

Stakeholders' Awareness and Attitude Towards Inclusive Education in Philippine Elementary Schools

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Abstract. This study focuses on the relationship between stakeholders' level of awareness and attitude towards IE in mainstream classrooms in the selected five (5) elementary schools in West Isulan District, Division of Sultan Kudarat, Philippines. The study used a comparative and descriptive-correlational research design, which involved a total enumeration of 611 respondents. Through a researcher-made and validated survey questionnaire, the study found that stakeholders were highly aware of the significance, difficulties, and policies, and expressed very positive attitudes regarding mindset, beliefs, and actions towards IE, which further indicates that there is a positive attitude towards those with impairments if there is awareness regarding IE. Meanwhile, using the LSD test, there is a notable distinction in the level of understanding and the level of attitude among the different stakeholders, with principals having the highest mean. However, although teachers have a very positive attitude towards IE, they still obtained the lowest mean because they only have a basic understanding of how to teach and understand children with needs, not in addressing students with emotional and behavioral difficulties. A significant correlation was found between awareness and attitude, underscoring the need for targeted professional development, especially for teachers to enhance understanding and better practice implementing IE.

Keywords: Inclusive education; Mainstream classroom; Elementary school.

1.0 Introduction

Inclusive education ensures that all learners have equal access to education regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. This study aims to examine stakeholders' awareness and attitudes, specifically regarding their understanding of the concept, importance, challenges, and relevant policies of inclusive education. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on how inclusive education can be more effectively implemented in mainstream classrooms, particularly in underserved areas. Understanding stakeholders' mental states, beliefs, and behavioral dispositions is essential for crafting interventions and policies that promote inclusivity in education.

Taking every learner with different capabilities into one classroom and providing quality education despite their differences are the goals of inclusive education. Children have diverse characteristics, each with strengths and weaknesses (Peters, 2004). Each one is eligible for education (EFA, 1990; Peters, 2004), and teachers must advocate for equity education by supporting them through teaching and learning processes (MDG, 2015). If those children were continually excluded from a mainstream classroom, their health, livelihood, and social participation would

be affected (Jodl et al., 2023). Likewise, this success relies on the awareness and attitude of various stakeholders within the educational system. Catolico and Cabanlit (2023) highlight the broader societal benefits, upholding students' rights and facilitating and lowering prejudice in an inclusive society. If there is awareness regarding IE, an increase in positive attitudes is associated with increased social interactions, high academic performance, and improved well-being and self-worth in students with impairments (Jincy & Anu, 2024; Jardinez & Natividad, 2024).

However, several challenges persist. These include limited government support for teachers, insufficient training in crafting Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and inadequate classroom resources (Muega, 2019; Ecoben, 2019). Collaboration among parents, teachers, and local education committees is essential for promoting inclusive practices (Lapeña et al., 2023; Baguisa et al., 2019). Moreover, many educators question whether their understanding aligns with the international definitions and requirements (Muega, 2016). In connection, Byrne (2020) also notes that nations have difficulties in declarations, treaties, general comments, and guidelines due to the varying set of international policies and standards on inclusion in an educational context. Despite these issues, the Philippines continues to push for inclusive education through various initiatives such as DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019 and the "MATATAG" agenda outlined in DepEd Order No. 14, s. 2023 (Catolico, 2023; Llego, 2022). Meanwhile, inclusive education is not accessible in some places in the Philippines, especially in these underserved areas. Although there was no special education available in these schools, especially the elementary schools in West Isulan District, Division of Sultan Kudarat, Philippines, there were still parents who chose to enroll their children due to the very far distance from the city schools, which have IE teachers (SPED) and classrooms.

