

Teachers' perceptions on their competence and the benefits of inclusive education

Janine Joy L. Tenerife ^a, Cebu Technological University-Main, College of Education, Cebu City, Cebu, 6000, Philippines
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7633-7185>

Emerson D. Peteros ^{b*}, College of Education, Cebu Technological University-Main, Cebu City, Cebu, 6000, Philippines
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9265-704X>

Irene D. Zaragoza ^c, Lomonon Elementary School, Head Teacher II, Palompon, Leyte, 6538, Philippines
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7190-4731>

John V. de Vera ^d, Cebu Technological University-NEC, College of Education, City of Naga, 6037, Cebu, Philippines
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6619-3963>

Lilibeth C. Pinili ^e, Cebu Technological University-Main, College of Education, Cebu City, Cebu, 6000, Philippines
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2603-9352>

Margie D. Fulgencio ^f, Cebu Technological University-Main, College of Education, Cebu City, Cebu, 6000, Philippines
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9938-964X>

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Abstract

This study assessed the perceived teachers' competence and benefits of inclusion to learners. There were 63 teachers who answered the survey questionnaires that assessed their perceived competence and benefits of inclusive education. They were identified using cluster sampling. The data gathered were treated using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results revealed that majority of them were in the age range of 33-42 years, had finished their master's degree with specialisation not related to special education and had served in their school for 8-16 years. They perceived themselves to be highly competent and stated that inclusive education is highly beneficial for learners with and without special education needs. Moreover, their perceived competence is significantly related to the benefits of inclusive education for learners with and without special needs. Hence, school administrators need to validate the teachers' perceived competence in handling inclusive classes and create programmes geared towards an enhanced inclusive education implementation.

Keywords: benefits, inclusive education, learners, special needs, teachers' competence

*ADDRESS OF CORRESPONDENCE: Emerson D. Peteros, Cebu Technological University, College of Education, Main Campus, Cebu City, Cebu, Philippines
E-mail address: emerson.peteros@ctu.edu.ph

1. Introduction

Human rights have consistently been a vital issue in the international arena and unlimited efforts have been carried out by nongovernmental organisations and governments globally in safeguarding these rights, regardless of the characteristics that each individual has (Marcinkutė, 2011). However, there are still certain groups of people who experience exclusion due to their special characteristics such as their gender, socio-economic status, culture, religious background and disabilities (Babik & Gardner, 2021; Prattley et al., 2020). Education, which is a basic human right, is made as a tool to fight against the isolation of these people and eradicate discrimination of the weak sectors of the society. Thus, UNESCO (2005) emphasised on equal access to high quality education to all, which respects every individual with diverse characteristics.

The Philippines is one of those countries which observed this principle by stipulating in its constitution this basic right of every individual which upholds the dignity of every person (Mendoza, 2018). It is the right of every Filipino child to be afforded with an equal opportunity in education which is stated in the 1987 Philippine Constitution. However, some children have learning difficulties that would affect the teacher's instruction when these learners are present inside the classroom. Due to their lack of knowledge and limitations, children with disabilities were treated as undesirable and separated from the regular children which is why they are enrolled in special schools (Sansour & Bernhard, 2018). Hence, Special Education (SPED) centres were established in the Philippines to give access to learners with disabilities on education. Over the years, isolating learners with special education needs (LSEs) was practiced here and abroad in order to address the specific needs of learners on their difficulties by providing an individualised education program (IEP) (Kang & Martin, 2018; Vyrastekova, 2021). LSEs are given specialised programmes so that instructions will be delivered more effectively.

The current practices in other countries towards educating LSEs have changed in their strategies since these children are already enrolled in regular classrooms. This practice is called inclusion where in LSEs are joined in classrooms with regular children (Efthymiou, & Kington, 2017). Children in these classrooms are treated equally although there are cases wherein LSEs are given assistance in performing certain tasks. In the Philippines, inclusion or inclusive education has been advocated for many years already, which is strengthened by the law on disabled persons. Republic Act no. 7277 also known as the 'Magna Carta for Disabled Persons' states that 'the State shall facilitate integration of disabled persons into the mainstream of society and shall advocate for and encourage respect for disabled persons'. Hence, the State 'shall ensure that disabled persons are provided with access to quality education and ample opportunities to develop their skills. It shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all disabled persons'.

