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Research Article

Knowledge and Skills Competence of Special Education Teachers in Ilocos Norte

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education has led to a major paradigm shift in the Philippines' education system. The establishment of inclusive learning resource centers, through the enactment of Republic Act 11650, has served a major role in uplifting inclusive education nationwide. However, this mandate, with all its positive ideas and visions, seems challenging for the Department of Education, particularly for teachers. Aside from the challenges with facilities and equipment, special education teachers also needed pedagogical and professional support. This descriptive-correlational study was conducted to determine the knowledge and skills competence of 18 purposively identified special education teachers from Special Education Centers and Inclusive Learning Resource Centers in the province of Ilocos Norte. Results reveal that they have high knowledge and skill competence across 20 indicators, with weighted means of 4.03 and 4.16, respectively. Meanwhile, it was also revealed that there is a positive correlation between these variables, with an R-value of 0.81 and a p-value of <0.0001. This only signifies that their level of knowledge is at par with their skill execution. However, the findings also stressed the need to strengthen their knowledge and skills through rigorous seminars and training to equip them with the skills needed to teach learners with special needs.

Keywords: *Inclusive education, Knowledge competence, Special education teachers, Skill competence, Philippines*

Background

Education is deemed critically significant for every Filipino citizen, ensuring that any individual with the ambition to pursue

knowledge can enroll in educational institutions without bias based on gender, age, religious beliefs, creed, socioeconomic background, social or ethnic identity, political affili-

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ations, or physical or mental capabilities (Philippine Constitution, Article XIV, 1987). Within the framework of the SDGs, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality), it is stipulated that educational opportunities must be equitable and accessible to all learners, irrespective of any physical, emotional, or cognitive conditions. In response to the imperative for equitable access to high-quality education, Inclusive Education (IE) has been formally established. Inclusive education is not simply a matter of privilege; it is a fundamental right afforded to every child. It advocates for superior and equitable educational opportunities for all individuals, regardless of characteristics that may predispose them to marginalization, based on their educational needs or societal status.

For instance, the Philippines is developing policies to support inclusive education, including Special Education (SPED) schools for students with special needs. Senate Bill 1414, introduced in 2017, seeks to create learning resource centers for children with special needs to ensure they have access to educational opportunities. On the other hand, Republic Act 7277 mandates provisions for ramps, Braille textbooks, and sign language interpreters to support students with disabilities. Meanwhile, the establishment of Inclusive Education (IE) in the Philippines is articulated in Republic Act 11650, known as the "Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education Act" (LAWPHil, 2022).

With the enactment of RA 11650, municipalities across the country began developing inclusive learning resource centers to cater to the educational needs of learners with special needs. However, given the current state of the educational system, it is difficult for the government to rapidly develop state-of-the-art facilities, which are necessary to fully achieve the aim of an inclusive education. In addition, challenges with facilities, funding, and equipment have been persistent and must be resolved to realize the law's very aim. Aside from the problem of scarce equipment and facilities, the competence of special education teachers in delivering instruction and fulfilling their responsibilities is also in question.

Quizana and Espiritu (2023) argued that teachers should fully equip themselves with knowledge, skills, and an understanding of what an inclusive classroom looks like and how it works. These skill sets will be useful to them in handling special cases and addressing relevant problems that may arise from time to time. They further emphasized that teachers should be fully aware of their duties and responsibilities and avoid bias and negative judgments toward their learners with special needs to prevent problems. Hence, without proper training and support for teachers, an ILRC will not succeed, despite having all the high-end facilities.

