provisions on the role of state colleges in the implementation of special and inclusive education are declared in RA 7277, Section 17.

The responses from research participants underscore the need for a holistic approach to sustaining positive school culture in inclusive education. This includes implementing inclusive practices and fostering inclusive values that support the diverse needs of LSEN. Ensuring effective communication, promoting positive norms, and embracing diversity are essential to creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment.

Theme 2: Weak Implementation of Policies and Programs of SIE

The second major challenge generated in this study is the weak implementation of policies and programs related to SIE. This theme is divided into two sub-themes: weak implementation of policies on SIE and weak implementation of SIE programs.

Policies on SIE

Research participants cited the weak enforcement of existing guidelines and policies as a primary concern. One participant noted, “The guidelines and policies of SIE are not strongly implemented, leading to inconsistencies in inclusive practices.” This poor law enforcement contributes to a lack of alignment between the school’s goals and the broader objectives of Inclusive Education. Participants also highlighted that the old curriculum for teacher education did not include sufficient units on Inclusive Education, with only an additional three units being introduced in recent updates. However, they expressed that “adding three units is not enough for comprehensive training in Inclusive Education.”

Moreover, the participants identified inadequate funding as a critical barrier. One participant shared, “There is a lack of budget for necessary teacher training, which impacts the quality of education provided to LSEN.” These findings are consistent with previous research by Florian and Rouse (2009), emphasizing the importance of adequate funding and resources.

Programs of SIE

Regarding the SIE programs, participants noted that programs designed to support LSEN are not effectively executed or regularly evaluated. One participant remarked, “There is low monitoring of the programs, which leads to gaps in their implementation and effectiveness.” This weak implementation is exacerbated by the difficulty of integrating LSEN into regular classes due to low acceptance by some teachers. “Many teachers still struggle

to accept LSEN in their classrooms, making it difficult to implement inclusive practices,” noted a participant.

The student respondents and the MKO agreed that insufficient funding is a problem in teaching LSEN. According to them, these funds were intended to procure teaching and learning materials and train teachers. It could have stemmed from the belief that instructional materials can enrich students’ learning. According to the study by Andaya *et al.* (2015), administrators continue to enrich instructional materials. Yet, they were recommended to secure special equipment for LSEN and allocate a teacher training budget. SPED teachers addressed the shortage of available funds for SPED through their resourcefulness and collaboration with stakeholders, including private foundations. One of the MKOs relayed, “Some of the learning and teaching resources here were either donated or I provided.” It can be implied that teachers in the Philippines would go beyond their duties for the sake of their students, especially when funds were insufficient.

The lack of acceptance extends beyond the school environment to the home, where parents of LSEN often prefer to keep their children at home due to the perceived challenges of inclusive education. Participants expressed concern that “many LSEN are left behind and there is a high number of out-of-school special children,” highlighting the broader social implications of weak program implementation. This aligns with the findings of Sharma *et al.* (2012), who identified social acceptance and systemic support as crucial factors for the success of inclusive education.

Theme 3: Teachers’ Lack of Readiness for SIE

The third significant challenge identified by research participants in teaching LSEN in inclusive education is the teachers’ lack of readiness for SIE. This theme encompasses two critical sub-themes: knowledge of SIE and skills in teaching LSEN.

Knowledge of SIE

One primary concern was the lack of information and awareness among teachers. “Many teachers have a misconception about disabilities and are unequipped to teach in an inclusive setting,” one participant underscores the gap in understanding that can hinder effective inclusive education. Another participant noted, “Teachers are not ready for Inclusive Education”, pointing to the lack of preparedness in integrating LSEN into regular classrooms.

Participants also emphasized the shortage of teachers with expertise in teaching LSEN. They mentioned, “There is a lack of knowledge on the basic educational needs of LSEN,” indicating a gap in initial teacher training and ongoing professional development. The information on issues related to SIE is limited, and there is a significant lack of orientation and preparation for teachers in this area. One respondent pointed out, “There is a low-zero availability of professors in SUCs who can teach subjects on SIE in Teacher Education,” highlighting the systemic

issue of insufficiently qualified educators to train future teachers.

Additionally, participants expressed that many teachers lack information about relevant policies and have not received adequate orientation. “Teachers need more information about the policy and orientation on teaching LSEN effectively,” said a respondent. This aligns with findings by Florian and Rouse (2009), who argue that comprehensive training and policy awareness are crucial for teachers to implement inclusive practices successfully. Similarly, a study in Malawi revealed that despite teacher awareness and training on inclusive practices, the absence of coordinated collaboration from other stakeholders including parents and education leaders resulted in fragmented efforts and weak support systems for inclusive education (Chimowa *et al.*, 2024).

Skills in Teaching LSEN

Participants cited a general lack of readiness in classroom management and teaching LSEN. “Teachers are not knowledgeable on how to teach real-life situations with LSEN,” one participant pointed out the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

Pre-service teachers’ lack of preparation and limited exposure to SPED programs were also highlighted. One respondent noted, “It is difficult to give proper accommodation to LSEN because of inadequate training,” emphasizing the need for more hands-on training and practical experiences in teacher education programs.

In the case of the in-service teachers, their readiness can affect their acceptance of LSEN in their classes. It was mentioned that one of the barriers to the effective implementation of inclusive education is the non-acceptance of the regular teachers. This can be attributed to most regular in-service teachers lacking a background in inclusive education. Thus, they are anxious about accepting LSEN. It is almost the same for pre-service teachers who believe their inability to teach LSEN is a barrier to implementing the program.

The need for training or education about SIE in teacher education aligns with Malak’s (2013) finding that pre-service teachers’ close contact with Students with Educational Needs (SEN) is essential in their preparation for inclusion. Likewise, Mateusi *et al.* (2014) found that teachers’ ill-preparedness is one of the impediments to the effective implementation of inclusion. Allday *et al.* (2013) further concluded that for inclusion to be successful, teacher preparation must change to meet the needs of their graduates.

These challenges underscore the necessity for enhanced teacher training programs that include comprehensive content on SIE and practical skills development. Sharma *et al.* (2012) suggest that teacher efficacy in inclusive education significantly improves with targeted training and exposure to diverse learning environments.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the prevalent needs and challenges

that pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, and SPED specialists encounter when teaching LSEN students in inclusive education. According to the findings, the most common needs are to improve pedagogical and content knowledge about Special and Inclusive Education (SIE), to provide sufficient teaching and learning resources that are appropriate for Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN), and to foster positive attitudes such as acceptance, patience, and understanding. The inability to maintain inclusive values and practices in schools, the poor execution of current policies and programs, and the general lack of preparedness among teachers, resulting from inadequate exposure and training, were the primary issues noted.

The findings discussed underscore the need to strengthen support networks and teacher education curricula to prepare future teachers for inclusive classrooms. The prominence of this study is in its potential to affect policy, capacity-building initiatives, and curriculum development in teacher education institutions. A limitation of this study, however, is that it examined a small number of respondents and institutions in a single geographical area, which may not be adequately representative of the overall picture of inclusive education across the nation.

It is recommended that Teacher Education Institutions, in conjunction with Basic Education Schools, develop support programs to equip pre-service and in-service teachers with the skills, attitudes, and resources required to educate learners with special educational needs (LSEN) in inclusive educational contexts.

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