The Department of Education's (DepEd) task, as the implementing agency, is to implement this programme in all schools. With this, a DepEd Order no. 72 series of 2009 was issued to this effect which guarantees the right for LSEs to receive appropriate education within the regular or inclusive classroom setting. However, school teachers who are not well-trained to handle LSEs find it challenging on their part to teach these children. The presence of these learners in regular classrooms will become a burden on their part because of their lack of knowledge and skills in handling these kinds of learners (Yazcayir & Gurgur, 2021). Teachers should consider that every learner's disability needs a specific intervention or approach in order that instructions are easily understood by their learners.

DepEd initiated various trainings and seminars in order to promote the teachers' awareness towards the concepts of inclusion and how to manage LSEs effectively. But the concern of the teachers is on

the sufficiency of the trainings provided to them. It is noteworthy that inclusive education does not specify what special needs will be accepted and what will be not accepted (Michailakis & Wendelin, 2009). Consequently, teachers should be ready on whatever disability of the child they may encounter inside the classroom. On the other hand, teachers must also consider that it is the right of the child to have access to education, regardless of his status in life (Heymann et al., 2014). Teachers' awareness on the benefits of inclusive education on LSEs might help them develop a positive perception towards this programme. An important aspect in the realisation of inclusive education is the teachers' competency in working with LSEs (Efthymiou, & Kington, 2017; Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018).

In the field of inclusive education, teachers should possess new abilities to conceptualise strategies, the ability to determine the individuals importance in implementing the activities needed during the delivery of instruction to children with disabilities and be responsible for the outcomes of instruction that are evident in the children (Zulfija et al., 2013). Furthermore, while working with inclusive classrooms, the teachers should be knowledgeable on the behaviour and characteristics of LSEs to develop appropriate strategies and improve one's skills in creating an environment that stimulates learning (Bukvic, 2014). This aspect of inclusive education is less investigated by researchers who may provide relevant literature regarding teachers' perception on their competency in handling inclusive classes and how these inclusive classes benefits the learners of these classrooms.

1.1 Conceptual framework

Different researches were initiated to explore the issues regarding the implementation of inclusive education in different countries to arrive at solutions that will help attain effective implementation of the programme. Teachers' perception about their competence and the benefits of inclusion to the learners are significant topics to be explored. Below are the different related literature studies that would support this study.

Inclusive education is a principle wherein all learners, regardless of their capabilities, attend and are welcomed in neighbourhood schools and are supported to receive equal opportunities of enjoying high quality instruction and interventions (Lindner & Schwab, 2020) that capacitate them to be successful in achieving the standards of the core curriculum (Juvonen et al., 2019). Moreover, it is based on the belief that every individual has the right to be educated in regular classrooms, including LSEs, in which the children with disabilities are not isolated and placed in special schools because their needs can be addressed in regular classroom settings (Efthymiou & Kington, 2017; Sansour & Bernhard, 2018). In inclusive education, both learners with and without special needs learn better than segregating students into special classrooms. Over the years, researchers have found that LSEs have higher achievement and improved skills inclusive classrooms while learners without special needs have also benefited from the program (Roldán et al., 2021; Walsh, 2018).

The concept of inclusion is to welcome learners' diversity, appropriately challenged, and supported by their efforts to achieve learning in school. However, it is also significant that the schools support the parents, caregivers and most especially the regular teachers and SPED teachers, because they are the key elements of inclusion (McManis, 2017). Teachers handling inclusive classrooms should be competent enough to address the needs of all their learners. Moreover, proper time management in dealing with these learners is also crucial for the programme to be successful.