In a study by Bañez (2023), it was found that the lack of professional development and training for teachers in the country limits Filipino teachers' ability to address the needs of an inclusive classroom. It is important to note that some of these learners with special needs are introduced to a mainstream classroom; however, only a few teachers know how to handle them. Meanwhile, De Arao and Fontanilla (2024) studied the competence level of SPED teachers and found that they are moderately competent in providing quality education to their learners. This rating reflects the problems encountered during the transition of the educational curriculum, in which learners with special needs are now part of the mainstream. Moreover, Cabradilla (2023) emphasizes that even when teachers engage in professional development and integrate inclusive teaching methods, they still need training and seminars to equip them with the necessary skills. Cohitmingao (2024) further stressed the importance of teacher training in ensuring that teachers, whether graduates of a special education degree or not, will be capable of nurturing the needs of a learner with special needs.

In connection with these ideas, special needs education teachers in Ilocos Norte particularly face significant challenges when it comes to teaching and handling learners with special needs. Since most of the ILCRs in the province are newly installed, there are persisting problems when it comes to teaching and learning. Associated with these challenges is the level of knowledge and skills of teachers in special education. It is in this context that the researcher conducted this study to determine

the knowledge and skills competence of special education teachers in various special education (SPED) centers and inclusive learning resource centers (ILRCs) in the province of Ilocos Norte. Since the establishment of ILRCs in the province has recently been strengthened, there is a wide methodological gap in studies like this, which has ignited the researcher's curiosity to delve into this topic.

Research Questions

This study aimed to understand the current state of special education teachers' knowledge and skills in working with learners with special needs.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the special education teachers' level of knowledge and competence?
2. What is the special education teachers' level of skills competence?
3. Is there a significant relationship between special education teachers' level of knowledge and skills competence?
4. What implications can be drawn from the results?

Methods

Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design to determine the relationship between the knowledge and skills competence of special education teachers. It is descriptive in nature, as it sought to understand the status of their knowledge and skills. Likewise, it is correlational as it stresses how these two variables affect each other.

Population and Sampling Procedure

The respondents of this study are special education teachers in the province of Ilocos Norte, specifically within its three schools' divisions: Division of Batac City (CSDB), Division of Ilocos Norte (SDOIN), and Division of Laoag City (SDOLC). Purposively, 18 respondents were identified from all the pre-identified SPED centers and ILRCs. These teachers were selected based on three criteria: (1) a license holder; (2) have been working as a SPED teacher for a year; and (3) either serving under

a DepEd Plantilla position or funded by the Provincial Government or Local Government Units.

Research Instrument

A two-part survey questionnaire was used to gather the necessary data for this study. The first phase collected demographic information from respondents, limited to age, sex, school division, highest educational attainment, length of service, and the number of seminars and training sessions related to special education they attended.

Meanwhile, the next part used a five-point Likert scale to assess respondents' knowledge and skill competence. The tool was adapted from the instrument developed by the Council for Exceptional Children (2022). The instrument has gone validation by experts in the field of special education to ensure that the instrument fits with the aim of the study.

Data Gathering Procedures

Initially, ethical clearance was obtained from the University Research Ethics and Review Board (URERB) to ensure the study's validity. Permission to conduct the study was also sought from the College Dean. Letters were also sent to each Division Superintendent requesting teacher participation. Meanwhile, letters of request were also furnished to the respective school heads of the identified respondents.

Upon acceptance of the approval sheet, data collection was conducted via an online platform. The link was also sent via a chat group and published through Facebook.

Data Analysis

The data were tabulated, organized, analyzed, and interpreted using descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, means, and Pearson's r correlation, with a 0.05 level of significance.

Ethical Considerations

This study followed the research protocol prescribed by the URERB to ensure that no participant was forced. It was ensured that their participation was voluntary and that no personal and private information would be disclosed without their consent. Furthermore, no

monetary or other compensation was given to the respondents.

Result and Discussion

Knowledge Competence of Special Education Teachers

Table 1 presents the 20 criteria for assessing the knowledge competence of special education teachers. The table shows that the respondents possess a very high level of knowledge with 1 of 20 indicators. Specifically,

they are very aware of existing rules and regulations that protect the welfare of these learners, with a mean score of 4.22. Meanwhile, the respondents are highly knowledgeable across all indicators, with a weighted mean of 4.03. This implied that the respondents have initial knowledge of the fundamental ideas and information related to special education. However, it also leaves significant room for improvement to further strengthen the knowledge and competence of special education teachers.

