

## Significant Relationship between Knowledge and Attitude of Lower Primary School Teachers Towards Inclusion

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the knowledge and attitude towards inclusion of students with special needs in a regular classroom set up. To achieve the objective, the researcher used a mixed method design to cultivate a better understanding of the participants' knowledge and their attitude towards inclusion of students with special needs in a regular classroom setup. The researcher used two tests: 1) the Opinions Related to Integration of Students with Disabilities (ORI) Test, which was given to the participants to be completed within one day and helped gather data related to the attitude of the teachers towards inclusion; and 2) the Standardized Model Test called Special Education: Core Knowledge and Applications model test, to gather data related to the knowledge of teachers about inclusion. To further strengthen the study, an open-ended questionnaire prepared by the researcher was also given to the participants in addition to these two. Based on the results, the respondents have a moderately positive correlation between their attitude and knowledge about inclusion. Attitude towards inclusion proved to have a significant relationship with the knowledge that the teachers have. This study would be beneficial to administrators looking for ways to better equip teachers who are teaching in an inclusive classroom, to curriculum writers creating an inclusive program and to SPED teachers doing their research on inclusive setting.

Keywords: Attitude, knowledge, special education, inclusive class.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In a traditional setting, the teacher is the center of the classroom learning. With a more progressive approach, a teacher would be considered only as a facilitator of learning. In both traditional and progressive settings, however, the teacher plays the major role inside a classroom. We can therefore say that teachers are the most important elements in students' learning and achievement in class. Recently, there has been a big move towards education in the form of an inclusion program for children with special needs with other students who have normal functions. In each school, a certain percentage of students are expected to pass some exams such as state-wide or national exams each year. This applies to all schools regardless of the inclusion program, which puts pressure on educators and stakeholders of schools that offer them (Mahony, 2016). Moreover, the new trend in inclusive education sparked numerous arguments among education stakeholders about

how they will be facing these challenges in terms of teaching strategy, managing the teachers, and how to manage the inclusive setting, among other things (Sakareh & Abu-Nair, 2014).

Therefore, teachers' attitude is an important factor in class, especially in an inclusive classroom, what then are the factors that affect each teacher's attitude? A study about teachers' attitude about inclusion, done by Vaz et al. (2015), stated that some of the factors that affect the attitude of a teacher towards inclusion are age, self-efficacy, and knowledge. Based on their study, they found out that teachers with low levels of self-efficacy in their teaching skills were more likely to also uphold negative attitude towards including students with disabilities. They discussed that self-efficacy is also related to the knowledge they have regarding the situation. They also found out that teachers who had more training in teaching students with disabilities have a more positive attitude towards inclusion.

The study of Vaz et al. (2015) is also backed up by a theory by Milton Rosenberg. Rosenberg did a study from 1960 to 1968 and came up with the theory on Affective-cognitive consistency. The theory stated that the attitude of a person is stable when his/her affective and cognitive components are mutually consistent (Rosenberg, 1960).

The study of Lynda Olson entitled "General educators' attitudes toward inclusion and their corresponding adaptations to curriculum" in Minnesota in 2011 also supported the idea of teachers' attitude. According to her findings, the category of perceived ability to teach students with disabilities was the area of top concern for the respondents. The participants felt they did not have enough training to teach students with disabilities and that teaching them would require extensive re-training.

The idea and proposal of including students with disability has been long present and was proposed as early as 1975 in America (Olson, 2011). This was later strengthened during 2004 when the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was established. This act specifies the rights and category of people with disabilities. It has 6 components that discuss their rights, one of which is Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for students with disabilities (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 2017).

The Philippines is also moving towards inclusion by adapting the policy "The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001" which started in the US stipulating that school districts around the country should address achievement gaps by more effectively educating underachieving students who may face challenges such as lower socioeconomic status, disabilities, English as a second language, or any other issue that may inhibit equal access to an effective public education in order to close achievement gaps (Wohlgamuth, 2016). The Philippines has established the Republic Act 7277 which was passed in 1992 which aims to support and allow them to improve the life of people with disabilities. There are other Philippine laws like this, but inclusion is far from being considered a requirement in the country. Because there is not one recipe or exact approach to include students with special needs, further trainings and seminars should be given to teachers who are to teach in an inclusive class.