Given these conditions, this study is timely and significant. It provides an in-depth analysis of stakeholders' awareness and attitudes toward inclusive education, which is crucial for developing informed, effective, and context-sensitive educational policies and projects for more effective and equitable implementation of inclusive education.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative method and a descriptive correlational research design, which is comparative and correlational. Descriptive correlational research design involves gathering data to determine the strength and direction of relationships between variables (Creswell, 2014). It measures the trends and relationships within a sample without manipulating the variables (McCombes, 2023). It involves comparison, for it establishes significant differences between groups of subjects based on the criteria. Thus, it allows us to describe a population and look for the relationship between the stakeholders' awareness and prevailing factors of stakeholders' attitudes towards inclusive education.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted in selected elementary schools in the West Isulan District, Division of Sultan Kudarat, Philippines. Five (5) different stakeholders were utilized as respondents, including teachers, school heads, PTA Officers, parents, and pupils. West Isulan District is situated in the western part of the municipality of Isulan. This area is an urbanizing rural area rich in agricultural land, forestland, and pasture/grassland. Its road distance from the municipality is 10km to 15 km from the city.

2.3 Research Respondents

The total population of stakeholders in the selected five schools in West Isulan District, elementary teaching personnel, is seventy (70) teachers, five (5) school heads, forty-two (42) PTA Officers, 233 Grade six parents, and 275 Grade six pupils, with 611 respondents in all. The study employed a total enumeration sample at a 5% margin of error and a 5% confidence interval. All teachers, school heads, PTA Officers, Grade six (6) parents, and pupils were taken from the population. Respondents were chosen regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, color, abilities, or disabilities.

2.4 Research Instrument

This study used a researcher-made and validated survey questionnaire to measure stakeholders' awareness and attitude towards IE. The study followed ethical guidelines, and the respondents' participation was voluntary. To ensure the integrity of the results, education and research enthusiasts reviewed the researcher-made

questionnaires to meet the objectives of this study. A pilot test with a small sample of stakeholders as respondents identified ambiguities and assessed the test questions' flow and relevance to the study's objectives.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The study has undergone methodical processes to collect data. First, approval must be obtained from the graduate school dean to carry out the study, and then permission must be sought from the school division superintendent and coordinated with the school heads. Second, the researcher explained the study's rationale and distributed the questionnaire to the five stakeholders who would fill it out. Third, the researcher personally collected the questionnaire once the respondents completed it. Lastly, the researcher assured the respondents that all their responses would remain confidential and that the study's findings would only be used for academic and educational purposes.

2.6 Data Analysis

The gathered data were initially analyzed using descriptive statistics. Mean and standard deviations were used to determine the stakeholders' awareness levels and attitudes. Meanwhile, to assess whether there is a significant difference in the level of awareness and attitude of the different stakeholders towards IE, one-way ANOVA and Least Significant Difference (LSD) test were used. Moreover, the Pearson r product-moment correlation coefficient was employed to examine the correlation between the two variables. The correlation coefficient is used to measure the frequency and relationships among variables. Its value can range from ± 0.00 to 0.29 (Curtis, 2016). All tests were done at a 0.05 level of significance. Calculations were carried out using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 2016.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to ethical standards. Participation was entirely voluntary, with respondents having the option to withdraw at any time if they felt uncomfortable. Every effort was made to minimize potential physical, social, or psychological harm. The dignity and well-being of the participating teachers, school heads, PTA officers, Grade six parents, and pupils were consistently safeguarded. All research data were kept confidential, and the rights of the respondents were protected to maintain scientific and academic integrity. Additionally, results were communicated ethically and adequately to prevent plagiarism or research misconduct.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the level of stakeholders' awareness across various dimensions. Stakeholders demonstrate a high level of awareness in inclusive education regarding teachers' concept ($M=4.41$; $SD=0.88$) and implementation importance ($M=4.33$; $SD=0.91$). The results indicate that stakeholders are highly aware of the concept and importance of implementing inclusive education. Further, the results show that these indicators generated the highest mean of awareness among the rest. The level of awareness was also explored on different samples using the same scale, showing the same high level of awareness among stakeholders towards IE (Toong, 2019; Jincy & Anu, 2024; Sharma & Giri, 2020). Interestingly, increasing awareness of IE could help students become more accepting and see the importance of each one, encouraging collaboration, reducing conflict, and enhancing the caliber of learning (Foster, 2020; Dewi, 2024).