Table 1: Knowledge competence of SpEd teachers in Ilocos Norte

Statements	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
1. I know the principles, standards, and policies that guide ethical practice.	4.11	High
2. I know personal and cultural biases and differences, and how they may influence one's practice.	4.11	High
3. I have all the knowledge regarding professional growth opportunities for continued learning.	3.89	High
4. I know the cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and language development that impacts milestones of students with disabilities compared to typically developing peers.	4.00	High
5. I know the educational challenges manifested as a result of varying disabilities.	4.00	High
6. I know the effects of cultural and linguistic diversity on the educational process and relationships between school, home, and community.	3.89	High
7. I know the effect of speech and language development on the academic and non-academic learning of students with disabilities.	3.89	High
8. I know the nonverbal modes of communication used by students with disabilities, including augmentative and alternative communication.	4.11	High
9. I know the purposes of supports, services, and specially designed instruction that provide access to the general education curriculum.	3.89	High
10. I have a general knowledge of categories from federal law for students with disabilities	4.00	High
11. I know that individual learner characteristics are the primary basis for instructional programming and decision-making, rather than disability categories or educational placement	4.11	High
12. I know that there are district/agency policies and procedures for protecting the safety, health, and well-being of learners and school personnel	4.22	Very High
13. I know the rights and responsibilities of students with disabilities and the personnel who serve them	4.00	High

Statements	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
14. I know the effects of SPED educators' proximity and fading of SPED educator support on student engagement, learning, and independence	4.00	High
15. I know the rationale and methods for formative and summative assessment	4.00	High
16. I know the accommodations on students' IEPs and procedures for proctoring accommodated tests	4.11	High
17. I know the concepts of differentiated instruction, accommodations, modifications, high leverage practices, and specially designed instruction	4.11	High
18. I know the instructional strategies and instructional technology to support the individual students' learning	4.11	High
19. I know the basic principles of positive behavior support to promote the social, emotional, and educational well-being of students with disabilities	4.11	High
20. I know the purpose of effective teamwork is to improve student outcomes	4.11	High
Weighted Mean	4.03	High

Blandul and Bradea (2017) argued that knowledge competence of special education teachers includes a thorough understanding of special psychopedagogy, evaluation, diagnosis, therapy, and rehabilitation of students with disabilities, enabling them to teach effectively and support students' individual needs in a personalized manner. Ramakrishnan et al. (2020) revealed that special education teachers possess a high level of knowledge competence, particularly in technological pedagogy and content knowledge, with a mean score of 4.96, indicating their proficiency in integrating technology and pedagogy in teaching special needs students. Moreover, 80% of special education teachers strongly agree that they are aware of their students' diverse abilities, indicating strong knowledge and competence, as indicated by the results of the study by Anne and Rashid (2024).

Hence, Arjumandi et al. (2014) stressed that special education teachers must possess extensive knowledge in their specific areas of expertise, including pedagogical and professional knowledge. Continuous improvement through specialized training programs and

professional development is essential to effectively support children with intellectual disabilities.

Skills Competence of Special Education Teachers

Skill in working with learners with special needs is essential, as it goes far beyond the spectrum of "normal" learners most teachers encounter in the classroom. Hence, teaching these learners is not just about pure knowledge but more about skill execution.

Table 2 shows that the respondents agreed they have comparable skills and competencies in executing the teaching and learning process for learners with special needs, with a weighted mean of 4.16. Specifically, they showed very high skills competence with 9 out of the 20 indicators. This means that they are skilled enough to handle their learners.

On the contrary, skills related to personal care for learners highlight a grey area in the skills competence of special education teachers. This only indicates that there are still significant areas that need improvement in the teachers' skills and competence.