This study aimed to determine the knowledge about special education and attitude of lower primary teachers about inclusion program in a certain schools, as well as confirming if there is a significant impact of the knowledge of teachers about special education and their attitude towards including students with special needs in their classroom.

The researcher visited two particular schools that accommodated the area of the study. The specific group of teachers was selected because they work with lower primary students in an inclusion setting that made them ideal for the study. The researcher also added five more respondents from a school in the United States for a more reliable sample size. The schools where the researcher conducted the study implements the program of inclusion of students with special needs.

The theory of Milton Rosenberg, known as the affective-cognitive consistency theory, states that attitude has two components: a) the affective, or the feeling towards an issue, which may be positive or negative; and b) the cognitive, or beliefs, thoughts or knowledge about an issue or act of knowing an idea (Rosenberg, 1960). The theory stated that the attitude of a person is stable when his/her affective and cognitive components are mutually consistent (Rosenberg, 1960). Rosenberg further explained that people seek congruence in their beliefs (cognitive component) and feelings (affective component) therefore interference of structural consistency between the two components will affect one's attitude towards an issue (1960). Given these factors, the attitude of a teacher regarding inclusion can significantly be related to the knowledge about special education (Vizeer & Coetzee, 2005; Mahony, 2016).

The Philippines implemented a nationwide reform in its education system last June 2012 (officialgazette.gov.ph, Republic act 105533). This change increased the pre-university education cycle from 10 to 12 years and, according to a research of Figueroa (2015), demanded a significant investment in the education system's human resources and facilities, which prompted the legislators to increase the education budget in 2014 to 4.3% of the country's gross domestic product. News around the world has often suggested that the country's school facilities are inadequate. This would consequently limit the capacity of schools to include students with disabilities in their classroom. Data on this study will help curriculum creators and administrators to know which area teachers would probably need more support and information they will need more. For teachers seeking further knowledge this can be a guidance where to start gathering information that would help them in the classroom.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The researcher used a mixed method design to cultivate a better understanding of the participants' knowledge and their attitude towards inclusion of students with special needs in a regular classroom setup.

The quantitative data were gathered through the Likert scale as well as a multiple-choice questionnaire which will be expounded statistically via mean, percentages, and charts. The researcher also devised an open-ended questionnaire, which consists of fifteen open-ended questions. The open-ended questionnaire is the part from where the qualitative data will be gathered and articulated using the descriptive method. The participants were also asked to answer a multiple-choice questionnaire, in order to have a more profound understanding of the teacher's knowledge and their attitude towards inclusion of students with special needs.

The goal of the study is to determine the relationship between attitude and knowledge of the lower primary school regular teachers about inclusion in which the mixed method approach will be most appropriate to have a broad, and at the same time, deep understanding of the goal.

The participants of the study were the lower primary school level teachers in an international school in Metro Manila and a school in New Mexico, United States. The number of participants will be the total number of the entire department in the said school international School. While the respondents from New Mexico were one grade level of the school in the lower primary.

Data related to the attitude of teachers towards inclusion were gathered through the revised Opinions Related to Integration of Students with Disabilities (ORI) test by Antonak and Larivee (1995) which were given to the participants for completion within the day. This instrument indicated that the ORI consisted of 25 items related to four factors: benefits of integration, integrated classroom management, perceive ability to teach students with disabilities, and special versus integrated general classroom.

Data related to the knowledge of teachers about inclusion of students' special needs were gathered from the standardized model test created by Education Training Services in America called "Special Education: Core Knowledge and Applications" model test. The test is generally based on Special Educator Professional Preparation Standards created by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). The Special Educator Professional Preparation Standards needs to be taken by a teacher who wishes to be certified in teaching special students (ETS, 2017).

