With Open Arms: Interfacing Classroom Inclusion Accommodation Modality and Self-Efficacy of General Education Teachers

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Abstract: Inclusive education democratizes access and opportunity for the education of learners with exceptionalities. At the forefront of this endeavor are the general education teachers or receiving teachers. The purpose of the study is to determine the interface between the self-efficacy of general education teachers and their classroom inclusion accommodation modality in instructional approaches and techniques, assessment of learning, classroom management in an inclusive setting, collaboration with the parents and special education teachers, and handling the behavior of the special learners. Following the descriptive correlational research design, a researcher-made survey questionnaire was administered to a purposively selected 30 elementary general education teachers handling inclusion classes. Findings indicated that a great extent of self-efficacy is displayed by general education teachers in their classroom behavior. They generally experience and deal with the behaviors of differently-abled students and sometimes adapt and utilize practices accommodating inclusive learners. It established a significant moderate negative correlation between the self-efficacy of general education teachers and their classroom inclusion accommodation modality. Cognizant of this, the general education teachers manifested their conviction, professional competence, and commitment to accommodate special learners in their classrooms. A training program is developed and proposed for the effective delivery of inclusion, to empower regular receiving teachers with appropriate competencies to meet these challenging teaching situations, and to improve the delivery of inclusive education among learners with exceptionalities.

Keywords: special education, inclusive education, teacher self-efficacy

Introduction

Delivering quality education to learners with certain exceptionalities is a primordial concern of the educational sector. To guarantee children's rights to appropriate education, inclusive classrooms are organized to address this urgency. This global trend towards inclusion has transformed regular classrooms into an academically neutral environment that provides equal opportunities for various abilities and talents or even the lack of them to be discovered or nurtured.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education through its DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009 contained the philosophy and general policies of inclusive education that require the support of stakeholders (Department of Education, 2009). At the forefront of delivering inclusive education, general education teachers can advocate inclusive education work by embracing inclusive education as a worthwhile idea, supporting school plans for delivering inclusive education, and establishing a harmonious relationship with special education teachers. This advocacy impinges on teachers' instructional capabilities and strategies to accommodate the diversity in abilities and capacities that exceptional education learners bring into the classroom. Such is particularly true for the general education receiving teachers handling inclusive learners. Variants of inclusion have been adopted to cater to this diversity. With the growing population of learners with special needs, a three-prong approach is adopted to provide access to special education programs in the Philippines through inclusion or placement with regular classes, organizing the mono-or-multi-grade self-contained class, and establishing a resource center program. However, of the targeted 2.2 million learners with exceptionalities in the country, only a small portion (2% of learners with special needs) received these services. Regular teachers most often receive mainstreamed children with disabilities or exceptionalities with the barest know-how on what to do or how to provide an appropriate education for these students. They may not have the professional preparation, the necessary teacher behaviors to deal with such situations, or an enthusiastic attitude toward including students with disabilities in regular classes (Cannon, Idol & West, 1992; Deutsch Smith, 1998; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003; Land, 2004).

Given the advocacy for inclusive education, the interface of the general education teachers' self-efficacy and their classroom inclusion accommodation modality in instructional approaches and techniques, assessment of learning, classroom management in an inclusive setting, collaboration with the parents and SPED teachers, and dealing with the behavior of the special learners provided inputs for a proposed intervention measure to improve the delivery of inclusive education.

Method

The descriptive-correlational research design was utilized with a purposive sampling of 30 public elementary non-Special Education or receiving teachers who handled inclusion classes were the participants of the study. The researcher-constructed questionnaire consisted of statements to gather information on the classroom instruction modality and self-efficacy, of which the latter was adapted from an online self-efficacy questionnaire. The reliability of the items was determined with a dry run to establish good internal consistency and reliability.

Result and Discussion

In Table 1, the overall weighted mean manifests the extent of the general education teachers' inclusion accommodation modality in their classrooms. In general, the general education teachers of inclusive children with disabilities sometimes utilize classroom accommodation modalities to provide for the educational needs of these pupils. In interacting with special learners in their classrooms, the regular receiving teachers deal always with the behavior of the special learners who needed special attention given that they are handling regular elementary students. More often than not, these regular receiving teachers are not provided with teacher assistants except pre-service student teachers who are only available for a certain number of training hours.