Table 2: Skills competence of SpEd teachers in Ilocos Norte

Statements	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
1. I conduct activities with integrity and in compliance with applicable local, state and federal standards, policies and guidelines	4.11	High
2. I maintain the dignity, privacy, and confidentiality of all students with disabilities, families, and school personnel	4.22	Very High
3. I advocate for participation in ongoing professional growth and development opportunities	4.11	High
4. I reflect on one's performance, seek guidance and use feedback from licensed professional to continually improve practice	4.11	High
5. I demonstrate respect and appreciation for cultural differences in verbal and written interactions with students, families, and school personnel	4.22	Very High
6. I align communication methods to individual's language proficiency under the guidance of the instructional team	4.22	Very High
7. I provide opportunities and support for children to understand, acquire, and use verbal and nonverbal means to communicate thoughts and feelings under the guidance of the instructional team	4.22	Very High
8. I recognize and respect individual differences between culture, religion, gender, and sexual orientation of students with disabilities and their families	4.22	Very High
9. I support students with disabilities in their use of self-assessment, problem-solving, and other cognitive strategies under the guidance of the instructional team	4.11	High
10. I use techniques to address personal care, medical care, and physical assistance to students with disabilities as directed or authorized by a licensed professional	3.89	High
11. I use and maintain adaptive equipment/materials and assistive technology for students with disabilities as determined by the instructional team	4.22	Very High
12. I support a safe and equitable learning environment that honors diversity and inclusion under the guidance of the instructional team	4.11	High
13. I access credible and reliable websites and resources to expand my understanding of special education services and students with disabilities under the guidance of the instructional team	4.22	Very High
14. I proctor routine classroom and standardized tests, following student accommodations as directed by the instructional team	4.11	High
15. I record objective and accurate data using collection procedures determined by the instructional team	4.11	High
16. I provide the least intrusive levels of support, fade support, and fade physical proximity from students with disabilities under the guidance of the instructional team	4.11	High
17. I review and reinforce learning activities, essential concepts, and modified content as directed by the instructional team	4.22	Very High
18. I demonstrate proficiency in academics, including oral and written communication, literacy, and mathematical skills appropriate to the job assignment	4.11	High

Statements	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
19. I assist in teaching specific behaviors and procedures to facilitate safety and learning in each school setting, as determined by the instructional team	4.22	Very High
20. I establish and maintain professional, collegial, and appropriate relationships with the school personnel, students, and their families	4.22	Very High
Weighted Mean	4.16	High

The skills competence of special education teachers includes language, speech, and communication skills, developed through methods such as role-playing, storytelling, and analyzing communicative situations, thereby enhancing their ability to interact effectively with students, parents, and colleagues in various contexts (Kachak & Blyznyuk, 2023). Moreover, Kim et al. (2023) added that the skills required for special education teachers in the 4th Industrial Revolution include intelligent information competency, collaboration and communication competency, and emotional competency, with lower emphasis on convergent and integrated reconstruction competency and community competency. This study's findings align with those of Buatag (2025), which revealed that SPED teachers were regarded as moderately

competent in identifying learning disabilities. It also adhered to the findings of Ramakrishnan et al. (2020) that special education teachers exhibit high levels of competency, encompassing professionalism, knowledge, understanding, and skills.

On the contrary, it contradicts the notion that 69% of those with special education qualifications rate themselves as having low competence in working with children with special needs in inclusive settings, as stated in the study of Rajaguru (2023).

Relationship Between Special Education Teachers' Knowledge and Skill Competence

Table 3 discusses the relationship between teachers' knowledge competence and skill competence in special education instruction.

Table 3: Relationship between knowledge and skill competence of special education teachers

Competency	Mean	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Knowledge	4.03	0.81	<0.0001	Significant
Skills	4.16			

Based on Table 3, there is a positive correlation between the knowledge and skills competence of special education teachers. This significant relationship highlights that teachers should possess both competencies to teach and support learners with special needs. Furthermore, the two competencies go hand in hand; hence, they should be enhanced to ensure that teachers are professionally developed.