To further strengthen the study, the researcher-made questionnaire was also given to each participant. In the first part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to answer some questions that pertain to their profile such as age, gender, educational attainment, years of teaching, knowledge in special education, if they have children, and if they know any person with disability. The questionnaire has fifteen questions regarding their point of view about their knowledge in special education, inclusion of students with special needs in a regular classroom, and any adaptation they may have done to accommodate them. The questionnaire also included questions pertaining to their perspective, feelings, and experiences about including students with special needs in their class.

All the data that were analyzed came only from the questionnaires given out to the participants. The closed-ended data were analyzed with the help of a statistician. To describe the final output, the researcher used charts to show the statistical data. A descriptive method was used for the open-ended data which in turn was used to discuss comparisons between the attitude regarding the lower primary school regular teachers towards inclusion as well as their knowledge about special education.

Part of the answers of the participants was calculated when presenting their profile, this therefore includes their gender, age, teaching experience, educational background, if they have a child and family with disability. To present their responses from the open-ended questions, a descriptive approach was used to put all items together.

Researcher followed the steps stated in Opinions Related to Integration of Students with Disabilities (ORI) test by Antonak and Larivee (1995). To facilitate the interpretation of results for the Special Education Core Knowledge Test and Applications, average mean and percentage was used. What was considered knowledgeable will range from 50% and above among the respondents.

Lastly, Pearson Product-Moment Coefficient of Correlation was used to compute and assess the relationship between the attitude and knowledge of the lower primary regular teachers about inclusion of students with special needs.

### 3. RESULTS

The profile of the teachers shows that most of their teachers are between 19 and 27 years of age. The age bracket of 19-22 includes 8 teachers, in the 23-27 age bracket includes 11 teachers, for a total of nineteen teachers out of thirty. Teachers in the lower primary school level are all females, or 100% of the population. The majority of the teachers are bachelor of education degree holders. To be exact, 73% of them or 22 out of 30 teachers are bachelor's degree holders. The data relative to the number of years of teaching show that the teachers have minimal experience in teaching. Thirteen teachers, or 54% of their population, has teaching experience between one to three years. The rest of the population ranges between four and fifteen years.

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Participants

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency (f)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>AGE</b>		
19-22	8	26%
23-27	11	37%
28-30	3	10%
30-35	5	17%
35-40	2	7%
40 and above	1	3%
Total	30	100%
<b>GENDER</b>		
Male	0	0%
Female	30	100%
<b>EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT</b>		
Bachelor's degree	22	73%
Post graduate	8	27%
Total	30	100%
<b>YEAR OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE</b>		
1-3 years	16	53%
4-7 years	10	34%
8-12 years	1	3%
12-15 years	3	10%
16 years and above	0	0%
Total	30	100%

Overall, the teachers are still positive towards the inclusion of students with special needs in a regular class, albeit with some reservations due to the academic improvement of the student. The teachers' average mean score in the thirty lower primary school teachers was 83.39%. Some hesitations were due to them feeling incapable to teach students with special needs. Statements such as "I have been teaching only for a year" and "I'm not equipped to teach them", as well as suggestions like "there should be another teacher helping them out" indicates the respondents' hesitation in accommodating students with special needs without an expert with them.

Table 2 shows the gathered data from the ORI test. Both the ORI and the Open Ended Questionnaire were used to draw answers regarding lower primary teachers and their attitude towards inclusion of students with special needs in a regular class.

**Table 2. ORI Results (Average, Maximum Score and Percentage)**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Average Mean per range (x)</b>	<b>Maximum Score (Z<sub>x</sub>)</b>	<b>Percentage (%) of average vs max score ( Z<sub>x</sub> )</b>
Factor 1: Benefits of Integration	29.73	48	61.94%
Factor2: Integrated classroom management	32.73	60	54.56%
Factor 3: Perceive ability to teach students with disabilities	11.40	18	63.33%
Factor 4: Special versus integrated general classroom	12.73	24	53.06%

The overall result of the test regarding the teachers knowledge about special education showed that they have some knowledge as the teachers attained a passing rate in half of the categories of the test. To a certain degree therefore, they are knowledgeable about students with special needs, as well as possible instructional adaptations. On the other hand, the data also projected that the majority of the teachers on average failed the general exam, where they had a 40% passing and 60% failing rate.