According to de Boer et al. (2011), there is a need to support teachers in implementing the inclusive classroom. Based on the review of the literatures, most of the teachers have either neutral or negative attitudes about inclusive education because they feel that they lack knowledge on handling LSEs. Teachers oftentimes question their competence in handling LSEs. However, teachers with more

experience in handling inclusive classrooms were significantly having a positive attitude (Woodcock et al., 2022). Teachers must have enough knowledge and skills about the teaching best practices and instructional adaptability for LSENs together with a positive attitude to create an effective inclusive classroom (Byrd & Alexander, 2020; Savage & Erten, 2015).

Despite the issues and challenges that the implementation of inclusive education encounters, the programme is still advocated by DepEd because of the benefits it brings to education. Henninger and Gupta (2014) posited that children with disabilities who are enrolled in regular classrooms have acquired positive skills in the different developmental domains. Furthermore, they found that LSENs who mingle with other children have higher social skills and usually adapt these behaviours and skills in the future (Maleki et al., 2019).

Moreover, some researchers had noted that there were evidences that inclusion when implemented based on its design and in excellent classroom setting of early childhood, provides the growth of the child's mental ability greater than the situations wherein children are not involved in the this kind of a setting (Strain & Bovey, 2011). Inclusive education is not only beneficial to LSENs but to also to their non-disabled peers in which LSENs in inclusive classrooms perform better academically and socially than those children in non-inclusive settings (Roldán et al., 2021; Vyrastekova, 2021). Inclusive classrooms are suitable in providing with opportunities to engage LSENs in the daily routine and in activities that stimulate and challenge academic performance of the children (Henninger & Gupta, 2014).

On the contrary, LSENs who are isolated and educated in special classrooms are not given the opportunity to interact with different types of people, but by creating inclusive settings these children are given the chance to interact and develop relationships with other children. However, inclusive education allows LSENs to improve their social skills and their behaviour by acquiring appropriate examples in regular classrooms whereby they will improve in their ability to follow directions and initiate contact with others. In inclusive classrooms, LSENs are being provided with age-appropriate activities and receive individualised instruction to support them in general education classroom. With these, LSENs feel more confident in themselves because they are given important work that is challenging to them academically compared to completing work that is easy feeling like their accomplishments were minimal. LSENs will develop more understanding on the desired behaviours that they are expected to act and will try to follow these behaviours to avoid the consequences if they are taught and shown models of these behaviours (Amstad, & Müller, 2020).

1.2 Related Research

Research studies have explored on different areas concerning the implementation of inclusive education with regards to its effects to students' learning, teachers' perception and their attitudes about the programme. A few of these researches are being enumerated below.

In a study by Mngo and Mngo (2018) which focused on the opinions of regular high school teachers who are involved in a pilot inclusive education programme in the Northwest Region of Cameroon, they found out that most teachers still prefer SPED centres than inclusive classrooms. They found that more experienced, highly educated and well trained teachers have positive perceptions towards inclusion than the inexperienced and untrained teachers. The results of this study are in consonance with the study of Wiggins (2012, as cited in Newton et al., 2014) who found that there is a significant relationship between the perception of high school teachers and classroom setting and concluded that there were favourable perceptions on experienced teachers than those who were not able to experience teaching in inclusive classrooms.

Ali et al. (2006) examined the attitudes and perceived knowledge of 235 public primary and secondary school teachers in Malaysia who were mainstream and SPED teachers. The findings showed that teachers have positive attitudes towards inclusive education. Moreover, they agreed that this programme increases social interactions among students, which decreases the negative stereotypes of LSEs. They also stressed, based on their findings, that collaboration between the mainstream and SPED teachers is very important in attaining success in the implementation of inclusion in schools. These findings were supported by Peacock (2016), who conducted a case study on eight general education and three SPED teachers which aimed to understand their perceptions regarding inclusion. The participants were interviewed and observed to determine the themes. The results revealed six themes such as teachers' need for collaboration, shared responsibilities, common planning time, professional development, understandings of teacher attitudes toward co-teaching, and the components of student success.