In implementing the Department of Education policy on inclusion, the regular receiving teachers sometimes provide instructional approaches and techniques, assessment of learning, classroom management, and undertake collaboration with parents and other special education teachers.

Table 1. Classroom Accommodation Modality of Inclusion Teachers

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Instructional approaches and techniques	3.90	Sometimes	4
2. Assessment of learning	4.09	Sometimes	3
3. Classroom management in inclusive settings	4.18	Sometimes	2
4. Collaboration with parents and Special Education teachers	3.65	Sometimes	5
5. Dealing with the behavior of special learners	4.68	Always	1
Overall Assessment	4.10	Sometimes	

These manifest the initiative of the regular receiving teachers to accommodate learners with special needs in their classrooms. Though this reflects resistance that most often regular receiving teachers feel when confronted with this situation (Subban, Round, & Sharma, 2018), their beliefs regarding their efficaciousness with inclusive education need to be immediately addressed. Likewise, it points to the need to capacitate these regular receiving teachers with the knowledge, skills, and competencies to sufficiently provide for the educational needs of these types of learners in an inclusive setting.

As reflected in Table 2, the general education teachers of children with exceptionalities have a highly observed self-efficacy in their work. Their dedication and commitment in their chosen field of the profession are very highly observed in the affective processes where trust in their teachers, feeling safe in school, and teacher-parent collaboration are essentially felt by their students in the inclusive setting. This is also supported by cross-cultural studies which confirmed that overall attitudes towards inclusion relate to self-efficacy, particularly, efficacy in collaboration (Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nel & Malinen, 2011). This manifests the commitment, dedication, and professionalism of the regular receiving teachers to accommodate every learner in their classroom.

Three indicators obtained weighted means showing the highly observed teacher self-efficacy. The general education teachers manifested a highly observed self-efficacy in the academic processes by providing coaching and instructional support with materials and equipment to students who encounter difficulty in their academic tasks or activities. Secondly, motivational processes are highly observed by encouraging a cooperative working environment in the classroom, encouraging students who lack interest in schoolwork and controlling disruptive behavior in the classroom as well. Thirdly, selection processes are highly observed by providing students with a variety of activities, assisting them in heterogeneous settings, and reducing student absenteeism or drop-out. However, innovation and change processes are slightly observed. As 21st-century learners, these children with special needs are exposed to digital or computer technologies in their homes or the community. With digital migrants even among children with special needs, teachers are most often challenged to have proficiency in using digital technologies in their inclusive classrooms. Not only that these technologies facilitate learning but they create motivation and sustain the interest of learners in their learning tasks. With easily available internet access in the environment, general education teachers may collaborate with parents or guardians to constantly engage children with special needs in their studies.

Table 2. Self-efficacy of General Education Teachers

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Academic processes	**4.00**	**Highly observed**	**2**
1. Keep students on the task on difficult assignments	4.03	Highly observed	
2. Provide needed instructional materials and equipment	3.99	Highly observed	
3. Provide coaching to students who have low performance	3.98	Highly observed	3
Motivational processes	**3.98**	**Highly observed**	
1. Get students to work well together	4.11	Highly observed	
2. Encourage students who lack interest in schoolwork	3.85	Highly observed	
3. Get children to follow disruptive behavior in the classroom	3.98	Highly observed	
Affective processes	**4.43**	**Very highly observed**	**1**
1. Increase collaboration between teachers and parents	4.56	Very highly observed	
2. Get students to trust their teachers	4.08	Highly observed	
3. Make students feel safe in school	4.64	Very highly observed	
Selection Processes	**3.83**	**Highly observed**	**4**
1. Provide students with a variety of activities	3.98	Highly observed	
2. Assist students in heterogeneous settings	3.30	Highly observed	
3. Reduce student absenteeism/drop-out	4.22	Very highly observed	
Innovation and Change Processes	**1.98**	**Slightly observed**	**5**
1. Utilize multimedia instructional technologies	2.21	Slightly observed	
2. Engage in professional development activities	1.84	Slightly observed	
3. Collaborate with colleagues in instructional planning	1.90	Slightly observed	
Overall Assessment	3.64	Highly observed	

