

# Teacher's Professional Background and Competence in Inclusive Education

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**Abstract** – *Inclusive education has been a remarkable paradigm shift in the Philippine educational system. The main problem of this study was to determine the teachers' competence in inclusive education in Maasin District II, Maasin City Division handling learners with special educational needs for the school year 2019 – 2020. This study focused on 30 teachers from different schools of Maasin District II who were able to handle mainstream classes of special education. A checklist on teachers' professional background and level of competence in 3 key areas; Social Regard, Learners' Diversity, and Knowledge in Inclusive Education were given to the respondents. The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative methods as the research design in this study. Research findings revealed that only teachers' training significantly relates to their teaching competence in the correlation test between teachers' professional background (education, training, years of teaching) and their level of competence to teach inclusive education. It would be easier to address or prevent possible new challenges for teachers in mainstream classes if they improve their level of competence. Increasing the competence among teachers in teaching Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN) relies significantly on building instructional capacity through training. Thus, the level of competence of teachers is realized through the provision of enough training and professional technical assistance. The school may opt to invest resources in training and the development of teachers to further bring out the output of the study, which is a division training workshop on teaching approaches and classroom management techniques for inclusive education teachers.*

**Keywords** – *Challenges, Competence, Inclusive Education, Teachers' Background*

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## INTRODUCTION

The teacher in the modern school plays a very

important role in the daily activities of the children, not only by giving new knowledge to students. The role of the teachers includes consultants, advisors, friends, and researchers. It is difficult to list all the roles of today's teachers. Moreover, it is important to develop more of their knowledge and skills and capacitate them on their teaching competencies, not only focusing on their role as a teacher. Educators as key figures in the successful implementation of an inclusive education policy, and their competencies in this field are of utmost importance. Therefore, teachers need to develop their competencies in accordance with transformation in practice as well as professional activities effectively.

The Philippine Department of Education released the revised K to 12 basic education guidelines stating that all children in the country should be admitted to the nearest public schools to access education regardless of their ability or disability [1]. This appeared to be a major challenge to schools, more so to teachers. Teachers were not ready for the increase in enrolment and were prepared to accommodate children with challenges in the mainstream schools.

Moreover, classroom diversity in the Philippines remains an issue due to cultural, disability, and individual needs [2]. A limited number of teachers with proper training and inadequate classroom was reported challenges in education [3].

There are still notable dodges in the implementation of inclusive education in the Philippines. After it fully kicked – off 2 years ago, only grades, 1, 2, 7, and 8 teachers have had a more or less 5–day training on handling children with special educational needs. The insufficient opportunity for teachers to prepare themselves and grasp their senses to handle learners with special educational needs could lead to less effective learning as a result of unprepared and untrained teachers. Teachers struggle to manage classes in inclusive education.

With the aforementioned issues, teachers are integral components in the success of inclusive education; their perceptions about the key competencies needed warrant research [4]. It is fundamental for policymakers in the country to be attentive to lessons learned from other countries as they are establishing the foundation for

inclusive education. It is believed that there is no better way to teach diverse learners than a well-prepared teacher.

For these reasons, the researcher wanted to study the professional background and competencies of teachers handling LSENs in inclusive education. This study hopes to strengthen the current situation of the inclusive education setup of Maasin City Division, most significantly to the professional background and competencies of teachers handling learners with special educational needs in inclusive education. The results of the study may prove useful for guiding efforts by the teachers, the Department of Education, government agencies, and the general public in formulating policy in support of inclusive education.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the teachers' professional background and competence in inclusive education of selected schools of Maasin District 2 for the school year 2019 - 2020. Specifically, it aimed to determine the professional background of the teachers handling learners with special educational needs; determine the level of competence in key areas of social regard for learning, knowledge about inclusive education, and learners' diversity of the teachers handling learners with special educational needs; test the significant relationship between the professional background of the teachers in terms of the identified variables and the level of competence and the challenges met by the teachers handling learners with special educational needs in inclusive education?