Table 1. *Level of Awareness towards IE among the Different Stakeholders*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Teachers' Concept of IE	4.41	0.88	Highly Aware
Importance of Implementing IE	4.33	0.91	Highly Aware
National and International Policies and Projects of IE	4.18	0.96	Aware
Issues in Implementing IE	4.19	1.00	Aware
Total Measure	4.28	0.94	Highly Aware

On the other hand, as shown in the table, stakeholders got a mean score of 4.19 ($SD=1.00$) on the issues in implementing IE and 4.18 ($SD=0.96$) on the national and international policies and projects regarding IE. It can be noted that these indicators got the lowest mean scores among the rest of the indicators, showing the stakeholders' understanding of inclusive education. This is also observable in the studies conducted on different groups using the same scale (Young, 2024; Papadakaki et al., 2022; Chary & Perumal, 2022). It could be inferred that some respondents were deprived of the information, which results in minimal awareness of the issues, policies, and projects of inclusive education (Boyle & Allen, 2023).

Table 2 presents the results of stakeholders' attitudes towards inclusive education. The result revealed that stakeholders' have a consistently very positive attitude when it comes to their value of belief or feeling ($M=4.35$; $SD=0.92$), mental state conscious or unconscious ($M=4.34$; $SD=0.89$), and predisposition to a behavior or action ($M=4.33$; $SD=0.89$) with an overall total measure of 4.34 (0.90). This suggests that stakeholders have very positive attitudes towards inclusive education. The positive attitudes were also explored using the same scale, showing the same positive attitudes towards inclusive education (Deeba, 2023; Islam & Ahsan, 2022; Singh, 2025). Additionally, explicit/conscious attitudes can draw a positive and constructivist perspective on inclusion, and there is no concrete evidence that people are ignorant of their indirect attitudes (Bornert-Ringleb et al., 2020; Gawronski et al., 2006). Further, someone's belief can contribute to their attitude toward handling inclusive classrooms (Dignath et al., 2022).

Table 2. *Level of Attitude towards IE among Different Stakeholders*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Mental State Conscious or Unconscious	4.34	0.89	Very Positive
A Value of Belief or Feeling	4.35	0.92	Very Positive
A Predisposition to a Behavior or Action	4.33	0.89	Very Positive
Total Measure	4.34	0.90	Very Positive

Result reveals that the mean values for awareness range from 4.25 to 4.64. Using One-Way Analysis of Variance, there is a notable distinction among the awareness of the different stakeholders in West Isulan District at the 1% level of significance since the computed F value of 5.045 is greater than the F tabular value of 4.89 at df error of 15. Furthermore, using the Least Significant Difference (LSD) test, principals obtained the highest mean of 4.64, comparable to PTA officers (4.47). Meanwhile, pupils received the lowest mean of 4.25, comparable to the parents (4.26). Despite that, all stakeholders obtained an overall mean for their awareness interpreted as highly aware; however, a stricter procedure using statistics obtained a significant difference among stakeholders due to the different standards used. Further, this implies that principals and the PTA officers have a higher level of awareness towards IE than the rest of the three stakeholders, as perceived by the respondents, which can shed light on promoting building bridges and relationships between schools and communities (Khaleel et al., 2021; Mbua, 2023).