Findings imply that teachers' knowledge levels are reflected in their teaching practice. They teach what they know, and at the same time, they are competent enough to understand what is going on with their learners.

This is strengthened by the findings of the study conducted by Mokhtar et al. (2019), highlighting that special education teachers possess

a high level of knowledge (mean score 4.09) and skills (mean score 4.06) in using the learning through play method, although some areas still require improvement for effective teaching of special needs pupils. On the other hand, the study by Daniel (2024) contradicts the idea that most teachers lacked sufficient knowledge and skills during their training to effectively teach children with special educational needs in inclusive classrooms, leading to inadequate support and a need for further training in inclusive education practices.

These studies present a strong link between knowledge and skills and the competence to teach learners with special needs effectively and efficiently. Hence, it is critical to

provide quality seminars, training, and adequate equipment and facilities to teachers and ILRCs.

Implications of the Results

The study's findings reveal critical implications for strengthening special education in the Philippines. Content-wise, while teachers demonstrate high knowledge competence ($M=4.03$), the identification of personal care and medical assistance as a grey area ($M=3.89$) necessitates immediate curriculum revision. Educational programs must integrate comprehensive modules addressing adaptive equipment maintenance, assistive technology utilization, and individualized health protocols for learners with disabilities. Additionally, content should emphasize updated policies under RA 11650, ensuring alignment with current inclusive education frameworks and evidence-based practices across diverse disability categories.

Pedagogically, the strong positive correlation ($r=0.81$, $p<0.0001$) between knowledge and skills competence demonstrates that teachers effectively translate understanding into practice. However, this correlation underscores the need for experiential professional development rather than theoretical training alone. Pedagogical approaches must evolve to incorporate differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), behavior management strategies, and technology-enhanced teaching methods. Training programs should prioritize hands-on simulations, peer mentoring, and collaborative problem-solving to bridge competency gaps.

For curriculum enhancement, despite high overall competence (skills $M=4.16$), significant room for improvement exists. Teacher preparation programs must establish systematic, ongoing professional development through rigorous seminars and specialized training. Curriculum frameworks should mandate competency-based assessments, reflective practice opportunities, and multidisciplinary approaches combining special education theory with therapeutic interventions. Furthermore, pre-service and in-service training must address the practical application of knowledge, particularly in personal care skills, to ensure teachers remain

responsive to evolving learner needs and legislative mandates in inclusive education settings.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to assess the knowledge and skills of special education teachers in the province of Ilocos Norte. Based on the findings of this study, special education teachers across all three school divisions in the province demonstrated a high level of knowledge and skills in teaching, supporting, and understanding learners with special needs. Moreover, it is revealed that there is also a strong positive correlation between their knowledge and skills competence. This signifies that their rich, in-depth understanding of the ideas and principles of teaching learners with special needs speaks volumes about how they apply these concepts in the teaching process. However, there is still room for improvement; thus, seminars and training to further strengthen their knowledge and skills are essential.

The findings also stress the immediate need for professional development among the special education teachers to further hone their knowledge and skills. This would include training and seminars related to content and pedagogy, which can further amplify what they have learned in their baccalaureate and graduate studies.

Therefore, it is critical that special education teachers continuously expand and improve their knowledge and skills in teaching learners with special needs. This ensures that they would be able to address the persisting challenges in the implementation of the goals of Republic Act 11650 in the basic education system.

Limitations

On the other hand, the drawn conclusions of the study are limited to the insights of the 18 pre-identified special education teachers in the province of Ilocos Norte. These generated results may or may not be true for other teachers outside the parameters of the study. Hence, it is also recommended to conduct a similar study in a larger group of participants to validate the findings of the study.

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