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### Research Design

To determine the professional background and competence of teachers as well as the struggles and challenges of teachers handling LSENs in inclusive education, this research adopted both quantitative and qualitative research paradigms (mixed method designs). The use of quantitative design was used to collect and interpret statistical data. On the other hand, the qualitative method allowed the researcher to collect information through interviews used to collect data from the purposefully selected inclusive teachers from the selected schools who are handling inclusive education classes in Maasin District II of Maasin City Division. Considering the direct participation of the respondents in the study, various ethical issues will be considered during the data-gathering stage. Furthermore, the researcher collected and maintained documented ethical permission in accordance with the institution's standards.

### Research Respondents

The respondents of this study were the 30 teachers from different schools of Maasin District II of Maasin City Division who have learners with manifestations of disability based on the MFAT tool submitted to the district office. This tool suggests who will serve as candidate respondents for this study. The researcher asked permission from the District Office to look into data on the Mutli-Factored Assessment Tool (MFAT) to identify teachers who are handling learners with special educational needs.

**Table 1. Total Number of Respondents**

Name of School	Male	Female	Total
Maasin City SPED Center	1	7	8
Tomas Oppus Pilot School	0	5	5
Laboon Elementary School	0	4	4
Asuncion Integrated School	0	3	3
Bagtican Multigarde School	0	2	2
Ibarra Elementary School		5	5
Dongon Elementary School		2	2
Cagnituan Multigrade School		1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>

### Research Instrument

In this study, the researcher used two sets of survey questionnaires to come up with measurable data needed from the respondents. Part I - A is the professional background of the teachers in terms of education, training, and number of years of experience. Part II - B is for the level of competence. A checklist of a set of questions that were adopted from the National Competency-Based Teacher Standards (NCBTS) was used and provided to determine the teacher's level of performance. Part II was all about the challenges met by teachers in handling learners with special educational needs.

### Data Gathering and Analysis

The researcher asked permission letter from the School Division Superintendent of Maasin City Division to conduct research for the schools of Maasin District II. After all the teachers had been identified as respondents, they were informed immediately that they would be part of the study. During the distribution of the questionnaires, the teachers were explained and oriented about the study, and a survey questionnaire will be used. The survey was personally administered and collected by the researcher. The results were collected, tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted to determine the relationship

between the level of competence of teachers in inclusive education.

**Statistical Treatment of Data**

This mixed-method of study utilized the quantitative and qualitative analysis of data. Treatment for the quantitative aspects centers on descriptive-correlational statistical tests. For descriptive analysis, the frequency count was used to describe the cross-sectional comparison of data between professional background and years of teaching. Meanwhile, mean and standard deviation were used to describe the competence level of teachers by domain with respect to the dispersion of scores. On the other hand, the measure of significant relationship/correlation between teacher profile and their teaching competence was determined using Chi-Square analysis since variables are nominal by interval levels accompanied by ETA to get the strength of this association. Moreover, a person's experiences, perceptions, or even interactions are too complex, allowing qualitative research to be explored. According to Bhandari [5], qualitative research is used to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences that will analyze non-numerical data (e.g., text, video, or audio). The researcher utilized the participants' language to characterize the respondents. Coded data provides a narrative about the scene, person, or group, as well as a classification for data analysis. Also, the description and verbatim are considered in justifying the themes taken from the frequency of responses.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Table 2. Professional background in terms of Education, Training and Years of Service**

Profile		Frequency	Percentage
Educational Qualification	Bachelor's Degree	24	80 %
	With MA Units	1	3 %
	MA	5	17 %
Training	With Training	6	20 %
	Without Training	24	80 %
Length of Service	0-10	5	17 %
	11-20	15	50 %
	Above 20 years	10	33 %

Table 2 shows the cross-tabulation of data between educational qualification, Training profile of respondents and their years of teaching inclusive education based on the outcome of a one-shot descriptive survey made. This is to closely depict a specific proportion of teachers or extreme values with their educational qualification (EQ) and training with respect to all ranges of teachers' years of service. Cross-analysis

revealed that most of the respondents that 24 of the respondents are bachelor's degree graduates; only 1 has units of Master's degree, while the rest are full-pledge MAs.

It also shows that among the respondents, 15 have taught for 11-20 years, while there are 10 who have more than 20 years of teaching career while the remaining 5 respondents belong to the bracket of 0-10 years of teaching experience.

Looking closely at the sum, it can be gleaned that 24 of the respondents do not have any training relevant to inclusive education. This implies that the majority of the respondents lack training and further graduate education. In this implication, it can be noted from these results that the very common need among the respondents, as reflected in their profile, is having relevant training that is related to inclusive education and pursuing a graduate or master's degree.