Table 3. *Test of Difference on Stakeholders' Awareness of IE*

Stakeholders	Mean*
Pupils	4.25 ^b
Parents	4.26 ^b
Teachers	4.34 ^b
PTA Officers	4.47 ^{ab}
Principal	4.64 ^a

CV= 3.38%, LSD value @ 1% = 0.30

**Means having similar superscripts are not significantly different using the LSD test

Using One-Way Analysis of Variance, the results revealed that there is a difference in the level of attitude across dimensions among the different stakeholders at a 1% level of significance since the computed F value of 8.40 is greater than the F tabular value of 5.99 at df error of 10. Further analysis using the LSD test showed that principals obtained the highest mean of 4.64, followed by a comparable mean of 4.59 by the PTA officers, and pupils with a mean of 4.37 (see Table 4). Consequently, teachers received the lowest mean of 4.16, comparable to parents, who received a mean of 4.28. This indicates that the principals, PTA officers, and the pupils have similar perceptions of the level of attitude toward IE. On the other hand, despite having a very positive attitude, teachers still obtained the lowest mean (4.16) among the rest of the stakeholders. This suggests that principals possessed the highest attitude towards inclusive education, which results in enhanced social interaction and harmonious teaching and learning processes (Rendon et al., 2023).

Table 4. *Test of Difference on Stakeholders' Attitude towards IE*

Stakeholders	Mean*
Pupils	4.37 ^{abc}
Parents	4.28 ^{bc}
Teachers	4.16 ^c
PTA Officers	4.59 ^{ab}
Principal	4.64 ^a

CV = 2.78% , LSD value @ 1% = 0.317

**Means having similar superscripts are not significantly different using the LSD test

The correlation coefficient reported in the table is 0.64. It indicates a moderate positive correlation, which means there is a dependable relationship between stakeholders' level of awareness towards IE and the level of attitude. The t-computed value of 19.77 is greater than the t-critical at 1.96, which indicates that the correlation observed is statistically significant and not due to chance. This indicates a dependable relationship between the stakeholders' awareness of IE and the attitude level. Moreover, the R^2 which is the coefficient of determination of 0.41, indicates that the awareness towards IE contributed 41% to the attitude, while the rest (59%) was attributed to other variables. The findings suggest that the more knowledgeable someone is about the principles and benefits of inclusive practices, the more likely they are to have a positive attitude to inclusion in educational settings. School administrators and educational institutions in the West Isulan District may advocate for more significant emphasis on inclusive education within the curriculum and teacher preparation program. Unlike previous studies (Papadakaki, 2022; Kumar & Rajitha, 2022; Masbaño, 2023), this paper found a significant correlation between the level of awareness and attitude towards inclusive education.

Table 5. *Pearson r Correlation between the Level of Stakeholders' Awareness and Attitude towards Inclusive Education*

Predictor	n	df	Pearson r	t _{comp}	t _{crit}	Interpretation	Remarks
Awareness Attitude	611	609	0.64	19.77	1.96	Moderate positive correlation	significant

$R^2 = 0.41$

Note: significant at 0.5 level

4.0 Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight a positive correlation between the level of awareness and attitude toward inclusive education. Individuals with a higher understanding of inclusive education's concept, importance, national and international policies and projects, and issues are likely to exhibit a more positive attitude toward its implementation. As stakeholders such as teachers, school heads, students, PTA officers, and parents work towards creating a more inclusive environment, increasing awareness through awareness drives, training, and workshops may be conducted to sustain effectively the implementation of inclusivity among schools and the community.

Considering the overall research findings, the researchers believe this paper offers a valuable assessment of stakeholders' awareness and attitude towards inclusive education in a specific sample and context. This paper confirms the high psychometric qualities of measuring the awareness and attitude of IE in a large sample, including the LGUs and government officials supporting inclusive education systems. Although the findings of this study provide valuable data, some limitations can be noted. Given the study's focus on a particular sample, it is recommended to investigate teachers' readiness towards IE about classroom resources that can be noted based on the characteristics of the population, particularly the mainstream classrooms in rural areas. At this stage, scale development studies should incorporate additional reliability and validity assessment using other statistical methods. Finally, to better understand the awareness and attitude of stakeholders towards inclusive education, further scholarly research is needed to explore its associations with additional factors and variables.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

The authors contributed equally to each section and reviewed and approved the final version of the work.

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7.0 Conflict of Interest

The authors affirm having no conflict of interest with the publication of this paper.

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