In a study by Bukvic (2014), on the teachers' perception of their competence for teaching LSEs who are included in the regular schools, it was found out that 70% of the teachers who participated in the study had no or have poor knowledge about teaching LSEs. Furthermore, these teachers have negative attitudes towards teaching children with special needs, however, younger teachers performed better than the older teachers. On the contrary, teachers who have positive attitudes towards inclusive education would not accept LSEs if they have a choice. However, Sowiyah and Perdana (2022) found that teachers have positive perception of inclusion regardless of their demographic backgrounds. With these, they recommend that professional development for teachers must be provided to equip them with more knowledge of inclusion.

On the other hand, Njuguna (2012) investigated the teaching methods of teachers which found that teachers used a variety of teaching methods in helping children with learning difficulties but they experienced difficulties helping the learners. In collaboration, it was also found out that teachers worked together in identifying, instructing and assessing learners with learning difficulties among other areas but needed more training to enhance their skills in collaboration. It was further concluded that inadequate knowledge for identification of learners with difficulties and failure to use an identification tool in class could be the possible reason why teaching and learning strategies used by teachers could not work. This is because individual learners with learning difficulties were not identified and the skills deficits were also not identified, hence appropriate interventions were not carried out.

Rodriguez et al. (2017) aimed to explore the perspective of teachers in Ecuador towards LSEs regarding the implementation of inclusive education. It also assessed the abilities and hindrances that teachers encounter with LSEs in inclusive classrooms. Most of the teachers agree that teachers' training and accessibility needs an all-out support from the administration and the availability of materials that will be used to address the learners' needs. In addition, some of the problems encountered were the architectural barriers and lack of inclusion, which indicate that they are not fully prepared for having LSEs. Hence, they recommend an in depth training in special education needs to teachers who will be handling LSEs. Similarly, Paguirigan (2020) found that teachers handling learners with special needs have no idea about inclusion and they lack skills in handling inclusive classes. Teachers encountered many challenges such as bullying, lack of infrastructure and limited resources. They also suggested that teachers should undergo seminars or trainings before they are required to handle in inclusive classes.

In a qualitative case study conducted by Gachocho (2017) on 15 SPED teachers from Thika East District of Kenya, which aimed to explore the teachers' perception on inclusive education, it was found that

most teachers have positive perceptions towards learners in mainstream classrooms. Teachers agreed that LSENs are able to socially interact with others and establish relationships with others, which creates a feeling of being part of the school.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This research assessed the perceived competence of regular public elementary school teachers in handling classes of inclusive classrooms and its benefits at the identified schools in Leyte, Philippines. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of age, highest educational attainment, field of specialisation, and length of service?
2. What is the perception of the respondents in terms of their competence in handling inclusive classes and the benefits of inclusive education to children without and with special needs?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the perceptions of the respondents on the benefits of inclusive education and their perceived competence?

2. Materials and Methods

This section presents the research method, participants, data collection tools, data collection process, and data analysis.

2.1 Research Method

The research utilised a descriptive correlational research design which aimed to determine the relationship of the teachers' perceived competence and benefits of inclusive education towards the learners using the researcher-made questionnaire. Correlational research is a technique in gathering information about a certain topic dealing with two or more variables which investigate if relationship exists between these variables without manipulating them (Bhandari, 2021).

2.2 Participants

There were 63 teachers from the 5 identified public elementary schools in Leyte Division, Leyte, Philippines, who participated in the study. These schools cater to LSENs who have the capacity to be included in regular classrooms. The inclusion of these learners is determined by the professionals and experts in the field. Identified LSENs who are enrolled in these schools are diagnosed with autism, hearing impairment, ADHD, visual impairment, and down syndrome. These learners have mild difficulties that made them qualified to be enrolled in inclusive classrooms. However, the performance of these learners is constantly monitored. Teachers handling these classes are given trainings to enhance their skills in handling these classes.

The focus of this research was on the regular teachers of the identified public elementary schools. These teachers were chosen as the respondents because they are the most affected in the implementation of this programme. Their perceptions towards inclusive education would have a great impact on the success of the programme since they are the front liners in delivering the quality education to the children. Through cluster sampling, the following schools were identified to which the respondents are chosen to participate in the study.