As cited by Marcojos-Canon [6], training and development are designed for the professional growth of educators to improve the academic performance of the students. Training and seminars will capacitate the teacher's pedagogical skills to be used in the classroom discussion.

The effectiveness of the delivery of the lessons is attributed to many factors; it is strongly indicated that the training of the teachers contribute a huge impact on the teaching-learning process among learners, significantly those with special educational needs.

**Table 3. Level of Competence of LSEN Teachers in Inclusive Education**

Domain	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Social Regard of Learning	4.22	0.37	Highly Competent
Knowledge about Inclusive Education	3.33	0.98	Moderately Competent
Learners Diversity	3.96	0.50	Competent
Overall Mean	3.84	0.62	Competent

Legend: 4.20-5.00 (Highly Competent); 3.40-4.19 (Competent); 2.60-3.99 (Moderately Competent); 1.80-2.59 (Less Competent); 1.00-1.79 (Not Competent)

The result of the analysis revealed that teachers are highly competent in the "Social Regard of Learning," implying that these LSENs teachers understand the idea that teachers serve as positive and powerful role models of the value in the pursuit of different efforts to learn. Their action, statements, and different types of social interactions with students exemplify this aspect.

Meanwhile, in the Learner's Diversity domain, inclusive teachers handling LSENs are found to be "Competent." According to NCBTS [7], this domain emphasizes that teachers will use different teaching

strategies to cater to individual differences to ensure that all learners can attain the desired learning goals. Although competent in this aspect, to some extent, teachers in inclusive education still have more to consider related issues on diversity and develop new approaches to manage mainstreamed learners. UNESCO [8] emphasized that inclusive education is associated with the practice of including learners with disabilities in ordinary classrooms. Every child is unique, which influences his or her school experiences and performance. Findings of Ibe [9] state that an inclusive school is one that considers all the disparities that learners bring with them to school, despite of ethnicity, race, language, disability, ability, religion, and social and economic status.

On the domain "Knowledge about Inclusive Education," respondents are observed to be moderately competent. This indicates that teachers, to some extent, are able to understand the role of inclusive education as integral to today's education system, and as inclusive educators, they are able to fulfill their role in defining mainstreamed learning among diverse learners across learning stages. The moderate competence level implies that teachers of LSEN acquired prior understanding but still need and deeper understanding while there is more to develop among themselves in the process and implementation of inclusive education in terms of training, instructional delivery approaches, assessments, and classroom management. In the study of inclusive education Baguisa and Manaig [10], the teachers' role necessitates flexible thinking in terms of being resourceful and innovative to accommodate diversity among learners.

However, on average, the teachers are competent in inclusive education. This implies that teachers are competent enough to handle LSEN learners and able to manifest enough understanding of their role across different domains.

**Table 4. Relationship between Teacher's Professional background and their Competence to teach Inclusive Education**

Variables Tested		Test Used	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Independent	Dependent				
Educational Attainment	Teaching Competence on Inclusive Educ.	Chi-Square +ETA	.121	.999	Not Significant
Training Attended	Years of Service		.369**	.047*	Significant
			.055	.814	Not Significant

\*relationship is significant at  $\alpha = 5\%$  ( $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ ); \*\*Strength of correlation is moderate at  $.21 < r < .70$

Test on relationships via correlation revealed the significance of association between the profile of teacher-

respondents and their teaching competence. Results of analysis derived at 5% alpha, as reflected in Table 4, showed that from the 3 independent variables, training is found to be moderately significant ( $p\text{-value} = .047 < \alpha$ ), implying that teachers' prior training significantly relate to their competence in teaching inclusive education. This further implies that teacher's engagement to training that hone their capacity for inclusive education matters the most in their capability to work and deliver instruction effectively. Findings of Batsiou et al., [11] affirm this result showing how teachers' attitudes and teaching competence are influenced by the knowledge and information they have gained through training about inclusive education. Further, Landasan [12] asserted that teachers need to attend training on special education supported by parents, guidance counselors, nurses, teachers, and the DepEd district offices should include in their action plans training for the teachers who are handling children with special needs.