**Table 3. Special Education Core Knowledge Test and Applications Results Special Education Core Knowledge Test and Applications**

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>Average Mean per range (x)</b>	<b>Maximum Score (Z<sub>x</sub>)</b>	<b>Percentage (%) of average vs max score ( Z<sub>x</sub> )</b>
I. Individualizing instructions and instructional adaptations	7.00	13	53.85%
II. Characteristics of children with special needs	2.72	5	54.40%
III. IDEA guidelines on IEP and other related topic	2.72	6	45.33%
IV. Individualizing assessments	1.56	6	26.00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13.96</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>Ave of Passers: 46.67%</b>

Linear Regression was used to compute and assess the impact of knowledge of the lower primary regular teachers to their attitude about inclusion of students with special needs. As shown in the table, the results of the Linear Regression indicated that there was a significant positive association between the knowledge and attitude about inclusion, ( $p = .010$ ,  $R^2 = .216$ ).

The table below presents that the results of the linear regression model were significant,  $F(1,28) = 7.71$ ,  $p = .010$ ,  $R^2 = .216$ , which indicates that approximately 22% of the variance in ORI is explained by Core Knowledge. Furthermore, Core Knowledge significantly predicted Attitude,  $B = 1.87$ ,  $t(28) = 2.78$ ,  $p = .010$ . This indicates that on average, a one-unit increase in Core Knowledge Test will increase the value of Attitude by 1.87 units.

**Table 4: Linear Regression Model**

**Results for Linear Regression with Core Knowledge Test predicting Attitude**

Variable	Coefficient	SE	t	p
(Intercept)	54.60	9.910	5.51	<.001
Core Knowledge Test	1.87	0.675	2.78	0.010

Note:  $F(1,28) = 7.71$ ,  $p = .010$ ,  $R^2 = .216$

Regression Equation:  $54.60 + 1.87 * \text{Core Knowledge}$

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The main objective of the study is to find out if there is a direct relationship between the teachers' attitudes towards the integration of students with special needs in their class, considering their existing knowledge regarding special education. The first questionnaire given was the Opinions Related to Integration of Students with Disabilities (ORI) test by Antonak and Larivee (2009) which analyzed the attitude of the teachers towards inclusion. The data related to the knowledge of teachers on the inclusion of student with special needs will be gathered from the standardized model test created by the Education Training Services in America called Special Education: Core Knowledge and Applications model test. The last questionnaire given to the respondents was the researcher made open-ended questionnaire, to further strengthen the results.

The questionnaires were completed in two days to ensure that the participants were not too stressed to hurry and answer each questionnaire. The time allowance given to the researcher for the completion of the questionnaires was scheduled between to 3 to 4pm, which was the time usually allotted for the department's General Faculty meeting.

The data gathered by the researcher showed that the age of the teachers in the respondent international school in Metro Manila, shows that their teachers are generally younger -

within the range of 19 years of age to 27 years old comprising 63% of the total population of the lower primary school teachers in the school. In terms of gender, a landslide value of 100% are females. The educational experience of the respondents were only mostly bachelor's degree, which consisted of 73% of the total respondents. Regarding the length of teaching experiences, most of the respondents were just between their first year to third year of teaching and comprised 53% of their total population for the lower primary school level. It can therefore be said that the profile of the teachers in the lower primary school department of the school are still young and is at the first early stage of their career.

According to the results of the test it can be concluded that the teachers still have a positive outlook towards inclusion albeit with some reservation. Some hesitations were due to the teachers feeling incapable just yet to teach the students, or the intense requirement of teaching Special Education. They feel the need that another teacher should be co-teaching with them in an inclusive classroom. These results are reflective of the study done by Eugenio Guhao (2023) which showed that teachers have a high level of work engagement and a high sense of pride in what they do even when working intensely. The data presented us with the fact that the majority of the teachers failed the general exam. They had a 40% passing and a 60% failing rate, albeit attaining a passing rate in over half of the other tests.