2.3 Data Collection Tools

The researchers used three survey questionnaires in determining the respondents' profile, perception on their competence and the benefits of inclusive education towards learners. Part I contains

questions that elicit the respondents' age, educational attainment, field of specialisation, and length of service. Part II contains statements that describe the perceptions of the respondents as to their teaching competency in handling inclusive classes. It has 15 indicators. The respondents were asked to rate on their agreement on how they perceive their level of competence on a 5-point scale, namely 5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Undecided, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree. Part III contains statements that describe the respondents' perception on the benefits of inclusive education towards the learners. It has 22 indicators which were grouped into 2: 10 items for the benefits towards the learners without special needs and 12 items for the benefits of LSENs. The respondents were asked to rate their agreement on how they perceive the benefits of inclusive education on a 5-point scale, namely 5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Undecided, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree.

The research instrument was developed through the literature readings of the researchers and the concepts and ideas of inclusive education. The instrument went through a validity test by consulting experts in the field and statistician who approved on the validity of the questionnaire. Furthermore, the instrument also underwent pilot testing to test its reliability. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the internal consistency of the items being measured to describe the construct observing the above 0.7 threshold for all the constructs as a sufficient measure to ensure the reliability of the instrument (Taber, 2018). A high reliability was achieved in each of the following constructs being measured including the competency of teachers (0.900), benefits of inclusive education to children without special needs (0.847) and benefits of inclusive education to children with special needs (0.905).

2.4 Data Collection Process

The researchers personally administered the questionnaires to the identified participants. Informed consent was asked to confirm the willingness of the respondents to participate in the study. A brief orientation was conducted to the teachers as to the purpose of the study and important instructions were given. The questionnaires were then administered to the respondents and subsequently retrieved. Teachers were given enough time to answer the said questionnaires. Retrieval of the questionnaires followed. To further validate the quantitative results of the study, the researchers conducted a random informal interview on the selected respondents which focused on answering the questions that were based on the objectives of the study.

2.5 Data Analysis

To shed light on the data obtained, the researchers used descriptive and inferential statistics. To facilitate statistical calculations, appropriate software such as MS Excel and SPSS were used. All statistical computations and analyses were carried out with the assistance of a statistician. Frequency count and percentage were used to summarise the data of the respondents' profile. Weighted Mean and standard deviation were utilised to determine and interpret the level of perception of the respondents towards their competence and the benefits of inclusive education. Pearson's r was utilised to determine the significance of the correlation between the respondents' perceptions on the benefits of inclusive education and their perceived competence.

3. Results

This section presents the level of the respondents' profile, competence, benefits of inclusive education and the test of their relationships. Table 1 presents the profile of the respondents.

Table 1. Profile of the respondents

Profile	f	%
Age (in years)		
53-62	12	19.05
43-52	12	19.05
33-42	20	31.75
23-32	19	30.5
Total	63	100.00
Educational attainment		
Master's Graduate	46	73.02
Bachelor's Graduate	17	26.98
Total	63	100.00
Field of specialisation		
Administration and Supervision	14	22.22
Early Childhood Education	6	9.52
General Education	8	12.70
Home Technology	7	11.11
Science	8	12.70
Mathematics	2	3.17
Handicraft	3	4.76
Elementary Education	2	3.17
English	1	1.59
Filipino	1	1.59
Foods	1	1.59
Hearing Impairment	1	1.59
Library Science	1	1.59
Management	1	1.59
Special Education	1	1.59
No response	4	6.35
Total	63	100.00
Length of service (in years)		
25 and above	9	14.29
17 – 24	11	17.46
8 – 16	25	39.68
Below 8	18	28.57
Total	63	100.00

It can be gleaned from Table 1 that majority of the teachers were in the age range of 33 – 42 years and had finished their master's degree specialising in administration and supervision. Interestingly, most of them had already 8 – 16 years of teaching experience.