There is the least self-efficacy in responding to innovation and change in the utilization of multimedia instructional technologies, engaging in professional development activities, and collegial collaboration in instructional planning. These weak areas point to possible intervention measures and implications for future professional development provisions (Reina, Roldan, Hemmelmayr & Klavina, 2019). As for 21st-century teachers, regular receiving teachers recognize the need to be relevant to their digital natives in their classrooms. But a greater challenge would be able to adapt these digital or computer technologies in an inclusive classroom. Hence, there is a need to provide capacity-building activities. With better skills, the regular receiving teachers would have greater confidence and self-efficacy in handling inclusive classes since it is expected that teachers have been prepared to teach all students (Tournaki & Samuels, 2016).

As shown in Table 3, the R-value of -0.7244 and a coefficient of determination of 0.5248 implies a moderate negative correlation exists between the self-efficacy of general education teachers and their classroom inclusion accommodation modalities. The p-value of <0.0001 indicates that the result is significant at $p<.05$. It can be inferred that their convictions, professional competence, and commitment propel them to accommodate special learners in their classrooms and provide for their education.   Despite their resistance to implementing inclusive practices, general education teachers accommodate their inclusive students primarily because it is a policy. Even without the prior training to handle inclusive classes and full self-efficacy to expectedly deliver on the instructional requirements and educational needs for these children with special needs, these teachers have the basic teaching proficiency to handle effectively this type of learners. Although the teachers' readiness, motivation, and ability to adopt inclusive teaching practices in their classrooms may be influenced by self-efficacy beliefs (Subban, Round & Sharma, 2018), it is their professional and technical know-how that can facilitate the effective delivery of instructional services to these types of the learning environment.

Table 3. Correlation between General Education Teachers' Self-Efficacy and Classroom Inclusion Accommodation Modality

Variables	R-value	P-value	Decision on H_o

Self-efficacy of general education teachers and classroom accommodation modality	-0.7244	<0.0001	Significant at p<.05

The diversity inside the inclusive classroom can be a gargantuan challenge to the regular receiving teachers whose regular students are already characterized by behavioral, attitudinal, and social differences. Without proper training, and adequate experience in inclusive education and pupils' type of disability, meeting the student's educational, emotional, and social needs would require a teacher's strength of personality and multi-faceted instructional delivery strategies to provide the best possible education for inclusive learners. This unique classroom situation requires preparing and supporting teachers to teach interactively since they may encounter attitudes of indifference and negativity toward the inclusion of learners with special needs at a regular basic education level (De Boer, Jan Pijl & Minnaert, 2010). While there are teachers who have openness to accepting the challenge of inclusion, general education teachers were strongly negative about it (Geronimo, 2014). Positive perception, however, emerges towards the end of the process of inclusion (Halvorsen & Neary, 2001). Reinforcing the initiative to improve the regular teachers' preparedness to handle inclusive classes, the provision of effective inclusion strategies and teacher training serve as the keys to the success of inclusion education (Yang & Rusli, 2012; Pantic & Florian, 2015). With greater familiarization with inclusion, regular receiving teachers may change their attitudes and become committed implementers in the classroom.

While advocating for access, teachers' perceptions and beliefs about inclusion and application of various inclusive pedagogical practices, inadequate quality support, and limited education in special needs continue to hinder the implementation of quality inclusive education which can be manifested in the demands for reducing class size, more instructional materials and adding of services (Mckenzie, 2010; Mukhopadhyay, Nenty & Abosi, 2012; Dueck, 2003). This situation demands the effort and initiative to address capacity-building among the teachers who will implement the inclusion program. This may be done during the pre-service phase of teacher preparation and as in-service training for all teachers.