It can be concluded that the knowledge has significantly predicted the attitude of the lower primary school teachers. Results of the Linear Regression indicated that there was a significant positive association between the knowledge and attitude about inclusion, ( $B = 1.87$ ,  $t(28) = 2.78$ ,  $p = .010$ ).

Based on the data gathered, the researcher found out that there is a need for training. Providing training will also help teachers stay longer in the institution they are teaching. This change could generate a sustainable working environment due to the continuous learning and perceived good treatment stemming from management listening to employee feedback (Truong et al., 2023). The researcher asked the Human Resource office, who was in charge of staff training if there are existing policies with regards to training specifically for special education. According to them, they have workshops and seminars for teachers during in-service and pre-service, however they do not have a policy specifically for special education training. Tapping certain teachers' knowledge regarding this area to facilitate training is one way to address the need for training regarding special education. Collaboration amongst teachers through exchanging and sharing information amongst each other will definitely help with knowledge acquisition and increase innovation and creativity within the organization (Suryanarayana, 2023).

The output of this study can be useful for mainstream teachers and SPED teachers, this would help facilitate the class more efficiently and foster a better learning atmosphere. This would also help the teachers in the mainstream to better accommodate the children with mild conditions in the regular class. On the other hand, School Administrators, this would encourage teachers to accommodate and have a positive view with the semi-inclusion program of the school. This will be helpful in improving the quality of education for both the regular children and children with special needs.

Curriculum developers, this will give them a background on how much the teachers know about inclusion. It will help evaluate the possible topics and ways that they can better accommodate students with special needs in a regular classroom set up via a curriculum.

This will also indirectly influence students because the data regarding the teacher’s perception may be used by the school to help improve positivity towards inclusion. Positivity will help teachers to be open for further learning, which will provide a better environment for students with special needs placed in a regular classroom set up. If students have a better environment, they will be better focused on their task at hand, and thus would gain better knowledge and produce better grades in the general class. The knowledge and attitude of teachers towards inclusion may also influence the normal functioning students’ positivity towards children with special needs, letting everyone gain a friendlier environment.

**APPENDIX A**

Open Ended Questionnaire about Inclusion: Available from the Authors on request

**APPENDIX B:**

**Statistical Data for the ORI and SKT Test**

Model Fit Measures

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Overall Model Test			
				F	df1	df2	p
1	0.465	0.216	0.188	7.71	1	28	0.010

Model Coefficients - ORI

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p
Intercept	54.60	9.910	5.51	<.001
Core	1.87	0.675	2.78	0.010

**Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
ori	83.39	16.996	30
SKT	46.67	14.47977	30

## APPENDIX C

### Test Descriptions of ORI and Special Education Core Knowledge Test and Applications

**OPINIONS RELATED TO INTEGRATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES** (ORI) test by Antonak and Larivee (1995) which were given to the participants for completion within the day. This instrument indicated that the ORI consisted of 25 items related to four factors: benefits of integration, integrated classroom management, perceive ability to teach students with disabilities, and special versus integrated general classroom.

The standardized model test created by Education Training Services in America called **“SPECIAL EDUCATION: CORE KNOWLEDGE AND APPLICATIONS” MODEL TEST**. The test is generally based on Special Educator Professional Preparation Standards created by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). The Special Educator Professional Preparation Standards needs to be taken by a teacher who wishes to be certified in teaching special students (ETS, 2017).

The **researcher-made questionnaire** was also given to each participant. In the first part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to answer some questions that pertain to their profile such as age, gender, educational attainment, years of teaching, knowledge in special education, if they have a children, and if they know any person with disability. The questionnaire has fifteen questions that regards to their point of view about their knowledge in special education, inclusion of students with special needs in a regular classroom, and any adaptation they may have done to accommodate them. The questionnaire also included questions pertaining to their perspective, feelings, and experiences about including students with special needs in their class. The first five questions were about their basic knowledge and idea about special education. Three questions ask about the adaptations they know and might have done, and the influences that might impact their adaptation process. The other three questions were about their general experience and perspective. Four of the questions were about their perspective on trainings, resources or support they might need or needs in order to successfully educate children with special needs in a regular classroom.

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