Table 2. Teachers' competence in handling inclusive classes

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal description
1	Modifying my teaching strategies to cater children with special needs.	4.38	0.633	Highly competent
2	Handling behaviour of learners with special needs in an inclusive classroom	4.13	0.751	Competent
3	Implementing the process on how to handle a class catering learners with special needs.	4.11	0.785	Competent
4	Using assistive technology for learners with special needs	4.05	0.728	Competent
5	Using appropriate assessment tools for learners with special needs	4.13	0.729	Competent
6	Motivating learners with special needs to participate in class activities	4.38	0.728	Highly competent
7	Catering to the needs of the learners with disability	4.22	0.728	Highly competent
8	Providing interventions of any learner with special needs	4.16	0.700	Competent
9	Identifying the strengths and weaknesses of learners with special needs	4.33	0.696	Highly competent
10	Providing atmosphere that is friendly to both learners with and without special needs	4.46	0.692	Highly competent
11	Collaborating strategies and techniques in handling learners with special needs with my colleagues	4.08	0.576	Competent
12	Coordinating with well-trained teachers with regards to the strategies I apply inside the classroom to address the needs of the learners	4.40	0.583	Highly competent
13	Establishing partnership with parents to monitor the progress of the child	4.59	0.557	Highly competent
14	Preparing anecdotal records of the learners with special needs	4.41	0.586	Highly competent
15	Pursuing advanced studies to enrich my knowledge on handling learners with special needs	4.08	0.703	Competent
	Overall weighted mean	4.26		Highly competent
	Overall standard deviation		0.678	competent

Legend: 4.21 – 5.00 Highly competent, 3.41 – 4.20 Competent, 2.61 – 3.40 Moderately competent, 1.81 – 2.60 Less competent, 1.00 – 1.80 Not competent

Table 2 presents the respondents' level of competence in handling inclusive classes. From the results in the table, the overall weighted mean of 4.26, with an overall standard deviation of 0.678, suggests that the respondents perceived themselves as highly competent in handling inclusive classes.

Table 3. Benefits of inclusive education to learners without special needs

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal description
1	Establish meaningful friendships with LSEs	4.51	0.564	Highly beneficial
2	Increase their appreciation and acceptance of individual differences	4.52	0.564	Highly beneficial
3	Improve their self-esteem in peer-tutoring situations	4.51	0.592	Highly beneficial
4	Learn to value children with diverse abilities in inclusive classrooms	4.57	0.560	Highly beneficial
5	Be prepared for adult life in an inclusive society	4.16	0.653	Beneficial
6	Have opportunities to master activities by practicing and teaching others	4.27	0.745	Highly beneficial
7	Enjoy improved technologies and instructional resources for everyone	4.38	0.682	Highly beneficial
8	Increased their understanding and acceptance of diversity	4.37	0.630	Highly beneficial
9	Learn to respect for other people	4.75	0.439	Highly beneficial
10	Have the opportunity to learn additional skills such as Braille or sign language	4.29	0.705	Highly beneficial
	Overall weighted mean	4.43		Highly beneficial
	Overall standard deviation		0.613	beneficial

Legend: 4.21 – 5.00 Highly beneficial, 3.41 – 4.20 Beneficial, 2.61 – 3.40 Moderately beneficial, 1.81 – 2.60 Less beneficial, 1.00 – 1.80 Not beneficial

Table 3 presents the perception of teachers on the benefits of inclusive education to children without special needs. The overall weighted mean of 4.43, with an overall standard deviation of 0.613, indicates that the teachers perceived that inclusive education is highly beneficial to learners without special needs.

Table 4. Benefits of inclusive education to LSEs

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	Demonstrate high levels of social interaction with non-disabled peers in inclusive setting when compared with segregated setting.	4.13	0.582	Beneficial
2	Improve social competence and communication skills	4.30	0.496	Highly beneficial
3	Establish friendship with peers	4.56	0.590	Highly beneficial
4	Be assisted in the development of General Knowledge	4.22	0.580	Highly beneficial
5	Succeed on the main motto of inclusive education i.e. 'learn to live together'	4.33	0.622	Highly beneficial