Competence in teachers may be acquired in many ways, but it is notably understood that training contributes a huge part in the delivery of an effective teaching-learning process. It is understood that training is an excellent avenue to upgrade teachers' KSAs, for it equips the teacher's necessary attributes needed to hasten the transfer of knowledge from the teachers to the learners, especially the learners with special educational needs.

**Table 5. Teachers' Encountered Challenges from their Experiences with LSEs**

Themes	Sample Verbatim	Description
Teachers make adjustments to LSEs' learning capability	<i>"Since each LSEN is a unique case, I have to modify my lessons to suit their level and individualize instruction as some of them exhibit problems &amp; disabilities. R-4</i>	Teachers make adjustments as to how they deliver the instruction and how they treat attention to individual LSEN to manage issues on their learning capabilities/disabilities
Behavioral problems of LSEs measure teacher's patience and understanding	<i>it was actually difficult for me to handle their behaviors bec. some of them have a short span of attention and</i>	LSEs exhibit behavioral issues such as short attention span, indifference, uncontrolled manifestations that test teacher's patience &

	<i>are sometimes irritable" R-10</i>	way of accommodating them
Unmet Instructional and professional needs of teachers	<i>"Sometimes, I cannot focus on LSEs bec. I am handling 2 grades, and I don't know how to handle them" R-6</i>	Teachers experience lack of support in terms of training, teaching strategies, classroom management strategies, IMs, teaching load, technical assistance & the like.
Weak Parental involvement in handling behaviors of LSEN	<i>"Some parents of special needs will be given an orientation on how to take care or train in dealing the kids" R-3</i>	Parents need to perform their role & work with teachers to soften behavioral issues through their support, follow-up, caring and managing their children's behavior

Experiences of teachers based on the themes clearly show how these teachers embraced the challenges of being with learners with special needs. There were difficulties and struggles encountered as they dealt with day-to-day tasks alongside the learner and school-related issues and unmet expectations that made it challenging for them to implement a productively inclusive education curriculum. Prevalent challenges include behavioral issues and problems attributed to learning disabilities that are common in mainstreamed classrooms where there are LSEs who have influenced teacher's level of approach towards handling classes in terms of instruction and classroom management. Individualizing lesson and adjusting/modifying teaching strategies to place in the shoes of every single LSEN and treating attentions in a motherly way are major mechanisms that inclusive education teachers do to address diversity despite the instructional needs and professional support that teachers cry for added with the poor involvement of parental support. These factors shared from the lived experiences provide evidence on the need for enhancing the implementation of inclusive education in the country.

Findings of some studies in the literature revealed challenges faced by teachers who teach children with developmental disability include the following; lack of training in special needs education and problems with literacy and numeracy among learners [13] [14].

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Increasing the competence among teachers in teaching Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN) relies significantly on building instructional capacity through training. Findings revealed that the majority of the respondents are bachelor's degree teaching within 11-15 years without training. Only one (1) teacher with CAR-MA is teaching within 16-20 years with training. Teachers with MA degrees are within 6-10 years of service without any training. Among the 30 respondents, only 6 were able to attend training relevant to inclusive education. Teachers, on average, perform competently in teaching Inclusive Education. However, they are highly competent in the domain of Social Regard for Learning. A correlation test between teachers' professional background (education, training, years of teaching) and their level of competence to teach inclusive education revealed that only teachers' training significantly relates to their teaching competence. Major challenges encountered by teachers from their lived experiences with learners with special educational needs (LSEN) include adjustment to learning capability, behavioral problems, unmet instructional/professional needs, and weak parental involvement in handling behaviors of LSEs.

Thus, the level of competence of teachers is realized through the provision of enough training and professional technical assistance. The school may opt to invest resources in training and the development of teachers to further bring out the output of the study, which is a division training workshop on teaching approaches and classroom management techniques for inclusive education teachers.

With the provision of inclusive in-service training, teachers are likely to become competent in addressing the growing challenges in the implementation of inclusive education. Teachers need to upgrade their techniques and approaches in the teaching-learning process through attending more training relevant to inclusive education.

The result of this study may serve as a basis for the policymaking of the school division in consideration of the needs of the teachers in the implementation of inclusive education.

Since there is limited research on inclusive education in the country, future research will be conducted to determine comprehensive teacher preparation, development programs, and services, which also include professional competence in inclusive pedagogy.

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