Inclusion is viewed as a process where children with special needs are integrated into a regular class together with typical peers and their full acceptance to the school system where SPED teachers collaborate with regular teachers in creating and implementing appropriate instruction as well as families and other professionals to effect change and social justice (Geronimo, 2014; Halvorsen & Neary, 2001). Inclusive education, on the other hand, is a class composed of students with disabilities and regular students in chronologically age-appropriate general education in their schools and a developmental approach targeting the educational needs of all children, youth, and adults (Halvorsen & Neary, 2001; Esmaquel II, 2012; Allen & Schwartz, 2000). However, among regular receiving teachers, there is an overall sentiment, resistance, and less favorable attitude to implement inclusive practices and anxiety about the possible consequences of children with disabilities in the classrooms (Subban, Round & Sharma, 2018; Savolainen, Engelbert, Nel, & Malinen, 2011; Desombre, Lamotte & Jury, 2019).

As a result of the investigation, the regular teachers provide within the mainstreamed classroom appropriate accommodation modality of inclusive learners which are geared to their capabilities and needs as well as any support and assistance that these inclusive learners may need. Hence, the teachers' professional commitment transcends their self-efficacy. This underscores the necessity that general education teachers should possess the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions to successfully teach students in inclusive classrooms as well as develop curriculum materials to enlighten them about students with disabilities such as materials that teach children about differences, including disabilities (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003; Grskovic & Trzcinka, 2011).

These findings have a practical implication in concurrence with the widely accepted impression that teachers generally struggle to deliver instruction effectively to students with exceptionalities in regular classrooms. Nonetheless, this does not affect their self-efficacy since they can be assisted to devise several strategies for implementing inclusion and provide for the educational needs of their students with exceptionalities. It has been shown that teacher professional development program may have a positive impact in effecting a positive attitudinal change among the regular receiving teachers (Tournaki & Samuels, 2016; Saloviita, 2018; Reina, Healy, Roldan, Hemmelmayr & Klavina, 2019). Generally, capacity-building programs are some effective means by which in-service teachers are prepared to implement radically new policies such as inclusion.

Conclusion

A myriad of factors affects how teachers accommodate children with exceptionalities in an inclusive classroom environment. With the basic inspiration of guiding the future generation, teachers adapt to challenges that they encounter in their daily teaching engagement. With the policy of inclusion as advocated to bridge the discriminating barrier in abilities and capacities among students, regular teachers generally find themselves wanting in their preparedness to effectively implement this program at the classroom level. This is partly not their fault since pre-service teacher preparation at the elementary level, except for those pursuing special

education as their field of specialization, is aimed at training generalist practitioners. Thus inclusion poses a great challenge even to a veteran teacher. To achieve instructional effectiveness, regular receiving teachers utilize a variety of instructional strategies to accommodate the heterogeneity of their inclusive classroom. Despite their ill-preparedness, they can transcend the uncertainty of their self-efficacy in meeting the challenge of an inclusive classroom. Hence, the regular receiving teachers' innate love of teaching and their professional commitment more than their self-efficacy impact on maximizing their classroom engagement of their inclusive learners.

To assist general education teachers provide for the educational needs of learners with disabilities in an inclusive classroom, there is a need to provide a professional development activity that is intended to enrich their preparedness as effective and efficient instructional leaders. To respond to this need, a two-day training program is hereby proposed to provide support, assistance, and improvement of pedagogical practices of regular receiving teachers in an inclusive classroom and address concerns on classroom instruction of children with special needs. This training program aims to equip the in-service teacher with the relevant knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively implement inclusion in their regular classrooms. It consists of six parts: (a) situation and legal mandates of inclusive education, (b) inclusive education: definitions and concepts, (c) preparing the school for inclusive education, (d) effective pedagogy in a digital milieu, (e) assessing children with special needs in an inclusive classroom, and (f) home-community involvement. It is, likewise, recommended that the pre-service teacher education curricula should integrate pedagogical concepts and techniques in implementing inclusion so that even at an earlier stage, prospective teachers would develop their readiness, motivation, attitude, adaptability, and flexibility to utilize inclusion teaching practices in their classrooms.

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