6	Have greater access to general curriculum	4.11	0.625	Beneficial
7	Benefit on peer role models for academic, social and behaviour skills	4.21	0.572	Highly beneficial
8	Have increased achievement of IEP goals	4.08	0.604	Beneficial
9	Enjoy increased parental participation	4.49	0.592	Highly beneficial
10	Have higher expectations	4.03	0.567	Beneficial
11	Improve confidence and display qualities of self-efficacy	4.27	0.627	Highly beneficial
12	Enjoy assistance from peers on class activities	4.40	0.583	Highly beneficial
	Overall weighted mean	4.26		Highly beneficial
	Overall standard deviation		0.587	beneficial

Legend: 4.21 – 5.00 Highly Beneficial, 3.41 – 4.20 Beneficial, 2.61 – 3.40 Moderately Beneficial, 1.81 – 2.60 Less Beneficial, 1.00 – 1.80 Not Beneficial

Table 4 presents the results on the data gathered regarding the perception of teachers on the benefits of inclusive education to LSENs. The overall weighted mean of 4.26, with an overall standard deviation of 0.587, indicates that the respondents perceived that the inclusive education is highly beneficial to LSENs.

Table 5. Relationship between teachers' competence and benefits of inclusive education

Variables	r-value	Strength of correlation	p - value	Decision	Remarks
Teachers' competence and benefits for LSENs	0.576**	Moderate positive	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant
Teachers' competence and benefits for learners without special needs	0.589**	Moderate positive	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant

**Significant at $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

Table 5 presents the test of the significant relationship between the teachers' competence in handling inclusive classrooms and the benefits of education. The computed statistics ($r = 0.576$, $p < 0.1$) indicates that there is a significant moderate positive correlation between perceived teachers' competence and the benefits of inclusion to LSENs. On the other hand, the computed statistics ($r = 0.589$, $p < 0.01$) signifies that there is a significant moderate positive correlation between teachers' competence and the benefits of inclusion to learners without special needs.

4. Discussion

From the data presented, majority of the respondents had pursued further studies which imply that they further aimed to gain more academic knowledge which will help them in their teaching profession. Teachers who are knowledgeable and highly qualified present their lessons in very

interesting ways that provide the students better understanding and mastery of the subject matter (Bakar, 2018). Even though there are respondents who had a shorter teaching experience, many of them had a considerable number of teaching experiences in which the exposure to teaching will help equip the respondents with strategies in handling diverse students. Notably, teaching experience is one of the important factors that affect learners' performance (Mageka & Ogochi, 2020).

On the other hand, in handling inclusive classrooms, it is important that teachers are equipped with enough knowledge on how to deal with learners, especially those with special needs, because teaching strategies must be modified to suit in to the needs of these learners. It can be observed that only one of the respondents was specialising in special education. The rest of the respondents are in the other fields that do not have any connection with special education. Yet, it cannot be discounted that because these teachers are already exposed to the teaching profession they probably have ideas on how to handle students with special needs. In addition, seminars and trainings were conducted in different regions of the country before inclusion was implemented. Moreover, teachers probably would have developed the skills in handling LSENs through their teaching experience. However, from a theoretical perspective, it is very important that teachers should be teaching classes in accordance with their field of specialisation in order to deliver lessons in a more effective manner (Papadima-Sophocleous et al., 2019).

Competency of teachers is the skills to handle effectively the interaction inside the classroom which is proper to the activities and considers the different learning needs of the learners. Similarly, competence is a composition of different knowledge, skills and attitudes which leads to effective human action in a specific area for a person (Martin et al., 2019). These skills are acquired by teachers when they encounter concrete experiences in dealing with learners with a lot of diversity. Teachers with more experience in handling inclusive classrooms have significantly higher positive attitudes towards inclusion (Savage & Erten, 2015). Evidence shows that to be effective, teachers should have sufficient knowledge about the best practices in teaching and of adapted instruction for LSENs, wherein positive attitude is most significant in creating an effective inclusive classroom. Additionally, in inclusive education, there are three groups of teachers, such as the keen, but anxious, beginners who are identified mostly as pre-service teachers with positive attitudes but are worried about their efficacy in inclusion; positive doers who are identified mostly as experienced teachers who struggle with the challenges met in inclusion; however, they maintain their positive attitudes; and resisters who are identified as the experienced teachers are resistant to inclusion (Massé et al., 2022).

Teachers believe that inclusion can develop the learners without special needs' social skills and awareness on the diversity of individuals. Learners in these classes could develop acceptance and respect to individuals with disabilities while learning to deal with them. Inclusive education is not only beneficial to LSENs but also to their non-disabled peers in which LSENs in inclusive classrooms perform better academically and socially than those children in non-inclusive settings (Roldán et al., 2021). The manner of interaction of the individuals surrounding the child affects the growth development of the child. Similarly, how the child reacts to people in his surroundings will be influenced by how they treat the child. Social interactions, that nurture and support relationships of the child with the environment, can contribute to the child's positive development (Tenerife et al., 2022). Hence, learners without special needs may also learn from their interactions with LSENs.

Similarly, inclusive education benefits the LSENs because they are already given the chance to learn in a more realistic classroom since they will have the chance to engage with their peers who are regular learners instead of considering them as burdens in the society. In this sense, they are given opportunities similar to what regular children have enjoyed which can enhance their feelings of being

treated fairly in the society and be assisted with their difficulties (Tenerife et al., 2021). Teachers believe that LSENs should be given adequate access to quality education in order to provide them with opportunities to develop their skills and potentials. The perceptions of teachers is consistent with the findings of Henninger and Gupta (2014), who posited that LSENs who are included in high- quality classrooms with their typically developing peers stand to reap positive gains across developmental domains. When LSENs are included in regular classrooms, there will be greater chances that they will be socially accepted by their peers because the more regular the children are in contact with their peers with disabilities the more the chances that they will develop tolerance and have a greater acceptance of other's differences (Knight et al., 2022).

The test on the relationship of teachers' perceived competency and benefits of inclusion to the learners yields a high significant correlation among the variables. These findings suggest that teachers' perceived competence is a factor in achieving benefits to inclusive education to the learners. This study supports that of Sharma et al. (2021) which states that the higher the teachers' feelings of competence yield the higher the perception on the benefits of inclusive education to the learners. Furthermore, the results are also in consonance with that of Efthymiou and Kington (2017) which concludes that the behavior and pedagogical practices of classroom teachers have great influence on the educational and social outcomes of the learners in inclusive classrooms. Notably, Majoko (2019) found that training teachers on the required teaching competencies could help in the effective implementation of inclusive education by equipping them with knowledge and skills addressing the learners' diversity.

Lastly, the teachers feel that they have the capability of handling inclusive classrooms even though they are not trained in the field of special education. However, the kind of training to which the teacher is exposed to determine the quality of the teacher's perceptions on the implementation of the curriculum and that the teacher's performance is dependent on the kind of education he/she had (Onyilo & Shamo, 2017). Teachers who are highly educated and have acquired trainings, knowledge and experience on teaching students with disabilities were more supportive of the programme while the neophyte, less experienced teachers with no trainings in special education were less enthusiastic regarding the benefits of inclusion, management ability and teaching LSENs (Mngo & Mngo, 2018).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study focused on the assessment of the teachers' perceptions on their competence and benefits of inclusive education to learners. With the given findings, it can be concluded that teachers are very confident that they can handle inclusive classes even though they are not specialised in special education. Some of these teachers had been in the field for a long period of time so they had encountered cases of LSENs who were enrolled in their class. They treated these experiences as learning experiences in handling such children. Their positive attitude towards the benefits of inclusive education was consistent to their beliefs that they can handle inclusive classes. Moreover, they are aware of the benefits that inclusion brings to learners. However, these perceptions of their competence must be assessed by experts to check whether they employed proper strategies in handling inclusive classes so that when inappropriate intervention are observed they can be corrected. It should not be disregarded that these teachers are not specialised in special education so their knowledge on handling LSENs must be reinforced by trainings and seminars. School administrators are encouraged to conduct regular classroom monitoring, expose teachers to the new trends of inclusive

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education practices and evaluation on the implementation of the programme to determine areas that need to be improved for an enhanced inclusive education implementation.

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